

THE CAPITALIST INFESTO and How to Fight It

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*O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,
That I am meek and gentle with these butchers!*

- William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

ASPECTER IS HAUNTING THIS PLANET — the specter of biological devastation and ecological catastrophe — and it is ravaging the ecosystems sustaining life. Butterflies, frogs, bees, whole familiar species are in sudden danger of being wiped out. And, mechanisms for propagation — even seeds! — are coming under the private ownership of a tiny number of very large agro-chemical corporations which are, at this very moment, altering the reproductive capacities of entire species in order to extend their control over land and monopolize the world's food supply.

All the good things that human beings have achieved, and all the natural beauty of the world around us are being grabbed, privatized and pillaged by corporate, technological and political powers. This *colonization* is legitimized by new Enclosure Acts similar to those of centuries ago, a legal framework validating the shameless orgy of profiteering and conquest.

In the last 40 years, fully one-half of the world's forests have been chopped down. Please think about that for a moment, what that means. Forests prevent floods, maintain soil health, defuse hurricanes and detoxify drinking water. They oxygenate the air, and serve as habitats for millions of species. In Argentina and Brazil today, huge swathes of primeval rainforest are being cut down for cattle, for mono-cropping genetically engineered soybeans for animal feed, and for bio-fuels exported to the United States and elsewhere. In Brazil this confiscation of land for extracting corporate profits is occurring under trade agreements with so-called "socialist" president Luis Inacio Lula da Silva. In Indonesia millions of acres of forest have been burned for palm oil plantations, mining (especially coal mining) and cattle grazing. In Mexico the Lacandona forest — home of the Zapatista rebellion — is under siege by international paper companies as much as by federal troops. Under Clinton and Gore more trees were clearcut in the U.S. than under any other administration in recent history. The destruction of the forests, along with emissions from large-scale power plants, automobiles, factory farm-

ing of animals (cow-farts, believe it or not, from rendered diets), refrigerators and paper mills are the most important contributors to global warming and the pending ecocide of this planet.

The media defend the corporations under the guise of “property rights,” “protecting individual freedom” and “freedom of entrepreneurial spirit” — the “freedom,” that is, to exploit and to plunder. (*The New York Times*, for instance, cuts down 60,000 trees a week to publish its Sunday paper, so it can’t stray too far from this mantra of “rights” even if it wanted to.) The ideological spin dominates our language and shapes our thoughts. Suddenly we are no longer talking of global warming or the extinction of whole species, but of the so-called “rights” of corporations — as though these artificial entities should have the same rights (or *any* rights) as *people*.¹ The paper and lumber industry’s “Wise Use” movement spins the clearcutting for public consumption, and calls it a “salvage sale.” Magnificent giant redwoods, the oldest living beings on the planet, are, to capital, merely “standing inventory.” Beautiful mountain vistas are considered “view sheds.” The last few clumps of trees stretching in a thin line along the highway en route to the mall (giving the false impression of some vast and wild nature on the other side) are “scenic corridors.” Carting the strip-mined carcasses of trees off the mountain is portrayed as “sanitizing a unit.” Industry casts the technology required to do all of this in the dubious forge of “Progress.”

This critique is all straight Marxism. There’s nothing in the mechanisms I’ve described here that Karl Marx didn’t analyze 150 years ago. No, he didn’t talk about automobile emissions, genetic engineering, television, nuclear power plants or the mass drugging of children; but he did analyze the *mechanisms*, the *processes* by which *all* technologies under capitalism would develop, and how capitalist relations would come to prevail over all other ways of experiencing our lives so that we would eventually take them for granted as “natural,” as “human nature,” as having always been this way and as being this way everywhere. (Marx called it the move from the *formal* to the *real domination* of capital.) Wasn’t it Karl Marx who, in his earliest adult essays, spoke out forcefully in defense of the forest against privatization and in favor of the rights of peasants to glean dead wood from the Rhineland’s trees — lands traditionally unrestricted by law and used in common? Wasn’t it Marx who railed against the state’s jack-booted stormtroopers’ expropriation of the Commons on behalf of the capitalist class in the 18th and 19th centuries? Wasn’t it Marx who, despite some foolish and urban-centric comments, called this expropriation “primitive accumulation” and explained how the capitalists legalized their plunder after the fact through legis-

¹ One organization doing excellent work challenging the supposed “rights” of corporations is POCLAD – Program on Corporation, Law & Democracy (www.poclad.org; tel. 1-508-398-1145).

lation and their increasing control of the State? Wasn't it Marx who pointed out that by 1842, 85% of all prosecutions in the Rhineland dealt with a new crime: the theft of wood, which applied only to peasants while corporations were being freed to strip whole forests of all the trees in them with impunity?

How did it happen that public lands and early machinery were allowed to become privatized and re-shaped by the needs of capital? Why didn't people protest, revolt?² We can ask the same today: How did our once-public universities, hospitals, beaches, libraries, prisons and parks suddenly become privatized? Private mercenary armies now make up a large percentage of U.S. forces in Iraq; rivers are so polluted that drinking water is now sold in plastic bottles, their sources owned by the world's largest corporations.³ Yes, it was Marx, especially, who explained how such "enclosures" came to receive acceptance socially and sanction by law. His entire critique of capitalism started with an analysis and sharp denunciation of the enclosure of lands used in common and the criminalization of peasants for taking dead wood for heating and cooking.⁴

One of the things I'm *not* going to do here is to go through all of Marx's writings and select quotations pertaining to ecology. Others have undertaken that task,⁵ and John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett have theorized that an ecological understanding was central to Marx's outlook;⁶ so I will just note here that Marx raised ecological issues in his earliest writings and supported peasants' and workers' resistance to privatization. That is how *he* got involved politically in his early 20s and why he began to develop his analysis of capital. Many years later, in his Critique of the Gotha Program (1875), Marx wrote a blistering critique of his fellow socialists: "Nature is just as much the source of use values"

² Actually, people did and still do revolt. See Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2003), which is a history of the development of capitalism in the 16th and 17th centuries analyzed from the viewpoint of its impact on women and the reproduction of the workforce – and the working class's resistance to it [reviewed, *S&D* #41 (July 2006)].

³ Aquafina (owned by Pepsi-Cola) and Dasani (owned by Coca-Cola) have finally admitted that they do not draw water from natural springs despite the pictures on the labels, and have been drawing water to sell from tap water — or, as they call it, a "Public Water Source" (PWS).

⁴ Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979).

⁵ Howard L. Parsons, ed., *Marx and Engels on Ecology* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977).

⁶ John Bellamy Foster's books include *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000); and *Ecology Against Capitalism* (Monthly Review Press, 2002). Paul Burkett's relevant works include *Marx & Nature: A Red and Green Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); and *Marxism & Ecological Economics: Toward a Red and Green Political Economy* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

as labor, “and it is surely of such that material wealth consists.”⁷

Since his death in 1883, however, many of Marx’s followers have done exactly what Marx had warned against. They ignored his formulation of the twin sources of value — Labor and Nature — and called for “developing the forces of production” at any cost, rarely going even as far as Marx in asserting — let alone analyzing — the central role played by the exploitation of Nature, along with Labor, in the production of capital and the reproduction of the capitalist system. They concentrated narrowly on the exploitation of labor alone. In omitting the expropriation of Nature, which was central to Marx’s analysis of capitalist accumulation, Marxists allowed capitalism’s industrial form of production to go unchallenged. In fact, many Marxists glorify technology, asserting that technology is composed of a series of “neutral” inventions and machines that could be appropriated lock, stock and barrel and administered communistically for the good of all. (Many Marxists make a similar argument about the State — that it could be taken over and administered for the good of all, instead of having to be “smashed.”)

When the Socialist Committees of Correspondence, for example, envisioned technology as bringing “the good life” to workers through the wonders of manufacture of ever more commodities, they even presented it as “the *genie* of technology.” Did their members consider the effects on working-class communities of a factory-based manufacturing system under socialism? Some may have done so, but the hope was always that new technologies would develop to deal with the exhaustion of natural and human-made resources and the growing mountains of garbage as they passed into the waste stream, poisoning the planet. They rarely realized and almost never wrote about the social and economic conditions in which the factory form of production indelibly stamps the rapaciousness of capitalism into every moment of the production process.

The drudgery of the assembly line and office, the inferno of rotten relationships and rancid dreams, the privatization of everything and twisting of everybody into things to be bought and sold, the reproduction and consolidation of hierarchy, domination, exploitation and patriarchy, the subjugation of Nature (and of Nature within us) to the exigencies of production and the market, the exploitation of natural and human resources, the permanent destruction of the environment — all of these are embedded in capitalist technology, not just in the end product but **in the conditions through which the instruments that make those commodities are manufactured** and which themselves are commodities one step removed. And we, raised in those same conditions, can barely conceive of human relations or modern societies producing to satisfy human needs in any other

⁷ Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, sec. I.

way. Steeped as we are in capitalist ideology, industrial production seems to us to be most “natural” and integral to our notions of progress.

But technology is not just a vast collection of machinery and inventions. It is not a “neutral” force. Technology, like the State, is an ensemble of social relations. In every product – and in the means for producing them – is embedded the history of exploitation, organization of production, class relations, the desecration of the natural environment and destruction of the Commons. This holds as much for production based on the assembly line as it does for the genetic engineering of agriculture, whether they occur under capitalism or under some other system of production.

Unfortunately, official Marxism has sought to *emulate* the factory form as its model for production and reproduction. At best, Marxists argue for bringing technological development under public ownership and control, administered through centralized state planning. Anarchists – who on the whole have been far more challenging than Marxists about technology, just as they have about challenging the existence of the State – nevertheless generally limit their arguments to the need to bring development under the self-managed decision-making of workers at the industrial workplace and community town meeting.

One prominent anarchist tendency – typified by *Fifth Estate*, the longest-surviving anarchist newspaper in the U.S. – has made its skepticism about technology the centerpiece of its politics.⁸ *Fifth Estate* critiqued fellow anarchist (and long-ago Trotskyist) Murray Bookchin for insisting that industrial technology would be essential in creating a “post-scarcity” world and could serve to liberate humankind by freeing up workers’ time and reducing the number of hours on the job.⁹ On the other end of that spectrum are the anarcho-primitivists – John Zerzan, in Oregon, for example – who say they want to abolish civilization altogether.

In calling for expanding technology to achieve admittedly laudable goals,

⁸ *Fifth Estate’s* politics were shaped in Detroit during the hub and decline of automobile production there, and involved such luminaries as Fredy and Loraine Perlman, Peter Werbe, SunFrog, and David Watson.

⁹ Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, Ramparts Press: 1971. Bookchin did modify his views later, as he thought of technology in itself as neither liberating nor the opposite, but a product of its ‘social matrix.’ (cf. chapters 9 and 10 of “The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy,” AK Press, 2005). Only a thoroughly transformed technics, he argued, not a product of capitalist alienation nor an alienated relationship with the rest of nature, could possibly play a positive role in social evolution; also, Mitchel Cohen, *Listen Bookchin!*, Red Balloon Pamphlets: 1997, addresses the fallacies of Murray Bookchin’s argument. All of Mitchel Cohen’s writings cited here can be ordered from Red Balloon Books, c/o Mitchel Cohen, 2652 Cropsy Avenue #7H, Brooklyn, NY 11214, and shortly from www.RedBalloonBooks.org.

Marxism, Anarchism, and other philosophies of liberation are transformed into their opposite: instruments of rapid industrialization that re-impose the social and dominance relations embedded therein, even while envisioning a society that no longer exploits human labor.

But should Leftists think of “progress” in terms of technological development and expanded production? Is the manipulation of nature in a supposedly rational and planned manner a significantly different form of “progress”? And will the continuation of the factory form of production into Socialism not only *not* meet human needs but inevitably end up undermining the socialist project and ravaging the planet?¹⁰

Most people equate technology with the machinery or tools needed to create abundance. It is as fundamental to their vision of a post-revolutionary society as it is to capitalism. Radical ecological movements such as Earth First!, on the other hand, offer a profoundly different analysis: Unless we also dismantle the factory *form*, they argue, capitalist and patriarchal relations will continue to prevail and will destroy Nature, ecological and human alike, regardless of the type of government in place. Even in the hands of well-intentioned people not motivated by competition or monetary profit, they assert, there is a complex internal dynamic within the production process under capitalism that goes beyond which class owns and controls the technology (the “social relations”), calling into question the whole industrial schema of what constitutes progress and challenging both bourgeois and traditional leftist notions of growth and development.

The Accidental Environmentalist

One unexpected environmentalist posed this question: “Should we expect that densely populated countries such as China, India, Indonesia, will have as many automobiles in proportion to their population as North America and Western Europe?” He answered his own question: “Well, it’s necessary; the expansion of capital requires it. It’s also impossible; the earth cannot sustain it.”

That was Cuba’s president, Fidel Castro. And in the past year, Fidel Castro has also made extremely insightful speeches sharply criticizing the growing switch-over to plant-based fuels and the consequent destruction of agriculture and the world’s forests, which he terms “the internationalization of genocide.”¹¹

¹⁰The dominant view of progress, held even by many Marxists, has been challenged from the Left by such thinkers as Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Silvia Federici, Harry Braverman, Barry Commoner, Joel Kovel, Victor Wallis, Paul Goodman, Ursula Huws, Sheila Rowbotham, George Caffentzis, Brian Tokar, Michael Dorsey, Chaiah Heller, Vandana Shiva, David Noble, among others.

¹¹See, for example, <http://www.counterpunch.org/castro03302007.html>.

Unfortunately, those concerns have not been picked up by most of those in Marxist parties. In fact, the defense of the forests in the U.S. has been led not by Marxists, but by direct action anarchist groups like Earth First!, the Earth Liberation Front, the Global Justice Ecology Project, and the Greens.

I visited Havana in 1992, along with members of the Radical Philosophy Association, during what Cubans called the “Special Period.” To address the devastating effects on Cuba of the Soviet Union’s collapse, the Cuban government took a number of emergency measures that unexpectedly ended up having profoundly beneficial effects for the environment and people’s health. One decision to counter the extreme shortages of gasoline was to import hundreds of thousands of bicycles from China, which were distributed around the country.¹²

Everyone not on bicycles rode the old rickety Hungarian buses which got four miles to the gallon and were falling apart. The fare was only ten cents. To say that the buses were “overcrowded” is like saying there is but a *slight* tear in the ozone layer. Adults as well as kids, doctors, professors, construction workers, orange juice squeezers, seamstresses, clerks and municipal officials raced after the buses and jumped onto whatever toehold they could find, arms wrapped around the window posts, clinging like ants to the sugar cube as it hurtled down the streets.

Most buses had three, sometimes four sets of exit doors through which the sea of humanity attempted to board. Often the drivers wouldn’t even bring their buses to a halt. People just sprinted after them as they slowed down and leapt, hoping to grab hold. Those able to enter through the bus’s back doors voluntarily passed their 10 cents forward — sort of an honor system; no one even thought of pocketing another worker’s money, even though everyone needed it. I had a similar experience in Nicaragua during the optimistic height of the Sandinistas 9 years earlier, and in Harlem when Nelson Mandela first visited the U.S. upon his release from South Africa’s dungeons after 28 years. There, I was at first astounded by and then swept up in the mass enthusiasm as the huge crowd of people on 125th Street emptied their pockets and passed tens of thousands of dollars over their heads to the stage, the entire crowd laughing, trusting, and cheering one another the whole time. What a transcendental “we’re all in this together” heady moment! Revolutionary success can be measured not only in government policies but in creating conditions through which the morality and radical social consciousness of the community are able to emerge. (“When the prison gates are

¹²See my pamphlet *An American in Cuba*, 1992, re-issued 2007, which logs my observations during the “Special Period.” Also, Bill Livant’s great essay, “Ride the Red Bicycle”, packaged in the same pamphlet with Mitchel Cohen’s essay and available from Red Balloon Books.

open / the real dragon will fly out.”¹³)

But why were the buses in Cuba so awful? Was it only due to the U.S. embargo, as many Marxists here maintain? That’s part of it, but it’s not the whole story. In 1990, Cuba’s president Fidel Castro blasted the shoddy Eastern European machinery, including the buses: “Let’s speak clearly once and for all ... We Cubans don’t export garbage. But often what we get back in trade [from the East] is junk! No one else in the world buys Bulgarian forklifts,” Fidel said. “They are such garbage, only *we* bought them! How many hundreds, thousands of them stand idle today in our warehouses? The Hungarian buses ... pollute the city with fumes and poison everyone around. Who knows how many people have died from the fumes of those buses just because they put in a defective fuel pump? On top of it all, those buses have a two-speed Czech transmission that alone wastes 30% of the fuel! Oh, how happy I am to speak with such openness! It’s been difficult to talk about these things in the past, but thanks to these new circumstances [the collapse of the East European socialist bloc], we have been relieved of our previous compromises.”¹⁴

Among other stop-gap measures taken to ease the transportation crisis, all government vehicles in Cuba were demarcated by red license plates, and people flagged them down. The government required them to carry people wherever they were going along the way. It was not unusual to find 5 or 6 people surrounding a government Toyota and somehow squeezing into it.

As is the case in most countries in hard times, during the Special Period in Cuba, people were forced to make do with what they had. However, unlike other countries the Cuban people’s extremely high degree of social consciousness enabled them to take a different approach to the problems their society was facing. To what degree did the various creative and environmentally friendly policies – which were, let’s face it, predominantly making a virtue out of necessity – carry over into the development of an environmental consciousness and continue into non-austere periods? The jury is still out and the situation is fraught with contradictions, but at least for a moment Cuba offered a different vision of “Progress” and what might constitute “The Good Life” despite material privation, at least as judged from the top of the mountain of material (and environmentally destructive) *stuff* available here in the United States.

What Is To Be UnDone?

With all of this in mind, I offer the following six proposals for greening Marxism,

¹³This is a famous line from a poem by Ho Chi Minh, leader of the victorious resistance movement in Vietnam to U.S. imperialism.

¹⁴*Village Voice*, May 1, 1990.

which is essential if we are going to both save the planet and transform society in a socially and economically meaningful way. I call this framework “Deep Marxism”:

1. OPPOSE GENETIC ENGINEERING

The privatization of the biological cell, of natural genetic sequences, is the mechanism through which a new and fundamental expansion of capitalism is taking place.

Today, with the globalization of capital – oiled by the International Monetary Fund’s and the World Bank’s “structural adjustment programs” (also known as “neo-liberalism”) – capitalism is colonizing not only other countries’ economic, political, agricultural, ideological and healthcare systems – the world “out there” – but through Genetic Engineering it is able to engage in a new form of colonization and accumulation, as it seeks to colonize the cells of living organisms, the “nature within.”

This is what genetic engineering is about. No more the Jeffersonian idea that people are “endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights” such as the right to own and control our own bodies. We have been struggling to control our own reproductive capacities for many years, but now the legal authority to own and to sell our genes themselves has been handed to private corporations. This is one of the most disgraceful legacies of the Clinton/Gore administration. What does it mean to speak of “self-determination” and “working class democracy” when our own cells, and the genetic sequences of whole societies (Iceland, for example) – that is, our “selves” – can now be legally owned and sold by private corporations? Whose “self” is doing the determining?

Is nothing sacred? Is all life and every stretch of wilderness (and “the wilderness within”) for sale? In my view Marxists *must* take on this and related issues, if we want to truly confront one of the key mechanisms upon which capitalism as a system relies. We must fight to:

- a) *Ban* all genetic engineering of agriculture, plants, pesticides, and foods – this demand becomes essential to the new anti-colonial movements of the 21st century, which are fighting everywhere to retain control of their indigenous plants and animals, and to their own biological legacies.¹⁵

¹⁵See, for example, U.S.-imposed laws in Yugoslavia under NATO, Somalia and now in Iraq, which force the purchase and planting of genetically engineered seeds. Zambia provided the stiffest resistance to genetically engineered foods, forcing the U.S. to back down lest their resistance spread to the rest of Africa – a defining moment at the Seattle anti-globalization protests in 1999.

- b) Abolish the private patenting of genetic sequences and seeds — so-called “intellectual property rights.”
- c) Take private profit out of research and development of genetically engineered health-related drugs.
- d) In the meantime, require all bio-engineered products and those derived from them to be clearly labeled.
- e) Develop the theoretical framework to reveal the ways in which biotechnology is not just another interesting issue, but fundamental to the expansion of capitalism in this era.¹⁶

Portions of the right-wing grassroots have also rallied against genetic engineering, which they see as a violation of the sanctity of species and “God’s work.” Aside from failing to engage all of the economic, social, ethical, class and environmental issues embedded in the technology of genetic engineering, the Left is missing the opportunity to organize the right wing’s base out from under its leadership. Marxists need to break with the liberal capitalist ideological framework and understand that opposition to genetic engineering is not just another issue but one of the crucial and heretofore hidden *class* issues driving the system — the “color line” (in W.E.B. Du Bois’s words) of this new century.

2. CHALLENGE THE MEANING OF “PROGRESS”

We need to deepen Marxism so that it challenges the capitalist-manufactured consensus underlying what we mean by “Progress” and “the Good Life.” We need to reject the notion that the “good life” is based on the mass production and accumulation of commodities, and its consequent massive and unregulated consumption of Nature.

“Progress,” for capital and its apologists, is always technologically framed. We can hardly think of “progress” that does not involve production and accumulation of more *stuff*. Rarely do Marxists discuss other aspects of what we’d like to see in a new and humane society, such as the way we treat each other or organize our lives. We need to think about the way the industrial *form* of production itself — not just who owns it or how it is administered — propels anti-social, anti-loving behavior and a skewed conception of “progress”.

Workers in the past had a very different conception of what work should be

¹⁶ Although limited by misunderstandings concerning Marxism, some good work on this score has been done by Chaia Heller, *Ecology of Everyday Life*, Black Rose Books, Montreal: 1999, and her dissertation advisor, Arturo Escobar. Also, Brian Tokar, *Earth for Sale: Reclaiming Ecology in the Age of Corporate Greenwash* (Boston: South End Press, 1997).

about, a different conception of “the good life.” It took enormous effort by capitalists to coerce the potential workforce into abandoning that different view. All the way into the 1940s workers in the U.S. fought against what today we take for granted — the imposition of the factory, the artificial rhythms that technology imposed upon the working class, the unnatural mechanical motions, the need to “make money.”

But for many Marxists the institutionalization of the factory was a progressive facet of capitalism, one in which the “good life” became increasingly accepted as *ownership of things* and *access to services* rather than as communal relationships among people. The idealization of small-town America remains fixed in the American psyche. Meanwhile, the real communities of workers were uprooted and shifted to the shop floor where they were tightly regulated and controlled by the boss, the needs of the massive technological infrastructure, and eventually the workers’ own unions. The factory *model* jumped from the factory floor to the other institutions of society, coming to pervade education, recreation and all other areas of daily life. As Phil Ochs sang, “Every school is a factory of despair.” He meant that literally. So do I.

How does Marx look at the process historically, by which entire populations were driven insane in this manner, torn from their lands and communities and “proletarianized”? Marx sums it up in this way: “Thus were the agricultural people first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by laws grotesquely terrible into the discipline necessary for the wage system.”¹⁷

We need to envision a society based on a very different organization of productive forces, one that produces the goods we need and desire in a very different way. (We also need to investigate where our desires themselves come from. They are not innate; they’re manufactured by the society we live in, in order to sell us goods to fulfill those conditioned desires.) Failing to apply a “ruthless critique to everything existing” in Marx’s words — i.e., failing to fully examine our own desires, ways of relating, the way we’ve been manufactured and spit out by the system — will mean that we will find ourselves chaining all working class initiatives and the possibility of a qualitatively different world to the dreams implanted by the expansion of the factory form. Unless we confront the desires manufactured in us by capitalism and patriarchy and begin to transform ourselves *now* into human beings fit to live in the new world we seek to create, we will end up undermining the revolutionary project and further poisoning the earth even as we struggle to heal it.

¹⁷Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Chapter 28 (p. 737 in International Publishers ed. [New York, 1967]).

In projecting a superficial and ecologically destructive notion of “the good life,” official Marxists — and many anarchists — literally miss the forest for the trees, reproducing the dominant paradigm of capitalism and technological progress even when meaning to oppose it. To start, they’ve forgotten that a non-capitalist society need not accept efficiency *per se* as the measure of progress, nor labor alone as the measure of value.

Two hundred years ago, in 1811, the Luddites — like the Iroquois and other American Indian communities — offered a different measure of progress, one not defined by artificial discipline, mechanical efficiency or the expropriation of Nature and exploitation of Labor. Contrary to popular mythology, the Luddites did **not** oppose machines *per se*, but “machinery hurtful to Commonality.” In England they wielded hammers against the newly installed giant mechanical looms; in France, their counterparts threw wooden shoes (in French, *sabots*) into the gears (hence the term *sabotage*). The emerging industrial system found it needed to crush the Luddites, who were organizing across England and were becoming a widespread and well-organized mass movement.¹⁸ The bourgeois presses distorted and then obliterated memory of the Luddites’ radical direct action “critique” of factory production from history’s texts. So did the Marxist parties, who falsely caricatured the Luddites in order to dismiss their trenchant critique of industrial technology. So in that sense, I am proud to be a Luddite, an Iroquois, a Saboteur ... a Zapatista!

3. OPPOSE REDUCTIONISM: THINK HOLISTICALLY

We in the industrialized capitalist world need to train ourselves to see “holistically.” This is not something that will come about on its own within the capitalist or patriarchal frameworks — nor will it come about in any socialist framework based on the dominance of industrial production.

Take this item, about a malaria outbreak in Borneo in the 1950s. The World Health Organization (WHO) sprayed DDT to kill mosquitoes. But the DDT also killed parasitic wasps which were controlling thatch-eating caterpillars. As a result, the thatched roofs of many homes fell down, and the DDT-poisoned insects were eaten by geckoes, which were in turn eaten by cats. The cats perished from the poisoning, which led to the multiplication of rats, and then outbreaks of sylvatic plague and typhus. To put an end to this destructive chain of events, WHO had to parachute 145,000 live cats into the area to control the rats.

The Left, like the rest of society, is steeped in the same linear thinking. It finds a problem and then looks for the magic-bullet approach for addressing it. I talk

¹⁸ Kirkpatrick Sale, *Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and Their War on the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1996).

about this in a number of other essays, grouped under the general heading, “Zen-Marxism.” Leftists need to practice *holistic* thinking. Holistic thinking attempts to look at entire ecosystems as totalities, with their underlying Unity as the starting point. In the West, we’re accustomed to examining pieces and trying to fit them together in some sort of totality. A holistic approach, on the other hand, invites us to examine how the Whole informs interactions of the “Parts.” We need to do that with *every* issue. One important effect of that type of approach is the minimization of unintended consequences (which are rampant, as Edward Tenner informs us in his fascinating book, *Why Things Bite Back: Technology and the Revenge of Unintended Consequences*). But that’s not the only reason to look at things holistically.

Reductionist science claims that our “sameness” over time is the result of genes, which predetermine and program each cell. It tries to explain each level of causality by searching for ever-smaller determining factors. In actuality, it is the position of each new cell with respect to the surrounding cells, and not its genetic component alone, that defines what each cell does. Will it be a muscle cell? A blood cell? A bone cell? A skin cell? The kind of cell each becomes is as strongly influenced by its context and location — its relationship to its surrounding environment — as by the type of parent cells it had.

Note, for example, the Mississippi alligator. Alligator eggs developing in the temperature range 26-30° C. hatch females. Change nothing but the temperature, raise it to 34-36° C., and *the same* eggs will hatch only males. Eggs that develop between 31-33° C. produce alligators of either sex, with the probabilities changing from female to male as the temperature rises. What causes the egg’s temperature to change? Well, the macro temperature is important — global climate change may play a role here and cause more male alligators to be born. On the other hand, there are counteracting factors, such as cooling rains — also subject to global climate change — and the time of year in which the eggs are laid (which may be changing, too). What about temperature variations in the micro-environment around the egg? It turns out that the most important factor is the egg’s location within the nest. Eggs surrounded by other eggs tend to be slightly warmer and, thus, tend to hatch males. Eggs around the circumference tend to be slightly cooler and tend to hatch females. (Please do not construe this as a “potential female” alligator *nurturing* the “potential male” eggs.)

Clearly, *genes* are not strict determining entities as claimed by, among others, Richard Dawkins in his popular book *The Selfish Gene*. They depend upon and interact with the surrounding micro-environment — in this case, the temperature of the air in the immediate vicinity — which, in turn, influences environments at other levels, such as the chemistry of the cell, the genes’ immediate environment. The problem of where to draw the boundary of the immediate environment or

community — in this case the gene's — plays a critical role in what will actually happen.

One other important factor: the 3-dimensional double-helix configuration of DNA is guided by non-transcribed segments of the genome that geneticists until recently called 'junk DNA.' How do these interact with the micro-environment in shaping the sequences of which they themselves are a part? I'm reminded of Escher's famous drawing of one hand drawing the other. Paradoxes on this recursive level abound. They cannot be addressed by linear thinking, especially by the magic-bullet approach of Western (and increasingly corporate) science.

Understanding an organism's relationship to the ecosystem in which it lives (as well as the ecosystem *within*) requires ways of seeing that carry beyond the "cause and effect" linearity to which we are accustomed. The sex of individual alligators, as well as the sexual dispersal over the population, is not determined by one isolated "gene" but, at the very least, by environmental temperatures working in a sort of "feedback loop" with the full genetic complement; it is influenced by the interaction of variables from different levels of complexity: temperature, genes, location of the egg in the nest, environment within the eggs and of course the gross destruction of the alligator's natural habitat.

Philosophically, it is not that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, but that by being parts of a particular whole the *parts* acquire new properties. And as the parts acquire new properties they impart new properties to the Whole, which are reflected in changes to the parts, and so on.¹⁹ This relation is always in motion. I use the term "dialectical" to encapsulate all of this back-and-forth between different levels of complexity.

4. STOP FETISHIZING SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

In the movie "Modern Times," Charlie Chaplin plays an assembly-line worker whose job is to wrench bolts all day as they come flooding down the conveyor belt, faster, ever faster. Charlie has no idea why. He just gets paid for it, and it warps his mind as well as his body. The film is a blistering indictment of indus-

¹⁹See, among others who challenge reductionist constructs, Stuart Newman, "Idealist Biology," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 31:3, Spring 1988, pp. 353-368; Paul Weiss, "The Living System: Determinism Stratified," in *Beyond Reductionism: New Perspectives in the Life Sciences*, ed. by Arthur Koestler and J.R. Smythies (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971); Martha Herbert, *Incomplete Science, the Body and Indwelling Spirit* (2000); Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature* (London: Zed Books, 2002); Richard Levins & Richard Lewontin, *The Dialectical Biologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); Brian Tokar, ed., *Redesigning Life? The Worldwide Challenge to Genetic Engineering* (London: Zed Books, 2001); Mae Wan-Ho, *Living with the Fluid Genome*, Institute of Science and Society, London, 2003; and Stuart Kauffman, *At Home in the Universe: The Search for the Laws of Self-Organization and Complexity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

trial production under capitalism. Like other assembly-line workers, Charlie is a victim of the “science” of mass production. In the early 1900s, Frederick Taylor introduced Time-and-Motion studies into industry, examining the fragmentary repetitive motions of the industrial labor process with the aim of increasing output and efficiency by subdividing each task and reducing each worker’s movements as much as possible to mimic the mechanical motions of a machine. Lenin became a huge fan of these studies and applied them to organizing production in the Soviet Union.²⁰

Every moment of mass production reproduces capitalist and patriarchal relations in their entirety. It’s like a “fractal” — every piece, no matter how small you slice it, contains within it the totality of which it itself is a part.²¹ The ensemble of capitalist *and* patriarchal *and* anti-ecological relations exists and is reproduced through every moment of industrial production as much under socialist governments as under capitalist ones, under state-centralized planning as under what passes for “democracy” — which is really just another name for the dictatorship of the “free market.” Technology is not some “neutral force”; it is dripping with the ideology and power relations of the system in which it originated. Marxists, like liberals, over and over again, fall for the “Technological Imperative” — the attempt to technologize one’s way out of the contradictions of existing in a world shaped and controlled by capitalism. In so doing they reproduce the very relations that they’d hoped to overcome.

Let me give another example of how these contradictions play out: *the fight over stem cell research*. Some leftists believe that the primary struggle today is between science and theocracy. So when George Bush steps forward to ban stem cell research, they ally with the Democratic Party and the capitalist intelligentsia and argue for underwriting with public funds billions of dollars in stem cell research by giant biotech pharmaceutical corporations. Bush has threatened to ban this research for theocratic reasons. Yes, the theocracy must be stopped. But does this mean that the reverse is true, that this new technology will cure the diseases we face today? Is it the best way to proceed to address those diseases?

Since Richard Nixon declared “war on cancer” in 1971, childhood cancers have increased 26% overall. Rates of some specific cancers have increased even more dramatically: acute lymphocyte leukemia by 62%, brain cancer by 50%, and bone cancer by 40%.²² Increased exposure to pesticides, *not* faulty genes, is seen as a main reason for this cancer explosion in children. A growing number of sci-

²⁰I review this fully in my pamphlet, *Big Science, Fragmentation of Work, & the Left’s Curious Notion of Progress*, 2004.

²¹Douglas Hofstadter addresses this relationship between *holism* and *reductionism* in his wonderful book, *Gödel, Escher & Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

entists see pesticides, diet sodas (particularly those containing aspartame) and cell-phone towers as related to increases in MS, Parkinson's and other neurological and immune compromising diseases, and genetically engineered hi-fructose corn syrup to diabetes and overweight youth.

But neither the Left nor the government nor the corporations involved will address those diseases from that perspective. Often forgotten in this debate is that not only are the biotech companies eagerly seeking patents for any new products or biological processes (that is, privatizing them), but there's no discussion of the underlying causes of disease that stem cells are allegedly being developed to treat. Stem Cell proponents, including (unfortunately) a number of prominent Marxists, in effect are buying into the dominant corporate ideology that disease is caused by an individual's faulty genetics. Gene therapies, cloning, and stem cell experimentation are patentable, and thus lucrative regardless of whether they actually work. Ending chemical pollution, pesticides, the stress of living in a highly competitive society — the real causes of disease — are not.

Stem Cell developments should require a much fuller discussion of the slippery slope of genetic cloning and organ cloning, and even animal and human cloning. How can we stop this profit-making juggernaut once the Left has bought into the Biotech and Pharmaceutical companies' framework? A recent Food and Drug Administration's ruling allows the sale of meat and dairy products from cloned animals. This follows an intersecting track with stem cell research and genetic engineering, in the name of "Progress."

The idea that science and technology are (or could be) somehow "objectively neutral" is an ideological construct and a figment of capitalist mythology. Calls for more intensive technological development ignore the capitalist relations embedded in the technology, and facilely peel away the critical Marxian category "forces of production" from the intricate constraints of its dialectical integuments, further disempowering the working class.

5. CHALLENGE DOMINANT HEALTHCARE PRACTICES

Even today, much of the liberal and Marxist Left buys into the capitalist formulations of both the official insurance-based healthcare fraud and the "opposition" to it, which asks for "single-payer healthcare" — or, as I view it, the "Subsidize the Pharmaceutical Industry" cult.

Yes, we need free healthcare for all — of course! BUT we also need to look beyond narrow economics and *promote a different conception of what healthcare should consist of*, instead of the factory model of healthcare that the Left promotes today!

²²Samuel Epstein, M.D., and Quentin Young, M.D., as quoted in *Pesticides and You*, vol. 22, no. 2, Summer 2002.

Where is that discussion, the understanding that free universal healthcare is by itself not enough and may even be counterproductive when not combined with those contextual demands such as access to acupuncture, homeopathy, chiropractic, nutrition, and herbology? Why doesn't the Left in the U.S. see this as part of its purview such that it can join movements to de-toxify the environment of the pollutants dumped there by industry, which increasingly sicken us in the first place?

Why are there 3 times as many episiotomies performed on women in the U.S. than in Europe, percentage-wise? Is it that women in the U.S. are genetically inferior to those elsewhere in the world? Don't American women know how to give birth properly? Obviously I'm being facetious, but I'm sure some enterprising corporation will soon try to market genetic implants to correct that "defect." In reality, it's the ridiculous on-your-back feet-in-stirrups position — the standard birthing position in the U.S. hospitals — that is the cause of the higher percentage here of difficult births. In Cuba, women squat in a sort-of rocking chair with the bottom removed and rock the baby out, a traditional method that generates a much lower need for C-sections. Yet doctors in the U.S. insist on that on-your-back position because it is more convenient for *them* and for connecting all the technological gadgetry that now is part and parcel of giving birth in this country.

Similarly with hysterectomies — in the U.S. the removal of the uterus is performed at a rate that is at least double that of other industrialized countries. *Why aren't these and similar issues being raised by the Left as part of the demands for Universal Health coverage?* Why doesn't the Left address widespread concern over what that coverage should consist of, instead of leaving that to the so-called capitalist-trained "experts"? Increasingly, it comes down to the Capitalist system vs. the Immune system. The left needs to stand with the alternative healthcare movement on the side of the Immune system.

A sustained critique of major health-endangering practices — such as nuclear power, fluoridation of water, inappropriate vaccinations, mass-spraying of pesticides, genetic engineering, industrialization of healthcare, the framework for AIDS and other syndromes and diseases, and many others²³ — has eluded the Left. Marxists need to stop assuming that science and technology could answer capitalism's problems if only they were owned, controlled and applied by the working class. Difficult though it may be to stop using the Master's tools to take down the Master's house (in Audrey Lorde's words), the Marxist Left needs to imagine a different *kind* of future, one not based on factories, assembly lines,

²³ All the practices listed here, as well as the torture of animals by cosmetics companies, have been typically endorsed by Communist parties in the United States. See, for example, Mitchel Cohen, *The Politics of World Hunger*, Red Balloon pamphlets, 1994.

factory farming or factory-type healthcare.

6. UNPEEL THE ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION

We need to actively search for the ecological dimension in every social justice issue and raise it as part of that fight.

Bob Dylan sang: “I’ll let you be in my dream if I can be in yours.” For many years the left acted similarly; organizations made alliances that at best led to raising each other’s issues and concatenating them into laundry lists of seemingly unrelated programmatic demands. However, the globalization of capital has changed all that. *Every* issue is multidimensional. Every issue has an ecological dimension *that is fundamental to it*. But it is often hidden. It is our job, as revolutionaries, to search for that green dimension and unpeel it, reveal it, and organize around it even when it does not seem obvious at first. We must make this a fundamental component of every fight. We need to *practice* how to unpeel that ecological dimension – it won’t happen on its own.

Here’s an example of what I mean: when the international boycott of Coca-Cola (www.killercoke.org) was being organized to protest Coke’s murder of indigenous working-class organizers in Colombia, Green activists brought to that struggle opposition to Coke’s support for the mass herbicide poisoning of the entire countryside with Monsanto’s RoundUp — the same deadly herbicide that they are spraying to kill weeds in New York City and on corn in Mexico. Monsanto has patented a procedure for genetically engineering what they call “RoundUp Ready” corn and soy so that the plants are able to withstand repeated application of the world’s #1 selling herbicide, RoundUp — and *only* RoundUp. As a consequence, corporate farms pour thousands of tons of RoundUp onto the crops, killing every living organism — weeds, butterflies, frogs, earthworms, bees. The only organism left standing is the corn itself. And then we eat it, saturated with poisons. The overwhelming majority of GMOs do nothing but aid the marketing of more herbicides and pesticides.

Marxists need to address the deeper systemic issues of such practices. We are not arguing that police clubs must be made from organic, non-rainforest wood, and that the police use non-GMO soy-based ink to take our fingerprints when we are arrested. Perhaps someone, somewhere, is demanding that traffic cops use recycled paper for all tickets and citations, and that bullets be made from recycled metal — oops, they’re already doing that with depleted uranium in Iraq — but none of those greenwashing reforms is what I’m proposing here (even though the fingerprint ink may in fact injure people who suffer from Multiple Chemical Sensitivities). In challenging the technology itself we learn to search out the deeper Green dimension, which reveals that Coke is one of the world’s

leading buyers of genetically engineered hi-fructose corn syrup; it permeates every processed food, and is largely responsible (as I've noted) for the epidemic of diabetes and overweight children in the United States. So we raise *this* as part of the reason for boycotting Coca Cola even though it was not part of the organizers' original rationale.

I'll give another example: When New York City's transit workers went on strike a few years back, we not only did strike support but also challenged the workers to express themselves about how to reconfigure the entire transportation system and raise the issue of alternatives to petroleum-based fuels. One role of Marxists is to encourage workers to legitimize and expand the issues that unions and other working-class organizations see as part of their domain and as valid and necessary to fight around.²⁴

Unpeeling the ecological dimension is crucial to success in vying for workplace democracy *and* reparation of the damages inflicted upon the communities we, as workers, live in. Imagine, for instance, how different things would be if workers at General Electric's plant in Schenectady N.Y. had fought against the company's dumping of PCBs into the Hudson River and demanded that G.E. clean up its toxic wastes from the river *as part of its union-organizing and contractual demands*.

A powerful example of *actively looking* for the ecological dimension of a particular issue occurred in Australia in the late 70s when unions issued "Green Bans" and refused to construct highways and malls unless they were first approved at public meetings by the communities that would be impacted by such "development." They would not build *anything* unless both the workers and the community approved it, regardless of the developers' plans and investments.²⁵

We can, and must, teach ourselves to do the same with every issue — even those that at first glance seem to have no ecological connections whatsoever. One of the principal reasons why the Left and the unions are in disarray in the U.S. has to do with their failure to take on these issues and expand the framework of what unions see as their role, beyond the single dimensionality of wages and a narrow construct of "working conditions". All of these (and more, of course) are necessary in enabling our movements and the working class in general to reveal and explore the deeper connections, which then would allow us to take actions

²⁴See Mitchel Cohen, *What Is Direct Action?* Red Balloon pamphlets, updated: 2007, which explores ways of reframing the questions before us to allow us to unpeel the hidden ecological dimensions of any issue.

²⁵The Communist-led unions enacting the Green Bans were finally broken up when the government hired Maoist thugs in "alternative" unions, who assassinated the leadership with the support of the Australian government.

that strike more deeply into the system itself and provide the basis for more powerful, successful, and radical social movements.

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