

**Sites/Cities of Resistance: Approaching
Ecological Socialism in Canada***

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The qualities of urban living in the twenty-first century will define the questions of civilization itself. — David Harvey

1. The Nature of the Crisis

Ecological socialism begins with the recognition that the current environmental crisis is a social crisis. This social crisis is linked to the transformation of relations in industrial society whereby relations among commodities have become the dominant form of social relationship. Rather than commodity relations serving human ends, humans and nature increasingly serve commodities. In this inverted world — and its consequent conceptions of human resources and natural resources — social failure and ecological failure are closely connected, as society and ecology become increasingly absorbed in the neoliberal economic paradigm. Although these are global problems, the logic of capitalism's "uneven development" means that this social crisis will manifest itself differently in different localities, and that solutions to this crisis will require attention to the specificity of local conditions, as well as to the logics of global processes.

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Ecological socialism is to be distinguished from reformist environmentalist discourses such as those of “ecological modernization,” “resource management,” and of “sustainable development.” While resource management is concerned with the production of goods and services, the sustainability debate is focused on integrating conservation and development perspectives. Ecological modernization perspectives envision a reconciliation of industrial growth and ecology. Ecological socialism however does not implicitly accept and universalize the forces of the modern economy as the context in which environmental problems are discussed. In other words, ecological socialism does not assume the very things that need to be explained when discussing environmental issues — the “naturalness” of certain forms of human behavior and social organization, for example — and is therefore engaged in a political approach to these issues. Rather than strategizing within the “given” of modern economic development, ecological socialism begins by highlighting the historical specificity of capitalism and the problems resulting from the economic, technological, and scientific relations specific to capitalism, so as to create the possibility for a consideration of alternate human relations and human-nature relations.

Ecological socialism is also to be distinguished from “deep ecology” in that it locates the source of ecological and social crises in the totalizing logic of commodification that is a specific feature of capitalism, rather than in modernity more generally. Ecological socialism calls not for a return to a more “natural” way of living, but for a mode of social organization that is both ecologically sustainable and socially just. That this does not involve a wholesale rejection of modernity will be evident in our discussion of urbanization, which is seen as a manifestation of current ecological and social crises, but also as the basis for both current eco-socialist struggles and for a future ecologically and socially sustainable society.

Ecological socialism thus has two related major aims. The *analytical* project of ecological socialism is focused on the extrication of conceptions of human communities and natural communities from the socially impoverished categories of capitalist production, markets, and technology. The central *strategic* project of ecological socialism, on the other hand, is the creation of a social context in which relations based on reciprocal, symmetrical, and participatory interactions — which challenge forces of exploitation, domination, and objectification both within human communities and between humans and the rest of nature — are possible. The recognition of current social failure rests on the contention that not only are viable conceptions of human

communities and natural communities disappearing, but that the human impetus within modern society to conserve what is left of human and natural communities, because they are part of “us,” is also disappearing. The recognition of this double disappearance — both of the possible contexts for and the social basis of the relationships between humans and nature — provides a starting point for shedding light on the environmental crisis as a social crisis, and highlights the link between social practice and theoretical frameworks in the pursuit of viable social and ecological relationships.

In an attempt to make this social relationship between nature and culture visible, it is possible to link the insights of social theorists who analyze transformation in social relations with those of naturalists who see nature as a social place. For naturalist John Livingston, the sense of “ecologic place” and “belonging” that exists in wild nature is a defining part of this sociality and identity. Livingston’s statement: “In the functioning multispecies community, all participants are subjects...” can form the basis of a social conception of nature which expands the critique of social theorists to include the sociality of the natural world.¹

When one compares this social conception of nature with Karl Polanyi’s statement that in archaic society human economy is submerged in social relationships based on reciprocity and redistribution, or with Marx’s descriptions of the mutual dependencies of use-values and concrete labor relations in pre-capitalist societies, the insights of social theorists point to a wider sociality which is not expressed within modern economic realities. The point is not to call for a return to a pre-modern form of social organization, but to link the insights of naturalists and social theorists, so as to both make nature visible and at the same time to recognize the disembedding of relationships under capital and markets which is at the heart of current environmental problems. This recognition of the sociality of nature and of the antisocial nature of capitalism then makes it possible to talk about social relations between human and natural communities in alternate socially viable terms.

¹John Livingston, *Rogue Primate: An Exploration of Human Domestication* (Toronto: Key Porter, 1994), p. 111.

2. The Historical Context of the Economic and Ecological Crises in Canada

Environmental issues are inseparable from the social context in which these issues manifest themselves. The current global economic agenda of privatization, deregulation, free trade and the increasing hegemony of finance capital, is the central initiative engendering social and ecological crisis. But these global processes need to be analyzed in terms of specific nation-state formations and urban ecological and economic regions. The following discussion, which will deal primarily with the ways in which economic and ecological crises have manifested themselves specifically in Canada, and even more specifically in Toronto, is intended to show the ways in which the crises are necessarily articulated through the specificity of particular national and local conditions, and that responses must be tailored to those conditions. Our focus on the local, however, should not be read as a denial of the fact that ecological and economic crises and their causes are global in scope. The discussion is also intended to be an example of ecological socialist analysis, at least some of the lessons of which should be generalizable to other areas of the globe.²

²Implicitly, this analysis rests on our ongoing dialogue with the Marxist and Innisian streams of Canadian political economy; See Roger Keil, David Bell, Peter Penz, and Leesa Fawcett, eds., *Political Ecology: Global and Local* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); Glen Williams, "Greening the New Canadian Political Economy," *Studies in Political Economy*, 37, Spring, 1992; Roger Keil, "Green Work Alliances: The Political Economy of Social Ecology," *Studies in Political Economy*, 44, 1994. There is a rich and unfortunately often little-known debate on political economy and ecology in this country which deserves to be mentioned here, although any attempt at doing this work justice must fail in this current endeavor. Laurie Adkin has certainly done much to name some of the major intersections of political economy and ecology. See especially her "Ecological Politics in Canada: Elements of a Strategy of Collective Action," in Keil, et al., 1998, *op. cit.*; *The Politics of Sustainable Development: Citizens, Unions, and the Corporations* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1998); and "Environmental Politics, Political Economy, and Social Democracy in Canada," *Studies in Political Economy*, 45, 1994. A recent edited volume by Fred Gale and Michael M'Gonigle, eds., *Nature, Production, Power: Towards an Ecological Political Economy* (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2000) has some excellent Canadian theoretical work in it. See also work by Anders Sandberg and Peter Clancy, *Against the Grain: Forests and Politics in Nova Scotia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000); L. Anders Sandberg and Sverker Sörlin, eds., *Sustainability — The Challenge: People, Power, and the Environment* (Montreal: Black Rose

In general, economies are defined by a continual process of transformation of social relations and ecologies through historical time and space. The reproduction or internal transformation of a socio-economic system is, however, not simply the chaotic interaction of autonomous individuals. Rather, history has periods of economic and social stability in which social relations are “institutionalized,” or regulated, in a way that allows economic agents to act to reproduce expanded accumulation.

Specifically capitalist economies are defined by the dominance of the commodity form, in which social relations, and especially work relations, are increasingly mediated through the abstract and impersonal mechanisms of the market. Yet, capitalist markets are not some naturalistic result, but socially-produced processes embedded in particular ecologies. Social, political and economic forms of regulation (several of which are compatible with a capitalist mode of production) are ultimately fragile attempts to contain the contradiction between the appropriators and the producers of economic surplus, and between the form of capitalist production and ecological limits, so that periods of economic growth inevitably give way to extended phases of economic decline and disorder. The fragility of these various forms of regulation, and capitalism’s propensity for generating economic and ecological

Books, 1998); Ray Rogers, *The Oceans are Emptying* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1995); *Nature and the Crisis of Modernity* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1994); Doug Macdonald, *The Politics of Pollution: Why Canadians Are Failing Their Environment* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991); and Keith Stewart, “Greening Social Democracy? Ecological Modernization and the Ontario NDP” (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Department of Political Science, York University, 1999). Political and policy theory (Robert Paehlke and Douglas Torgerson, eds., *Managing Leviathan: Environmental Politics and the Administrative State* [Toronto: Broadview Press, 1992]) and radical democratic theorizing (Cate Sandilands, *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) critically adds to this body of work. We must point out that our view of the Canadian scene is one influenced by our work in English Canada. Quebecois/e and Native Canadian thought is just as lively but often underrepresented in the English language discourse on nature and political economy in this country (for exceptions see Jean Rousseau, “The New Political Scales of Citizenship in a Global Era: The Politics of Hydroelectric Development in the James Bay Region” [Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Department of Political Science, Carleton University, Ottawa, 2000] and Jennifer Barron, “In the Name of Solidarity: The Politics of Representation and Articulation in Support of the Labrador Innu,” *CNS*, 11, 3, 2000).

crises, are thus a function of precisely the impersonal and uncontrollable nature of market forces that makes capitalism so productive. In James O'Connor's words, "Capitalism works because it doesn't work and vice versa." Both analytically and strategically socialist ecologists need to ask the question, does accumulation work *through* crisis or does it work *despite* crisis? (See for example the recent contributions by Elmar Altvater in *CNS* and the symposium on Alain Lipietz's intervention). In a related, more mainstream discourse, the question posed is whether late modern societies will be overwhelmed by the challenges of risk society or whether these challenges can be met through ecological modernization.³

The historical specificity of the economic and ecological crises in Canada arises from the particular form of the long-term development of capitalism in Canada. There are two key dimensions of Canada's national development model that are central to situating it in the general ecological, economic and social problems of North America. First, economic development in Canada has always encompassed significant forms of intensive and extensive growth.⁴ The origins of this model and its crisis lie in the distant past. The processes of market and state formation in the second half of the 19th century placed Canada within the center of the world economy, in terms of output levels and as part of the hegemonic British empire, but with a dependent industrial structure. Canada moved into the richest tier of capitalist economies by the early 20th century based on intensifying production — increasing productivity by borrowing technology from leading countries. But

³For a discussion see *Environmental Politics*, Spring, 2000.

⁴Intensive accumulation is essentially the application of science and technology to production, embodied in skills and machines, so that productivity advances rapidly as does growth (as long as final demand is adequate). This typically entails increasing the total volume of natural resources brought into production and the volume of pollutants emitted. Extensive accumulation, in contrast, is capital accumulation on the basis of extending the scale of production, with given production techniques, by drawing upon new sectors, workers, or resources, a larger portion of the day or more intensity during the existing work day. During periods of stability, these elemental forms of accumulation cohere into regimes of accumulation with a fairly long term stabilization of the allocation of social production between consumption and accumulation. No regime of accumulation is uniformly intensive or extensive in its specific historical conditions or institutions. It is necessary, therefore, to refer to national models of development, defined as the socio-spatial matrix of ecology, production, consumption and distribution and the nature of incorporation into the world economy, formed through historical time and social conflict.

Canada also developed by extending the scale of the capitalist market. The dominant European civilization expanded west and north by marginalizing the aboriginal populations and thereby increasing the quantity of land and resources available for accumulation. The strength of the postwar boom carried Canada along to even higher output levels, now within the confines of the hegemonic American empire. This development also pushed the extension of the market even further into the remotest regions of North America, in order to supply the resources to fuel the production and consumption processes of the world's most productive and wasteful economies. The ecological, economic and social costs of Canada's national model of development now only disclose a dismal and mounting tally: secularly growing unemployment; low productivity gain and faltering manufacturing capacity; foreign-dominated ownership patterns; resource depletion in many sectors including accessible hydro-carbons, fisheries, forests and many minerals; severe levels of pollution and contaminants, and increasingly extroverted growth steadily effacing state policy autonomy and political sovereignty.

There is a second dimension of Canada development model. What in the past were advantages of this model of development — exploitation and export of raw materials in an open world economy and industrialization of a small regional center — have turned into the impediments and problems of decay.⁵ The varied indices of the international scales of production — growth and productivity levels, trade and debt balances, unemployment and social welfare, environmental damage — all point in the direction of a relative decline of Canada's dependent capitalism in comparison to other capitalist countries. This relative economic decline in the context of increasingly global economic pressures has put social wages into competition: the attempt to meet the economic crisis by government cutbacks and wage

⁵One obvious example in the Canadian context is the pulp and paper industry. The relatively cheap hydroelectric power provided by the rivers of the Canadian Shield combined with abundant northern conifers whose long fibers were important in the production of good quality newsprint helped make Canada a leading producer of newsprint. Newsprint is now one of the cheap, low-value added paper products, the abundant forests have been ravaged, new technology has rendered the importance of the long fibers of northern conifers less important, and there is now stiff global competition from the global south which can provide fast-growing sources of fiber and a cheap labor force. Meanwhile many communities that were built upon the Canadian industry are dying as the reliance upon the one staple product is proving to be a liability.

austerity has pushed down living standards for workers, the unemployed, and other dependent classes. The same competitive pressures of relative economic decline have also put nature into competition: resources are being exploited more intensively and restrictions on the environmental impacts of production are being loosened. There are innumerable examples of this, from the collapse of the Maritime fishery to the intensification of clearcut forestry to the opening up of the National Parks for commercial development. Attempts at “green capitalism” have failed miserably in dealing with the *systemic* pressures from the economic crisis. Yet, the current period of capitalist accumulation is characterized by extensive ecological modernization campaigns. “Eco-mod” does not solve the fundamental contradictions of capitalism’s natural relations (such as the ones outlined in the concept of the second [Secondary] contradiction of capitalism), but it provides a powerful strategic space for capitalism to reinvent itself almost constantly in the face of its physical, social and spatial limits. Multinational forestry companies active (and sometimes based) in Canada have embarked on strategies critical of their previous clearcutting practices; a previous social democratic government in Ontario (between 1990 and 1995) dabbled in ecological modernization;⁶ urban development in major centers such as Toronto occurs “through” rather than “against” nature;⁷ fuel cell technology seems to promise a new future for the notoriously polluting auto industry. Putting nature into competition also reinforces the long-term reliance on extensive growth in the national model to keep pushing market relations deeper and deeper into wilderness areas and into Canada’s oceans in a continual pursuit to find new resources to exploit.⁸ The most recent national debate on this subject has been on the export of bulk water from Canadian sources such as the Great Lakes.⁹

What relative economic decline in Canada means, then, is not just a fall in place in the international hierarchy of production, but rather what Perry Anderson refers to as an “increasing entropy” of a social formation unable to avert, let alone reverse, a polarizing income structure, a depreciating public sector, a devaluation of productive capacities and the degradation of its ecological landscape. The Canadian state has not acted to correct, nor even had the capacity, to steer away

⁶Keith Stewart, 1999, *op. cit.*

⁷Roger Keil and John Graham, “Reasserting Nature: Constructing Urban Environments after Fordism,” in Bruce Braun and Noel Castree, eds., *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millenium* (London: Routledge, 1998).

⁸Rogers, *op. cit.*

⁹Maude Barlow, *Blue Gold* (Ottawa: Council of Canadians, 1999).

from economic decline and ecological decay. Rather, the state has advanced the extroverted and extensive accumulation strategy by actively advancing the strategy of austerity for international competitiveness and incorporating Canada into the continental trading bloc formed by NAFTA, a strategy which relies heavily on further intensifying the exploitation of Canada's natural environment for its viability. Moreover, to the extent that this incapacity to avert decline and decay has been a result of the global economic forces outlined at the outset, the response of the Canadian state has not been unique. "Competitiveness" strategies that have the perverse effect of engaging competing jurisdictions in a "race to the bottom" are the logical result of the rationalized irrationality of capitalist development.

These two dimensions highlight how actual production processes and economies exist in a physical space such that capital must be fixed in place for a length of time — what David Harvey has called a socio-spatial fix. This spatial fix must also be considered an ecological space as it implies different ecological relations over time and across space with respect to how nature is appropriated (or not), how production externalities are disposed of, and how consumption patterns are organized. Under capitalism, this spatial fix — the material form of existence of the socioeconomic and ecological practices which structure capital accumulation — has taken the form of the compartmentalization of space into discrete nation-states. Nation-states have structured social and ecological spaces, providing a common currency, legal structure, class formation and social institutions. National economic spaces, have been the key locus in the "hierarchy of space," for capitalist production, although not uniformly and not without significant local and international variations.

But while national economic spaces are still important, urban issues have assumed a new political salience for eco-socialists in Canada in the 1990s. This situation has emerged in the context of two distinct but closely related crises:

The first crisis is the decline of Fordism. The Fordist regime of accumulation — like all regimes of accumulation, an attempt to stabilize the inherent contradictions of capitalist production — attempted to regulate capitalist development through mass production and mass consumption and a social compromise which tied the consumption levels of the working class to ups and downs (first mostly ups, later mostly downs) of the capitalist economy. Since the mid-1970s, this Fordist regime has started to wind down and be replaced by newer, more flexible forms of production and consumption. The

consequence for millions of working people has been deindustrialization, restructuring, downsizing and redundancy.

The second crisis is the globalization of the economy. Fordism was built on the relative sovereignty of national political economies in a system of American hegemony. Its crisis is accompanied by the crisis of global regulation (e.g., Bretton Woods) and by the globalization of state institutions and national economies.¹⁰ Governments and communities lose much of their regulatory power over national economies and social structures.¹¹ At the same time, the devolution of national and provincial governments' responsibilities to cities and regions creates more direct relationships between urban areas and the global economy, a process which itself has been highly contested in Canadian metropolitan centers.¹²

3. Urban Ecology — Social Justice

At some point around the turn of the millennium, a child was born in a city or a displaced peasant wandered into a shantytown somewhere in the world and pushed the world's urban population over the 50 percent mark. In North America, already, more than 75 percent of the population live in urban centers. We have become an urban species. The consequences of this fact are tremendous regarding strategies both for socialism and ecology.¹³

For most humans, experiences of "environment" and "environmental crisis" have become urban experiences: what is usually called the "global ecological crisis" thus finds its concrete expression in communities and neighborhoods of our cities. If most urban environments are degraded ecologically, then perhaps 75 percent (or more) of the population of North America live in degraded environments. We breathe polluted air, drink unsafe water, our houses are built on contaminated soil, and our work environments continue to

¹⁰Harriet Friedmann, "A Sustainable World Food Economy," in Keil, et al, 1998, *op. cit.*; Elmar Altvater, "Global Order and Nature," *ibid.*

¹¹Although it needs to be pointed out that states play a major part in fostering globalization, see. Leo Panitch, "Globalization and the state," in Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch, eds., *Socialist Register* (London: Merlin Press, 1994).

¹²See *Studies in Political Economy*, 56, Summer, 1998; Stefan Kipfer and Roger Keil, "Toronto.Inc? Planning the Competitive City in the New Toronto," *Antipode*, forthcoming.

¹³Nicholas Low, Brendan Gleeson, Ingemar Elander, Rolf Lidskop, eds., *Consuming Cities: The Urban Environment in the Global Economy after the Rio Declaration* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

lack viable health standards. Our cities and the patterns of life in it are unsustainable in social and ecological terms.

But “urban” needs to be defined. In an earlier paper generated by members of the Toronto group, we agreed on the following:

Although Lefebvre’s writings are neither ecological in orientation nor free from problematic conceptualizations of nature, his thesis on the urbanization of society is a useful entry point to an immanent and dialectical urban-ecological critique of the urban process in capitalism. In *La Révolution Urbaine*, Lefebvre suggests that capitalist social formations have a tendency to become increasingly urbanized. As the urban built environment keeps sprawling, agricultural production is being industrialized, extra-urban spatial forms are being integrated functionally into urban networks, and social life is increasingly moulded by urban forms of living...The boundaries of the urban are fluid and render traditional notions of “city” and “countryside” increasingly problematic as terms to denote distinct socio-spatial forms.

The implication of Lefebvre’s thesis is that the process of capitalist urbanization has made it exceedingly difficult for most people to talk about nature and the “city” in a non-urban context. Indeed, many ostensibly non- or anti-urban celebrations of organic, harmonious “nature” are themselves products, and thus integral parts of, the urban experience. Arcadian constructions of suburbia, for example, have posited a retreat from the conflict-ridden, sinful and Promethean profanities of urban life into the idyllic, virtuous and divine “nature” while riding on subsequent waves of spatial expansion.”¹⁴

The ecology of urban regions has changed as a result of and in response to the decline of Fordism and the rise of globalization. An eco-socialist approach understands these changes engendered by shifts in the structure of capitalist accumulation as having both social and ecological dimensions. So-called old industrial areas are taken out of the cycle of global investment flows while newer areas are incorporated into the space of accumulation. Changes in the productive base, the mix of technologies used and the intensity of the production process have had a

¹⁴Stefan Kipfer, Franz Hartmann, and Sara Marino, “Editorial,” *CNS Special Issue on Urban Ecology*, June, 1996, pp. 7-8.

severe impact on urban regions, fundamentally altering both regional ecologies and urban social relations.

These changes have occurred everywhere, North and South, East and West, in rich and in poor countries. But they have had a different face in each global region. Globalization has shut down the “rust belt” factories of northeastern North America, and has facilitated the exporting of pollutants to the global South or to the “Fourth World” reservations of the indigenous peoples of North America. While environmental problems in the global North differ significantly from those in the global South, there are a number of common problem areas which we can identify everywhere. These include various types of pollution of air, water, and soil; the destruction of farmland and forests around cities; urban sprawl, and related forms of degradation. Even more importantly, urban areas everywhere are being affected more intensely by globalized processes of capitalist accumulation, even if the effects of these processes are often very different. For the most part, cities in the North and in the South seem to be on entirely divergent trajectories of development. The future development of capitalism will in many respects not make cities more and more alike: Toronto will not become Sao Paolo, nor will Lagos become London. To the extent that all cities are increasingly effected by global processes, however, they will be more rather than less comparable in the near future.

The view of generalized urbanization as both cause and symptom of environmental degradation is a common one. Almost everywhere, the so-called ecological footprint — the area needed for cities to reproduce themselves — is growing in size.¹⁵ Cities, by this measure, have been called parasites that live off an ever more global hinterland. They have exceeded their bioregional carrying capacity many times over. They have become entirely unsustainable in social and ecological terms. But “ecological footprint” means more than just the quantitative spread of urban needs over (global) hinterlands. The existence of large urban centers is premised upon highly industrialized, highly commodified, technology- and chemical-intensive forms of agriculture (and other primary production) which may not be economically or ecologically sustainable in the long run, and which pose severe environmental, economic, social, political and health problems for the people working in agriculture and the rural communities as a whole. This contradictory relationship between the city and its alleged hinterland was brought

¹⁵Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees, *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth* (Gabriola Island, B.C. and Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1996).

home to thousands of rural Ontario residents in the spring of 2000. In Walkerton, a small Ontario community 150 km northwest of Ontario, that is ringed by industrial agriculture, an E.Coli outbreak in the town's drinking water supply killed at least six people and made thousands ill. While this particular case was also linked to the drastic defunding of public services by the Ontario provincial government under Tory Mike Harris, it also was emblematic of the larger urban-exurban problematic encountered in Canada and elsewhere. All of this means that efforts to build environmentally sustainable urban communities cannot be dissociated from efforts to construct economically, environmentally, socially and politically sustainable rural communities. Urban ecology movements that do not confront these realities of the urban relationship to the rural hinterland are bound to fail in the long run and probably will generate a lot more of the kind of politically reactionary response which neo-conservative governments have tapped into in the rural regions, where environmentalism is widely perceived as a negative political force associated with the city.

The city as the source and site of humanity's ecological problems is, however, only one side of the story. Another view, one which is more conducive to the analysis of the environmental crisis as a social crisis, states that cities are not just the site and symbol of our ecological downfall, but that they also are the place where we can — and must — find collective solutions to our species' survival on this earth. The level of civil organization we have achieved in a majority urbanized society can potentially be the basis for a more ecologically sustainable human future.

In contrast to a view held by many environmentalists, ecological socialism asserts that environmentalism is not a concern for an external, non-urban nature "out there" but also — and perhaps even predominantly — a concern for the nature, the ecology and the environment of our cities and ourselves in these cities. If we accept this premise, however, we are facing a whole new set of conceptual problems.

If we agree that the ecology of cities is worth our attention, we have to find ways to communicate to one another, what we mean by that. "Nature" and "environment" mean different things to different people. Particularly in a globalized, multicultural city like Toronto, the diversity of urban civil society will surely create conflict around the notion of "urban ecology." Our understanding of urban ecology, however, must be derived from our premise that the environmental crisis is a social crisis. The eco-socialist vision of urban ecology is therefore to be distinguished from the way this term was first developed

by the Chicago School, which sought to naturalize certain patterns of urban development. There is for us nothing natural about the hollowing out of inner cities, the privatization of public space, or the decline of urban infrastructure such as mass transit. “Urban ecology...is not the transferral of biological imagination on to urban society but is the sum of our social practices in cities related to our natural environment.”¹⁶

But just as we understand that “nature” refers to the urban as well as the non-urban environment, we also cannot just assume that the environment is automatically a progressive cause. We need to make it a progressive cause by connecting its issues and concerns to an agenda of social justice. Urban sustainability is mainly a function of equity and of finding the political structures and processes necessary to achieve an ecologically and socially livable place. Conversely, we cannot simply tag “the environment” on to existing social justice agendas. Environmental concerns are not a subcategory of social justice, nor can ecology be subsumed under equity.

There is no ecological crisis per se. In crisis is the societal relationship with nature — a crisis of *human* ecology. Both the way we humans relate materially to non-human nature and the way we understand, express and talk about these ways are in crisis. And this is the area where we have a lot of work to do as urban ecologists. In this view, urban ecology is not some new religion or ideology of social change but a set of relationships we build with non-human nature, which have their place beyond the techno-fixes of the environmental planners, managers and engineers. What we need to forge at this point are new and more sustainable societal relationships with nature, as well as adequate ways of understanding and expressing these relationships. What we need are social-ecological alliances with which we recognize that our social organization always has an inseparable ecological dimension.¹⁷

The significance of urban ecology and sustainability is now undisputed and acknowledged on many levels of political decision-making. Local Agenda 21, which came out of the Rio Declaration of 1992 and the UN-sponsored Habitat II conference in Istanbul in 1996,

¹⁶Roger Keil, “The Environmental Problematic in World Cities,” in Paul L. Knox and Peter J. Taylor eds., *World Cities in a World System* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Richard Milgrom, “Sustaining Diversity: Participating Design an Urban Space,” *Planners Network Newsletter*, May, 1998.

¹⁷Egon Becker and Thomas Jahn, “Growth or Development?” in Keil et al., 1998, *op.cit.*

confirmed the necessity of particularly local governance structures to forge new social-ecological alliances. Moreover, these local governance structures need to be given the wherewithal to make our cities ecologically and socially sustainable. At this point, this seems largely still an uphill struggle.¹⁸ Still, this local system of governance is our main reference point for action because we are part of an urban ecological movement.

In this context, for example, progressive environmental activists in Toronto need to be outspoken and active concerning the issue of municipal boundary setting. This is an eminently ecological issue because any proposed new form of governance is the framework for the regulation of a variety of societal-ecological relationships, like the one between the so-called inner city and the so-called suburbs or between places of work and residence. In this discussion, we need to raise and defend a comprehensive ecological view which goes beyond the conservative ecological modernization project often at the center of Toronto's urban ecological politics.¹⁹ Progressives need to claim nature and environment back from those in the city who would like to merely paint the concrete green. Urban ecology is about liberation and social justice; it is ultimately about our survival as an urban species.

The immediate beneficiary of the compounded economic and ecological crises thus far has been the New Right politics which came to the fore in Canada at the federal level with Brian Mulroney's Tories in the 1980s and continued with Jean Chretien's Liberals and with Mike Harris at the provincial level in the 1990s. In Ontario, the attack by the Conservative government on Ontario's welfare state and environmental regulations is one which neatly situates itself within the process of facilitating global processes of accumulation. In Toronto, more specifically, this has taken the form of crippling local institutionalized forms of democracy through municipal amalgamation. Citizens have responded to the crises by taking community-based public action beyond the parameters of party politics offered by the social democratic New Democratic Party. One of the principal forms of this response were in the streets in a series of provincially-organized, but city-based, "Days of Action," which shut down major urban centers throughout the

¹⁸Low, et al., *op.cit.*

¹⁹Franz Hartmann, "Nature in the City: Urban Ecological Politics in Toronto" (unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Department of Political Science, York University, Toronto, 1999).

province in 1995 and 1996.²⁰ Social movement activities and workplace unrest were generally on the rise. Strike activities — particularly of public sector workers — throughout the province were rampant in the years after the neoliberal Tories were elected. And, while the Tories were re-elected in 1999, public support has recently dwindled, as even conservative strongholds started to rise up in protest against the government they had put in power.²¹ This was especially noticeable after the drinking water crisis in Walkerton in early 2000 which was largely blamed on the Harris government.²²

The political economy of globalization at the beginning of the 21st century is not the most opportune time to be projecting progressive responses to the changing fortunes of capitalism. The task of articulating, let alone constructing, an ecologically and socially sustainable alternative to global capitalism is immense. Moreover, the positions of the socialist and trade union movements in Canada are weaker organizationally, and the ecological movement remains relatively unorganized and isolated. This has meant that even when social democratic parties have been in power in Canada, they have had little success in reversing the pattern of policies of the New Right or in changing the direction of capital accumulation. Thus the dominant pattern of restructuring (in Canada but also elsewhere) has been toward the intensification of ecological degradation and social polarisation. But if our analysis has been correct so far, global capitalism at present is still in a period of economic restructuring (and even crisis) and ecological crisis. Global capitalism at the current moment is only being sustained through the fictions of credit-money sustaining the financial order, asymmetries in the world trading system (with working classes

²⁰Julie-Anne Boudreau, *The Megacity Saga: Democracy and Citizenship in this Global Age* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2000); Stefan Kipfer, "Urban Politics in the 1990s: Notes on Toronto," In INURA Zurich, eds., *Possible Urban Worlds* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1998), pp. 172-179; Roger Keil, "Governance Restructuring in Los Angeles and Toronto: Amalgamation and Secession," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, forthcoming.

²¹Stephen Dale, *Lost in the Suburbs: A Political Travelogue* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1999).

²²We regret that due to spatial limitations we will not be able to provide a more detailed account of Ontario politics at this point. Please see Dale, *op.cit.* for an account of the political space occupied by Mike Harris' conservatives.

bearing the costs of adjustment), and massive environmental dumping. In spite of the analytical and political difficulties, the need for an alternative remains urgent.

4. What Is To Be Done?

What we propose is more than the acknowledgement by social activists that there is an environmental movement which has legitimate concerns, and with which one needs to build a cross-sectional coalition. Social justice activists need to begin to recognize that everything they do has an urban and an ecological dimension. The social and the ecological are inseparable. They are united in their challenge to the disappearance of political-social space and the expansion of economic space.

The politics on the margins of the existing left in Canada must also become a constructed reality in order to illustrate that it is possible to construct a new politics of truth — or a new democracy through a linking of humans and nature in social, not consumptive, terms. This requires a movement away from the commodity as the dominant social relation (as communicated in the language of price). This is perhaps the essence of the problematic facing ecological socialism's political project: the extrication of political agency from the grasp of capitalism. From this could emerge a redefined citizen, whose politicization could be considered not only natural, but whose role as a systemic political actor challenges capitalism and its social and ecological failures as being both managerial and structural.

How does this relate to the urban as the site/city of strategic ecosocialist activity? An urbanized ecological socialism calls for not only an alternative to capitalism at the level of global social relations, but also identifies the appropriate means and key points of struggle to achieve that end: the substitution of commodified relations with those that are socially and ecologically sustainable. Analytically, the struggle is one to reveal the political interests that lie behind commodity relations, as well as the ecological implications of specific urban forms. Politically, the struggle is to construct healthy, sustainable, and just cities, which can only be achieved through the politicization of commodified social and ecological relations.

It will not be enough to build a social movement around the provision of services — social or environmental. Ecological socialism involves a reconceptualization of a whole host of social relations, including work, childraising, and politics. More immediately, and in order to achieve this longer-term goal, we need to become a political urbanist force. Most importantly, we need to break the development-

land nexus, which is responsible for the unsustainability of our cities. Because we are based in Toronto, this urban region's example looms large in our strategic thinking. As Toronto prepares its new general plan, entertains a \$12 billion waterfront project, and competes for the 2008 Olympics, all sails are set for the full emergence of a specifically Canadian version of the "competitive city" with its three constitutive parts: the entrepreneurial city, the city of diversity, and the revanchist city.²³ The fact that urban politics is mostly about urban growth — be it in the form of eviction of inner city populations through gentrification, office development and condo-mania, or in the form of suburban sprawl — is our most pressing urban environmental problem. We have built our cities as automobile-based, energy-wasting nightmares and we have created a political system run by developers and speculators which sustains this nightmare. This is where much of our political intervention begins. From the outer fringes of the urban bioregion (where suburban burghers fight for conservation of the sensitive Oak Ridges Moraine) to the inner city (where homeless and anti-poverty activists battle the police and the bureaucracy on an ongoing basis), the urban environment has turned into a battleground over the model of capitalist globalization that builds cities as exclusive money-making machines devoid of even the most modest redress of the ecological and social crisis it engenders. From water to trash and the pollution of soil and air: there is not a single area in which even shallow ecological modernization reforms would be tried, to stem the wave of globalization-induced development in Toronto.

The strategic question is then about the types of economic and political strategies that might allow ecologists, workers and communities to reform the collective agencies and capacities of a green left to control the market and impose democratic and collective priorities. Let us develop this point.

The impasse of Canada's development model is linked to three broad factors: First, there are the socio-economic dimensions of the crisis of Canada's postwar development, which has manifested itself in high structural unemployment and intensifying inequality. Secondly, post-WWII Canadian growth processes have relied heavily on ecological intensification and have consequently resulted in ecological degradation. Third, there is intensifying competition over living conditions and nature, as a result of the openness of the national economy in terms of trade and capital mobility, exacerbated by the seeming impossibility of regulation of the world market under the present international regime.

²³Kipfer and Keil, *Toronto.Inc?...*, *op.cit.*

A green left alternative has to address all sides of this compounded crisis. Three general principles seem central. First, the view now accepted among social democrats, that the growth of unemployment is inevitable, must be rejected: Unemployment is the basis for the splitting of society into those who have paid work in core jobs and those excluded from either work or stable employment. A green left alternative — which presently is not even on the radar screen in most federal or provincial politics, but has some currency in some local contexts — must advance the principle that democratic citizenship proceeds from the right to work and the right to a decent income, but must not see these two things as inherently connected. A guaranteed annual income can be used to minimize the need for ecologically destructive and socially superfluous forms of production. Second, all economic production and consumption must meet a test of environmental sustainability and actively promote principles and constraints that develop alternate quality production and complete cost internalization for resource usage and ecological clean-up. Third, the political compromises at the international level necessary for long-term stability must be built around the principle of maximizing the capacity of different collectivities to democratically choose different development paths, so long as these do not impose externalities (such as environmental damage) on other countries, and without suffering isolation and coercive sanction from the world economy.

The implication of these principles is that redistribution must be central to economic policy. An alternative model will have to entail a radical redistributive shift in terms of resources and new institutional structures: from the traded goods sector to the local and national economies; from the highest paid to the lowest paid; from those with too many hours of work to those with too few; from management dominated labor processes to worker controlled including a move towards a measure of work time reduction;²⁴ and from private consumption-led production to ecologically-sustainable economies. A redistributive economic policy would have to move toward “inward industrialization” which would contrast clearly with the traditional “dependent industrial” structure of the Canadian economy .

A viable green left alternative has to work, therefore, in a socialist direction “in and against the market,” “in and against the state” and “in and for the environment.” This would entail, as Andre Gorz has put it, substituting the logic of “market rationality” with “democratic and co-

²⁴Anders Hayden, *Sharing the Work, Sparing the Planet: Work Time, Consumption and Ecology* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1999).

operative forms of rationality.” There is no shortage of such ecological and democratization projects for Canada, ranging from the remedying of the democratic deficits of the archaic Westminster constitutional monarchy by republicanism and the expansion of workplace and community democracy, to the cleanup of the Great Lakes and the massive extension of wilderness areas. A particular urban ecologist agenda would have to address the unsustainability of global capitalism from the inside of capitalist everyday life. The material basis and political formation required to make such a project not just a necessity but a reality seems remote at present. That political challenge, in conjunction with developments internationally, remains our foremost task.

