
HOUSE ORGAN

This issue's House Organ is an expanded version of an invited talk by Jim O'Connor at Italy's new Environmental Forum, which met for the first time in Rome last January. The principle aim of the Forum is to operate as a red-green network of grass-root environmental organizations, fighting toxic waste incinerators, work casualties and cancer deaths from asbestos, air pollution, water pollution and supplies, traffic, GM foods, and so on. A second aim is to spread the idea of an alternative Left, to engage in a "preservation first" strategy while promoting the ecological conversion of the economy, culture and politics. The Forum defines itself as "red-green." It believes that a new Left for the 21st century is impossible unless it is both green and also anti-capitalist (against capital self-accumulation) and also anti-neoliberalist (against the privatization of resources and public spaces). The Forum is sustained by the Partito of Rifondazione Comunista (PRC), which however has not yet brought together the red and the green in the same discourse and politics. The Forum hopes to change the PRC over time, in red-green directions. It is founded with the conviction that political parties remain necessary, and that while social movements are equally necessary, they can not bring about radical change by themselves. The Forum represents a radical break from the existing left milieu, which is dominated by market ideology (the present government ruling coalition) and by the political culture of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), the focus of which remains "labor," and not "green." The national Forum plans to hold meetings two or three times a year. There will also be regular meetings at the regional level. The Forum will work through a regional structure, which is now being organized, and will hold meetings in different regions through the year. — Giovanna Ricoveri

The Red and the Green. I hope that the work of the Forum helps us to better understand what it means today — in the age of neoliberal global capital and the anti-globalization movement — to call oneself "red" and also "green" and of course "red-green."

There are those who think that a display of colors is not helpful. At one time, red meant that you were a Communist, but there aren't many Communists around any more. To stand up at a meeting in

progressive Santa Cruz and call yourself red is a good way to impair the hearing of your listeners or to be mistaken for a subscriber to *Red Herring*, a magazine for high tech businesspeople.

If fewer people wear red today, many more each year display the color green. In the States, environmental militants are still very much green and some have bequeathed us the Green Party, which (even divided as it is) has done well in local elections in selected parts of the country. Internationally, Green Members of Parliament, councilors and officials from 60 countries met in Australia last April to discuss the “downside of globalization” within the problematic of “sustainability.”

But green has also gone postmodernist: it means anything anyone wants it to mean. Ecological modernizers, “environmentally responsible” corporations and investment funds, even war parties in Germany and France (during the Pentagon’s war against Serbia), all wear green. So, too, do the big corporate-funded environmental organizations and also many in the “public interest community,” who sometimes work with big business on environmental issues.

Red has a noble as well as ignoble history, and in environmental activist circles green retains its critical edge. Those who wish to abolish the wage form of labor and the commodity form of need satisfaction, to be done with global capital as it is making itself better known to us every day, deserve a color (red) as do those who seek to abolish the state as well (anarchist black). Those who want to revolutionize the capitalist productive forces, to harmonize them with principles of ecological rationality and sensibility, need their color green. And those who wish to do both at the same time, to revolutionize the capitalist production relations *and* productive forces, and to democratize material existence in every way possible, want their colors red green or green red. (The placement of the noun and adjective is significant although it has yet to be discussed what the significance actually is.)

There are less utopian and more practical concepts of red-green. I have in mind not a “minimalist” program in the old-fashioned red sense nor a new series of single-issue initiatives in the still very relevant green sense. I mean both something more and something less, namely, to work with the left populist and democratic anti-globalization movement with our red-green intellectual and activist colors flying. The point being to try to complete (in the sense of making whole) red populist demands and actions with green thinking and projects, and vice versa. For example, the distribution of wealth and power in the world of global capital intersects the distribution of land, space and ecological

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resources (defined in non-instrumental senses, too) in many ways and at many points: red and green issues are often two sides of the same issue.

I'm thinking of definitions of red and green that make sense within an anti-globalist discourse; that are practical in the sense of belonging to the movement's agenda in the here and now.

Red means (among other things) to redistribute wealth in all of its forms, including ecological wealth, from the rich to the poor, the powerful to the powerless, the North to the South, capital to labor. We can think about redistribution from many different perspectives. From a societal perspective the first and most basic redistribution is from the North to the South. Then there is redistribution between rich and poor regions within a country and also between social classes within a region or country. Another is between men and women (e.g., undervaluing women's work) and also between whites and people of color, globally and also within and between countries and regions. From this point of view, for example, red greens would support a redistribution of wealth from oil rich, population sparse countries (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia) to oil poor, population dense countries (Egypt, Syria, Jordan) in the Middle East.

There are intermediate levels of redistribution, too, say, between rich and poor school districts, water-rich and water-poor watersheds, between health clinics for the wealthy to those of the poor. We can also talk about redistribution between management and workers in one industry or factory; between public services delivered in wealthy neighborhoods and those in poor districts. I imagine that there are a thousand and one ways to fight for redistribution of different types, many intersecting with one another through market relations, political boundaries, watershed borders and so on. Mal-distribution is that deep and widespread. A campaign to demand redistribution of wealth, including ecological wealth, could be, if the campaign were so inclined, totalistic in nature.

This is important because global capital has been tried and found guilty by the anti-globalist movement of wanton disregard of everyone without money. Still awaiting a sentencing date, global capital and its minions are in disorganized rhetorical retreat on the issue of capitalism and poverty. Meanwhile capital is reorganizing itself to produce new rhetorical gambits that are less aimed to alleviate poverty and more to split anti-globalist forces into two camps, one predominately the moderate NGOs, the other mainly the anti-globalist social movements.

Thus is created in history the division between NGOs and social movements that Alex Demirovic so insightfully has made in theory.¹

This divide-and-conquer strategy is a measure of the seriousness that global capital and its friends in the World Bank, IMF, NAFTA, and the WTO bring to the struggle for power and resources. To keep the resources, they have to keep their power. They know that the movements are dead serious about reducing their power and privileges in order to abolish poverty as the world knows it today. But business and government also have no intention of giving up any real power or of taking the range of macro-economic and micro-economic actions required to attack poverty at its roots. Proof positive is the ugly fact that, instigated by the U.S. government, Jubilee 2000's proposal (backed by hundreds of other organizations, including Britain's Drop the Debt campaign) to forgive the debt "owed" to the North by the poorest countries in the South was rejected by the IMF and World Bank last February. So, too, in the case of AIDS drugs, the world oligopoly of pharmaceutical manufacturers is still fighting tooth and nail against the production of and trade in generics by such countries as India, Brazil, Thailand, and South Africa. Is it any wonder that redistribution of wealth and power, number one on the anti-globalist agenda, has become simple common sense within the movement — hence that the color red retains concrete, practical meanings today?

Mal-distribution becomes more obscene as corruption scandals erupt on all continents, not sparing a single country. In the North as well as South national and local authorities desperate for money sell their natural patrimony to corporations ("privatization") driven by greed and pressured by financial markets to accelerate earnings and growth. G.W. Bush is a bought-and-paid-for godsend to resource corporations, ranchers, food monopolies and other nature-based capitalists in the U.S. hinterlands and also a danger to urban ecologies in the cities of the Great Lakes and Atlantic and Pacific coasts. However you define global ecology, complex natural systems are broken up and sold piece by piece, or die of neglect, in the global capitalist regime.

Every school of red-green thought, no matter the kinds of theories and politics that divide them, agrees that it is as important to be green as it is to be red. The reason is simply that one can't do the one well without doing the other, too. After 13 years of putting out *CNS*, however, I still don't know whether it is more difficult to convince red

¹Alex Demirovic, "NGOs and Social Movements: A Study in Contrasts," *CNS*, 11, 4, December, 2000.

or greens of this simple proposition, that for millions of people has become a truism.

In the populist anti-globalist movement, red means to redistribute wealth and green means to redefine wealth. For a century and a half reds have stressed the need to abolish capitalist relations of production to “develop the productive forces.” Thanks to decades of agitation by greens on dozens of fronts we know today that it makes little sense to talk about the relations of production “holding back” the forces of production. Scarcity and poverty are not to be abolished by doubling or tripling the world’s capacity to produce petrochemical products, paper and pulp, automobiles, freeways and junk food. The drug industry has the capacity to produce all the AIDS drugs needed today and all that will be needed tomorrow. While scarcity is not “natural” but social in the regime of global capital, we shouldn’t infer from this a need to expand existing capitalist forces of production but rather to redefine them. These same forces have also been tried and found guilty, by green activists and those who labor in low-input farming, alternative transport systems, communications, manufactures, construction and also those who struggle for new modes of consumption. In the U.S. in particular, the national ideology of competitive individualism has become terribly costly and wasteful and dangerous when played out in capitalist materialist terms.² The greens have proven that capitalist productive forces are destructive to the planet and have to be re-engineered and rethought generally, or abolished. Capitalist technology is not socially or politically “neutral” and never has been: it is designed to control laborers as well as labor; to exploit laborers as well as the gifts of nature (human-made or not); to specialize workers as well as work; to centralize social and political power, to promote particular investment and export strategies; and so on.

As reds can imagine many levels of redistribution of wealth, greens imagine many ways to redefine the productive forces. For example: from high-input to low-input agriculture; from branded to generic life-saving drugs; from junk foods not to “safe” foods but to “nutritious” foods; from cars to biking, walking, public transport one looks forward to using; from production that puts profits first to that which puts workers and nearby communities first. Locally there are countless struggles against pesticide use in parks, roadsides and other public spaces; community and labor coalitions around the world fight in dozens of ways for some control over production technology, as do coalitions of local governments, NGOs and others struggle against the

²See my *Accumulation Crisis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

use of greenhouse gases and for safe and renewable energy. As with redistribution, this list pertaining to reconceptualizations of capitalist productive forces could be expanded practically without end, given the onslaught of global capital on people and places. All of it is legitimated in one pathetic way: “You’ll get more consumer goods, which will be less expensive, if you do it our way.” Given enough imagination and will, and finally power, red greens have a chance to combine these two general types of struggles in hundreds of ways.

Red green then means to redistribute and redefine productive forces at the same time. One example of potential red-green theory and practice: Jubilee 2000’s campaign (noted above) to force the North to “forgive” the debt of the poorest countries is by (populist) definition red. If the campaign had included social movements in indebted (and other) countries demanding that foreign exchange saved by debt relief be employed to import skills, materials, and tools, to build human-scale infrastructure and produce low-input foodstuffs and raw materials and to set up green manufactures oriented to the basic material needs of local peoples — if there were local campaigns of this sort Jubilee’s inspiring effort would deserve red-green honors. And it might have a better chance at winning. I know that this is overly simple yet it’s the kind of formulation of the problem that everyone in the anti-globalization movement can understand.

The Red and the Green and the State. Social movements including the anti-globalization movement are divided on the main strategy to use to reach their goals. Some social movements (and the labor movement) stay within the traditional paradigm of mobilizing their forces and pressuring governments (at all levels) to legislate the changes that they demand. More social movements however have abandoned this paradigm for another based on the idea that *civil society* can better deal with the global corporations (and global capital) via direct action against offending corporations. Labor’s campaign to defend social security and raise minimum wages is an example of the first paradigm, Greenpeace’s campaign against toxics produced by the paper and pulp industry is a good example of the second. Those who defend the first paradigm have in mind a more active and powerful state than those who defend the second. My own view (shared by the Environmental Forum) is that social movements and political parties are (dialectically) essential for each other, and that one without the other is politically a losing strategy. But it’s not so hard to see why those who choose the civil society paradigm, which acts against big capital unmediated by lobbying, financing liberal-left candidates, and generally without going through all the motions of liberal democracy (which is a procedural

democracy after all), have chosen the direct route between the social and environmental demands of movements and the corporate villains.

There seem to me to be two major reasons for this (relatively) new kind of politics, which is more populist and anarchist than social democratic or socialist. The first is that the civil society folks often construct the social, ecological, economic or whatever problem they take up as a problem for *consumers*. Global capital after all asks to be evaluated in terms of how well consumers are satisfied. Thus to trope capital's concept of consumer as a passive buyer, and to reconstruct the consumer as a social activist, means that the movements are asking big capital to live up to their own promises (very much like traditional labor, civil rights and other movements demand that liberal governments live up to their slogans of liberty, equality under the law, and so on).

A second reason why more activists are deliberately "skipping" the struggle for new legislation may be that the nation-state in the age of global capital is fundamentally different than the state in the old "golden age" of capitalism. A composite argument may be constructed as follows: the capitalist state (which includes the elected government) must give away many or most of its former powers to the global corporations and banks and financial markets. Also, the line between domestic and foreign economic policy (it is said) has become increasingly blurry. If higher interest rates attract needed foreign capital because of balance of payments (current account) crises, then interest rates must remain high no matter the damage to the home economy: it is that important to let foreign capital take its money out of a country in the form of dollars or other hard currencies. Since economic expansion at home typically depends on new investment or expanded exports, governments need to do whatever they can to encourage new industry and exports and the development of foreign markets. And at all costs must intellectual property rights (monopoly profits) and technological superiority (technological rents) be defended against foreign capital and governments.

In short not only capitals compete in the global market, so do governments in their own way (an idea traditional economists have sneered at for some years.) Governments (or states) thus become very important in the age of global capital. *The reason is that their functions change.* First, central bankers (the bankers' banks) alone decide interest rate policy: this is no longer shared formally or informally with the elected branch. Second, no one even attempts to control the money supply (there are too many ways of creating liquidity hence of overcoming this type of monetary policy). Third, fiscal policy consists

of tax cutting (e.g., Dubya's tax cut) not ratcheting up government spending (except in times of severe crisis, as in South East Asia in 1997 when the IMF blinked and stamped government deficit spending "approved"). All major neoliberal governments are trying mightily to reduce the government budget in relation to GDP. Fourth, governments must do what they can get away with in the area of subsidizing exports (some kinds of subsidies are legal within WTO rules, some illegal, some still not precisely defined one way or the other) while leaving the home economy to a social Darwinian fate. (Japan leads all countries in resisting the neoliberal model for its home economy, as the dominant political coalition in Japan, and some other countries, depends on the support and votes of small business and small farmers.) In short, governments must reorganize themselves to expand exports (one of the measures of globalization is the world-wide increase in the ratio of exports to GDP), especially exports "earning" monopoly profits or technological rents, plus exports that live and die by brand-names thus "earning" what might be called consumer rent.

This globalist economic orientation however cannot work unless governments perform an increasingly important task. This is to strenuously develop science and technology policy and projects especially in information technology (IT) and related fields such as optics, and the life sciences. Otherwise capitals based in one country risk falling behind foreign capitals, and governments in laggard countries risk losing out to their competitors. Governments must supply export capitals the best possible inputs of laborpower, technology, business organization, materials, and so on. The export superpower, Japan, has followed this strategy with excellent results. Note that *all inputs into production* (in whole or part) are not produced capitalistically via market forces and the law of value, but are gifts of the earth (including those worked up in labs into mice with human ears and bacteria that eat industrial toxic waste), built environments and constructed space (both positive and negative), and human laborpower (produced mainly for sentimental reasons).

On the one hand, global capital has broken down or blurred borders between countries; on the other hand, because capital has done so, governments or states have to supply better or more numerous or more (indirectly) productive capital inputs, or make inputs available in less bureaucratic ways with less regulation, to help capitals compete effectively in the global marketplace (which of course also aids foreign capitals with investments in the country in question). I've called this kind of policy "social supply-side economics," a concept that hasn't quite caught on in leftist political economic circles.

The important point is that not only companies but also nation-states and governments have to become competitors in the age of global capital. I don't mean "competitors" in the old-fashioned sense of supplying slave labor, acquiring colonies or spheres of influence, conquering new territory and similar traditional imperialist projects. I do mean competitors in the ruthless game of establishing the most profitable opportunities for FDI that directly or indirectly aids the home economy and also of course for mobilizing their education, health, transport, energy, and other systems to expand exports.

There will be some readers who will say "nothing new here" and I partially agree. The French government went to lots of effort to ensure French contract construction companies were the best tunnel builders in the world and the Italians made hay in foreign markets after they harnessed high-flow water to produce electricity. Governments of many countries help make sure that traditional or famous products get all they need in the way of technical and budgetary help. And the Americans didn't develop fertilizers and other farm inputs to raise productivity to supply the home market but to break into and try to dominate more foreign markets.

What's new today, besides the global market, where both the prize and risk are greatest, is that almost all new products of significance are science-based; they derive from physics, biochemistry, biology and medical science, ecological science, and less well-known new sciences that wed physical and natural sciences. Someone has succeeded in making a working computer chip with chicken liver! Next it will be silicon soup. New products are always the dynamic factor in the capitalist accumulation and development, and also the main factor in the capitalist cycle. The North specializes in exports of new capital goods and services (the U.S. exports over one-half of its output of high-tech equipment); these exports build up the productive capacity of the 20 or so leading export-led industrialization countries, most in Asia. These countries supply the U.S. with a wide range of inexpensive wage goods (most with a high quality/price ratio). Cheap wage goods lower the value of laborpower in the U.S. hence (everything else being the same) increase real wages which in turn helps to keep a lid on money wages. We're looking at a global system of the production of relative surplus value, the basic foundation of capitalist production and accumulation. Science and scientists have become central to the workings of this system. The ratio of exports/GDP is increasing in almost every country in the world and FDI in the North as well as South is driving the development of the "new export economies." And driving FDI, as well as an increasing share of total exports, is science, which is the reason

why U.S. universities, which enjoy the greatest capacities to produce science, are being rapidly restructured, why they look increasingly like capitalist enterprises. So, too, are great Pentagon labs such as Sandia and Livermore contracting themselves out to science-obsessed capitals in various fields.

What's new today is the global reach of competition between big capitals from a dozen or so countries (unlike the old days of commonwealth preferences and the franc zone and the like) and the global production and circulation of surplus value (unlike colonial and neo-colonial systems whereby unfavorable terms of trade were forcibly imposed by the imperialist countries) and the global model of economic growth and development (unlike the nationalist models of development, for example, in the South between the 1930s and the 1960s/1970s). As discussed in earlier House Organs, there is developing one single model of capitalist accumulation (and crisis), a model that depends on science and scientists and their organization more every year.

In sum, not only companies but also states become economic competitors in the age of global capital, which also happens to be the age of science-based commodities. Once the underbrush of state regulation is cleared away, once the flow of money and real capital is liberalized, and once privatization functions to create national stock markets around the world — then each big capital is on its own. And to perform up to the expectations of financial markets, it needs to produce the very best (science-based) outputs which presupposes that the capital can draw upon the very best science-based or science-trained inputs that governments help produce or make available, including the recruitment, training, and discipline of scientific and technological labor power. Not only the U.S. and France but also India and Ireland and other countries are investing large sums into developing and improving software personnel and products. These and related investments are what make global capital tick; downturns in IT investment are what cause recessions; new IT hardware and software products that promise “increased efficiency” in both older manufactures and newer service industries are what cause economic booms (such as they are). (On another occasion I would like to discuss more systematically the inner connections between science, global capital, and short-and-medium term economic ups and downs, and the ways that governments try to both adjust and capitalize on these changes.)

Finally, since more economic activity is regional and global in scope, and since all big capitals are global capitals, investing and producing all over the world, changing the nature of world economy from a system of nationalist economies operating in a world market to

a single model of globalist development (*this* is the Leviathan the anti-globalist movement has discovered, and senses and feels), governments have the crucial tasks of supplying the right inputs. Also they find themselves dependent on the global performance of their own capitals (plus foreign capitals operating in their country) for everything from taxes to employment growth (at the high end of the labor market) to home consumption, indeed, the home economy as a whole, which tends to become disparate fragments of the totalizing global capitalist economy.

Ironically, as governments lose traditional powers, fiscal resources, administrative capacity, and legitimacy (at times to global capital itself), they have to take on new responsibilities to help those most to blame for this loss of power or freedom of action — the financial markets and global corporations themselves. Congress seems ever more interested in pleasing individual capitalist interests and less willing or able to make legislation for capital as a whole (framed as “society as a whole”). I believe that here lies the main explanation of the decisions made by some movement leaders and organizations to forego working for “progressive” candidates and lobbying them to make legislative change but rather (in the case of the anti-globalist movement) to adopt the two-fold strategy of attacking the WTO and other international capitalist institutions, on the one hand, and confronting the corporations and even capital markets directly — consumer boycotts or the threat of same being the main tactic used in the latter struggles to date (and massive mobilizations being the main line of attack against international capitalist agencies), on the other hand.

I think it’s important to stress that while the anti-globalist movement developed in some large part as a reaction to the “loss” of democracy entailed with the shift upstairs of power (to the WTO, etc.) with respect to social and economic issues hitherto decided by national elected bodies, the movement shows no signs of wanting to return to the good old days but rather not to stop until there is a genuine democratization of all institutions of society.

In Congress, for example, those with power have been bought and sold many times over and those who retain a sense of dignity as public servants and refuse the bribe are relatively powerless. Direct action against big capital (which requires periodic forays into the state bureaucracy) is today the chosen strategy of some successful movement organizations and struggles. (Local actions and local elected officials are another kettle of fish.) Yet at a certain point in the struggle against global capital (when I don’t know) we’ll need our own party (as the Environmental Forum insists). In the last analysis, a movement

without a party is a force without political direction. And a party without a movement is an empty shell, which as time passes becomes more brittle until the tide comes one day to break it up altogether. The German Greens may be a good example of the latter, as almost all members are also public officials! The anti-globalization movement in the U.S. (not necessarily elsewhere) may be a good example of the former, as different groups of militants seek to give the movement very different political directions all at the same time. This may be the best argument for the Labor Party, the Green Party (both wings), the Peace and Freedom Party, the Socialist Party, and other small left-of-center parties in the U.S. with more or less similar public values and socio-economic and political aims, to fold their small tents and patch together a larger one, backed by the many-faceted anti-globalization movement.
— April 15, 2001.

