

## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **James Richard O'Connor (20 April 1930 – 12 November 2017)**

My respect and loyalty for Jim is grounded in his political activism during his days in Cuba helping to stabilize the revolutionary government; his leaving relatively safe New York for the dangers awaiting his bus caravan to the South during the Freedom Rides; and his part in organizing the Faculty Against the War during the horrible days of Viet Nam. Through the eyes and devotion of his many graduate students, and those who looked to him for leadership in the world of academia and publications, my pride grew from becoming the chosen one who gained his trust to a partnership of more than thirty years. I am one of a large group of people who were challenged by Jim to step up and accomplish more than we thought we could do. I am very proud that I helped Jim get many of his ideas down on paper. Those of you who were influenced by those ideas are collateral beneficiaries of my love story. That story is now over. I will miss Jim for the rest of my life.

— **Barbara Laurence**

We mourn the sudden loss of a visionary and highly influential thinker, James Richard O'Connor, co-founder with Barbara Laurence of *Capitalism Nature Socialism* and the Center for Political Ecology. O'Connor was a rigorous, indefatigable intellectual and a committed Polányian Marxist activist. His thoughts have reached and shaped the minds of thousands of people, including mine, and I trust thousands more will benefit from his insights. He wrote on a wide range of subjects of great political consequence and of continuing currency and urgency. This includes explaining, in his early works, the relationship between capitalism and the state, as well as clarifying linkages between imperialism and economic processes. *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* is but one of the better known of his writings that emerged from this line of research. It remains a classical piece, and one that should be read even more widely and translated into more languages than it is. O'Connor also contributed to great theoretical strides for all of us in this journal through his latter endeavours on the ecological crisis, especially in the late 1980s. This, to me, is the germinal intellectual turning point that oversaw, with the establishment of this journal, the confluence of left-leaning ecological thought with a diversity of leftist anti-capitalist approaches, including variants of Marxism and feminism. The creative and illuminating outcomes of this confluence and, to a large extent, interweaving of disparate currents are among the lasting legacies bequeathed to us through O'Connor's efforts. The development of his Second Contradiction thesis is but one shining example of what came about through such confluence of approaches, and it continues to be an inspiration (or source of debate) for many. O'Connor's formidable intellect was complemented by political commitment. This was reflected in, among other actions, his involvement in local environmental struggles. Part of this kind of activity was consumed by writing pamphlets accessible to a wide readership, including for the Students for Democratic Society's educational campaigns in the 1970s and for various environmental and social policy activist groups in the 1980s. His political commitment was also represented by his networking and organising with intellectuals across continents to

bring to the attention of North American audiences news, perspectives, and analyses of social and environmental struggles in different parts of the world. He facilitated such international information flow by creating a network of journals from Catalunya/Spain, Italy, and France, based on reciprocity and free manuscript exchange. This is one major way in which this journal came to have international breadth and reach, as well as benefit from the input of thinkers from many countries. James O'Connor struggled in an inimical intellectual world to keep Marxist perspectives alive while critically reconstructing them to overcome their historical inadequacies, especially with respect to ecology. In all this he did not mince words, maintained a clear political line, yet kept this journal from falling under any particular tendency, including his own. Farewell, Comrade O'Connor, intrepid navigator of still very rough political waters, and infinite thanks for your intellectual guidance and inheritance.

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