

# **Green Party Power Reader**

**Edited by Andrew Stewart**

# Green Power Project Reader

## *A Selection of Classic Texts Regarding Green Issues*

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### *Editorial Introduction*

Welcome to the Green Power Project Reader. The GPP is not an official Green Party US group. Rather, it is a place where Greens can discuss building Green Party Power that is independent of the duopoly, rooted in working class and oppressed communities, anti-racist, anti-imperialist and lives by Green principles and values. This compilation is the first of what we hope shall be many anthologies, collections, and policy statements that stimulate both ideological development and, more importantly, practical base building projects for Greens nationwide. Our goal is to grow the Green Party into a mass-membership eco-socialist political force that can make contribute to and define political change in America at all levels of government **and** in the realm of direct action struggles.

At the foundation of creating a more effective Green Party is recognizing that we are an opposition party that challenges the political establishment. This requires the party to be independent of the two establishment parties, the Democrats and Republicans, which are funded by Wall Street, militarism and other big business interests.

We began this project in the fall of 2016 with a call to emphasize the

independence of the Green Party, especially from the Democratic Party and putting forth idea for building political power for the Green Party. By 2017, more than 500 Greens had signed on to the Green Party Power Project. To understand our goals and how we hope to achieve them see “Building Green Power for 2018 and Beyond.”

Like the popular social movements of our times we believe the United States needs radical transformation, not reform. The United States suffers from numerous emergency situations to which the current power structure is unwilling or unable to respond.

These texts have been selected based on how immediately relevant they are to contemporary American political struggles. Mass-incarceration and the prison-industrial complex, given thorough analysis by Angela Davis in *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, is the human right struggle of our epoch. It must be understood as a central location of struggle. It is impossible to subsume the matter under the heading of simplistic ecology or relegate it to a lower position on a roster of priorities. Rather, it is the true liberation politics of genuine socialism that can inform the struggle for livable ecology.

We follow Davis with a selection of texts by early Greens Murray Bookchin, Janet Biehl, and Peter Staudenmaier dealing with topics that we find to be prominent in the headlines today. It is our hope that this strand of the Green tradition, a socialist praxis rooted in values of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and harkening back to the emancipatory ideals of the Haitian Revolution, might take root in our wider American Green Party and help build our base into a viable force for taking power.

*For it is not true that the work of man is finished that we have nothing  
more to do  
but be parasites in the world  
that all we need do now is keep in step with the world. The work of man is  
only just beginning  
and it remains to conquer  
all the violence entrenched  
in the recesses of his passion.  
No race holds the monopoly of beauty, of intelligence, of strength and  
there is a place for all at the rendezvous of victory.  
-Aime Cesaire*

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**Angela Y. Davis**

**Are Prisons Obsolete?**

**2003**

# **Chapter 1. Introduction: Prison Reform or Prison Abolition?**

In most parts of the world, it is taken for granted that whoever is convicted of a serious crime will be sent to prison. In some countries-including the United States-where capital punishment has not yet been abolished, a small but significant number of people are sentenced to death for what are considered especially grave crimes. Many people are familiar with the campaign to abolish the death penalty. In fact, it has already been abolished in most countries. Even the staunchest advocates of capital punishment acknowledge the fact that the death penalty faces serious challenges. Few people find life without the death penalty difficult to imagine.

On the other hand, the prison is considered an inevitable and permanent feature of our social lives. Most people are quite surprised to hear that the prison abolition movement also has a long history-one that dates back to the historical appearance of the prison as the main form of punishment. In fact, the most natural reaction is to assume that prison activists-even those who consciously refer to themselves as "anti-prison activists"- are simply trying to ameliorate prison conditions or perhaps to reform the prison in more fundamental ways. In most circles prison abolition is simply unthinkable and implausible. Prison abolitionists are dismissed as utopians and idealists whose ideas are at best unrealistic and impracticable, and, at worst, mystifying and foolish. This is a measure of how difficult it is to envision a social order that does not rely on the threat of sequestering people in dreadful places designed to separate them from their communities and families. The prison is considered so "natural" that it is extremely hard to imagine life without it.

It is my hope that this book will encourage readers to question their own assumptions about the prison. Many people have already reached the conclusion that the death penalty is an outmoded form of punishment that violates basic principles of human rights. It is time, I believe, to encourage similar conversations about the prison. During my own career as an anti-prison activist I have seen the population of u.s. prisons increase with such rapidity that many people in black, Latino, and Native American communities now have a far greater chance of going to prison than of getting a decent education. When many young people decide to join the military service in order to avoid the

inevitability of a stint in prison, it should cause us to wonder whether we should not try to introduce better alternatives.

The question of whether the prison has become an obsolete institution has become especially urgent in light of the fact that more than two million people (out of a world total of nine million! now inhabit U.S. prisons, jails, youth facilities, and immigrant detention centers. Are we willing to relegate ever larger numbers of people from racially oppressed communities to an isolated existence marked by authoritarian regimes, violence, disease, and technologies of seclusion that produce severe mental instability? According to a recent study, there may be twice as many people suffering from mental illness who are in jails and prisons than there are in all psychiatric hospitals in the United States combined.

When I first became involved in antiprison activism during the late 1960s, I was astounded to learn that there were then close to two hundred thousand people in prison. Had anyone told me that in three decades ten times as many people would be locked away in cages, I would have been absolutely incredulous. I imagine that I would have responded something like this: IIAs racist and undemocratic as this country may be [remember, during that period, the demands of the Civil Rights movement had not yet been consolidated t I do not believe that the U.S. government will be able to lock up so many people without producing powerful public resistance. No, this will never happen, not unless this country plunges into fascism." That might have been my reaction thirty years ago. The reality is that we were called upon to inaugurate the twenty-first century by accepting the fact that two million group larger than the population of many countries-are living their lives in places like Sing Sing, Leavenworth, San Quentin, and Alderson Federal Reformatory for Women. The gravity of these numbers becomes even more apparent when we consider that the U.S. population in general is less than five percent of the world's total, whereas more than twenty percent of the world's combined prison population can be claimed by the United States. In Elliott Currie's words, "[t]he prison has become a looming presence in our society to an extent unparalleled in our history or that of any other industrial democracy. Short of major wars, mass incarceration has been the most thoroughly implemented government social program of our time.

In thinking about the possible obsolescence of the prison, we should ask how it is that so many people could end up in prison without major debates regarding the efficacy of incarceration. When the drive to produce more prisons and incarcerate ever larger numbers of people occurred in the 1980s during what is known as the Reagan era, politicians argued that "tough on crime" stances-including certain imprisonment and longer sentences-would keep communities

free of crime. However, the of mass incarceration during that period had little or no effect on official crime rates. In fact, the most obvious pattern was that larger prison populations led not to safer communities, but, rather, to even larger prison populations. Each new prison spawned yet another new prison. And as the U.S. prison system expanded, so did corporate involvement in construction, provision of goods and services, and use of labor. Because of the extent to which prison building and operation began to attract vast amounts of capital-from the construction industry to food and health care provision-in a way that recalled the emergence of the military industrial complex, we began to refer to a "prison industrial complex". Consider the case of California, whose landscape has been thoroughly prisonized over the last twenty years. The first state prison in California was San Quentin, which opened in 1852.<sup>4</sup> Folsom, another well-known institution, opened in 1880. Between 1880 and 1933, when a facility for women was opened in Tehachapi, there was not a single new prison constructed. In 1952, the California Institution for Women opened and Tehachapi became a new prison for men. In all, between 1852 and 1955, nine prisons were constructed in California. Between 1962 and 1965, two camps were established, along with the California Rehabilitation Center. Not a single prison opened during the second half of the sixties, nor during the entire decade of the 1970s.

However, a massive project of prison construction was initiated during the 1980s-that is, during the years of the Reagan presidency. Nine prisons, including the Northern California Facility for Women, were opened between 1984 and 1989. Recall that it had taken more than a hundred years to build the first nine California prisons. In less than a single decade, the number of California prisons doubled. And during the 1990s, twelve new prisons were opened, including two more for women. In 1995 the Valley State Prison for Women was opened. According to its mission statement, it "provides 1,980 women's beds for California's overcrowded prison system." However, in 2002, there were 3,570 prisoners and the other two women's prisons were equally overcrowded. There are now thirty-three prisons, thirty-eight camps, sixteen community correctional facilities, and five tiny prisoner mother facilities in California. In 2002 there were 157,979 people incarcerated in these institutions, including approximately twenty thousand people whom the state holds for immigration violations. The racial composition of this prison population is revealing. Latinos, who are now in the majority, account for 35.2 percent African-Americans 30 percent; and white prisoners 29.2 percent.<sup>6</sup> There are now more women in prison in the state of California than there were in the entire country in the early 1970s. In fact, California can claim the largest women's prison in the world, Valley State Prison for Women, with its more than thirty-five hundred inhabitants. Located in the



same town as Valley State and literally across the street is the second-largest women's prison in the world Central California Women's Facility-whose population in 2002 also hovered around thirty-five hundred. If you look at a map of California depicting the location of the thirty-three state prisons, you will see that the only area that is not heavily populated by prisons is the area north of Sacramento. Still, there are two prisons in the town of Susanville, and Pelican Bay, one of the state's notorious super-maximum security prisons, is near the Oregon border. California artist Sandow Birlle was inspired by the colonizing of the landscape by prisons to produce a series of thirty-three landscape paintings of these institutions and their surroundings. They are collected in his book *Incarcerated: Visions of California in the Twenty-first Century*.

I present this brief narrative of the prisonization of the California landscape in order to allow readers to grasp how easy it was to produce a massive system of incarceration with the implicit consent of the public. Why were people so quick to assume that locking away an increasingly large proportion of the U.S. population would help those who live in the free world feel safer and more secure? This question can be formulated in more general terms. Why do prisons tend to make people think that their own rights and liberties are more secure than they would be if prisons did not exist? What other reasons might there have been for the rapidity with which prisons began to colonize the California landscape?

Geographer Ruth Gilmore describes the expansion of prisons in California as "a geographical solution to socia-economic problems."<sup>9</sup> Her analysis of the prison industrial complex in California describes these developments as a response to surpluses of capital, land, labor, and state capacity. California's new prisons are sited on devalued rural land, most, in fact on formerly irrigated agricultural acres . . . The State bought land sold by big landowners. And the State assured the small, depressed towns now shadowed by prisons that the new, recession-proof, non-polluting industry would jump-start local redevelopment. But, as Gilmore points out, neither the jobs nor the more general economic revitalization promised by prisons has occurred. At the same time, this promise of progress helps us to understand why the legislature and California's voters decided to approve the construction of all these new prisons. People wanted to believe that prisons would not only reduce crime, they would also provide jobs and stimulate economic development in out-of-the-way places.

At bottom, there is one fundamental question: Why do we take prison for granted? While a relatively small proportion of the population has ever directly experienced life inside prison, this is not true in poor black and Latino communities. Neither is it true for Native Americans or for certain Asian-American communities. But even among those people who must regrettably

accept prison sentences-especially young people-as an ordinary dimension of community life, it is hardly acceptable to engage in serious public discussions about prison life or radical alternatives to prison. It is as if prison were an inevitable fact of life, like birth and death.

On the whole, people tend to take prisons for granted. It is difficult to imagine life without them. At the same time, there is reluctance to face the realities hidden within them, a fear of thinking about what happens inside them. Thus, the prison is present in our lives and, at the same time, it is absent from our lives. To think about this simultaneous presence and absence is to begin to acknowledge the part played by ideology in shaping the way we interact with our social surroundings. We take prisons for granted but are often afraid to face the realities they produce. After all, no one wants to go to prison. Because it would be too agonizing to cope with the possibility that anyone, including ourselves, could become a prisoner, we tend to think of the prison as disconnected from our own lives. This is even true for some of us, women as well as men, who have already experienced imprisonment. We thus think about imprisonment as a fate reserved for others, a fate reserved for the "evildoers," to use a term recently popularized by George W. Bush. Because of the persistent power of racism, "criminals" and "evildoers" are, in the collective imagination, fantasized as people of color. The prison therefore functions ideologically as an abstract site into which undesirables are deposited, relieving us of the responsibility of thinking about the real issues afflicting those communities from which prisoners are drawn in such disproportionate numbers. This is the ideological work that the prison performs-it relieves us of the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society, especially those produced by racism and, increasingly, global capitalism. What, for example, do we miss if we try to think about prison expansion without addressing larger economic developments? We live in an era of migrating corporations. In order to escape organized labor in this country-and thus higher wages, benefits, and so on-corporations roam the world in search of nations providing cheap labor pools. This corporate migration thus leaves entire communities in shambles. Huge numbers of people lose jobs and prospects for future jobs. Because the economic base of these communities is destroyed, education and other surviving social services are profoundly affected. This process turns the men, women, and children who live in these damaged communities into perfect candidates for prison. In the meantime, corporations associated with the punishment industry reap profits from the system that manages prisoners and acquire a clear stake in the continued growth of prison populations. Put simply, this is the era of the prison industrial complex. The prison has become a black hole into which the detritus of contemporary

capitalism is deposited. Mass imprisonment generates profits as it devours social wealth, and thus it tends to reproduce the very conditions that lead people to prison. There are thus real and often quite complicated connections between the de-industrialization of the economy—a process that reached its peak during the 1980s—and the rise of mass imprisonment, which also began to spiral during the Reagan-Bush era. However, the demand for more prisons was represented to the public in simplistic terms. More prisons were needed because there was more crime. Yet many scholars have demonstrated that by the time the prison construction boom began, official crime statistics were already falling. Moreover, draconian drug laws were being enacted, and "three-strikes" provisions were on the agendas of many states.

In order to understand the proliferation of prisons and the rise of the prison industrial complex, it might be helpful to think further about the reasons we so easily take prisons for granted. In California, as we have seen, almost two-thirds of existing prisons were opened during the eighties and nineties. Why was there no great outcry? Why was there such an obvious level of comfort with the prospect of many new prisons? A partial answer to this question has to do with the way we consume media images of the prison, even as the realities of imprisonment are hidden from almost all who have not had the misfortune of doing time. Cultural critic Gina Dent has pointed out that our sense of familiarity with the prison comes in part from representations of prisons in film and other visual media. The history of visibility linked to the prison is also a main reinforcement of the institution of the prison as a naturalized part of our social landscape. The history of film has always been wedded to the representation of incarceration. Thomas Edison's first films (dating back to the 1901 reenactment presented as newsreel, *Execution of Czolgosz* with included footage of the darkest recesses of the prison). Thus, the prison is wedded to our experience of visibility, creating also a sense of its permanence as an institution. We also have a constant flow of Hollywood prison films. Some of the most well known prison films are: *I Live*, *Papillon*, *Cool Hand Luke*, and *Escape from Alcatraz*. It also bears mentioning that television programming has become increasingly saturated with images of prisons. Some recent documentaries include the A&E series *The Big House*, which consists of programs on San Quentin, Alcatraz, Leavenworth, and Alderson Federal Reformatory for Women. The long-running HBO program *Oz* has managed to persuade many viewers that they know exactly what goes on in male maximum-security prisons. But even those who do not consciously decide to watch a documentary or dramatic program on the topic of prisons inevitably consume prison images, whether they choose to or not, by the simple fact of watching movies or TV. It is virtually impossible to avoid consuming

images of prison. In 1997, I was myself quite astonished to find, when I interviewed women in three Cuban prisons, that most of them narrated their prior awareness of prisons-that is, before they were actually incarcerated-as coming from the many Hollywood films they had seen. The prison is one of the most important features of our image environment. This has caused us to take the existence of prisons for granted. The prison has become a key ingredient of our common sense. It is there, all around us. We do not question whether it should exist. It has become so much a part of our lives that it requires a great feat of the imagination to envision life beyond the prison.

This is not to dismiss the profound changes that have occurred in the way public conversations about the prison are conducted. Ten years ago, even as the drive to expand the prison system reached its zenith, there were very few critiques of this process available to the public. In fact I most people had no idea about the immensity of this expansion. This was the period during which internal changes-in part through the application of new technologies-led the U.S. prison system in a much more repressive direction. Whereas previous classifications had been confined to low, medium, and maximum security, a new category was invented-that of the super-maximum security prison, or the supermax. The turn toward increased repression in a prison system, distinguished from the beginning of its history by its repressive regimes, caused some journalists public intellectuals and progressive agencies to oppose the growing reliance on prisons to solve social problems that are actually exacerbated by mass incarceration.

In 1990, the Washington-based Sentencing Project published a study of U.S. populations in prison and jail, and on parole and probation, which concluded that one in four black men between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine were among these numbers.<sup>12</sup> Five years later, a second study revealed that this percentage had soared to almost one in three (32.2 percent). Moreover, more than one in ten Latino men in this same age range were in jail or prison, or on probation or parole. The second study also revealed that the group experiencing the greatest increase was black women, whose imprisonment increased by seventy-eight percent.<sup>13</sup> According to the Bureau of Tustice Statistics, African-Americans as a whole now represent the majority of state and federal prisoners, with a total of 803,400 black inmates-118,600 more than the total number of white inmates.<sup>14</sup> During the late 1990s major articles on prison expansion appeared in Newsweek, Harper's, Emerge, and Atlantic Monthly. Even Colin Powell raised the question of the rising number of black men in prison when he spoke at the 2000 Republican National Convention, which declared George W. Bush its presidential candidate.

Over the last few years the previous absence of critical positions on prison

expansion in the political arena has given way to proposals for prison reform. While public discourse has become more flexible, the emphasis is almost inevitably on generating the changes that will produce a better prison system. In other words, the increased flexibility that has allowed for critical discussion of the problems associated with the expansion of prisons also restricts this discussion to the question of prison reform.

As important as some reforms may be—the elimination of sexual abuse and medical neglect in women's prison, for example—frameworks that rely exclusively on reforms help to produce the stultifying idea that nothing lies beyond the prison. Debates about strategies of decarceration, which should be the focal point of our conversations on the prison crisis, tend to be marginalized when reform takes the center stage. The most immediate question today is how to prevent the further expansion of prison populations and how to bring as many imprisoned women and men as possible back into what prisoners call the free world." How can we move to decriminalize drug use and the trade in sexual services? How can we take seriously strategies of restorative rather than exclusively punitive justice? Effective alternatives involve both transformation of the techniques for addressing "crime" and of the social and economic conditions that track so many children from poor communities, and especially communities of color, into the juvenile system and then on to prison. The most difficult and urgent challenge today is that of creatively exploring new terrains of justice, where the prison no longer serves as our major anchor.

## **Chapter 2. Slavery, Civil Rights, and Abolitionist Perspectives Toward Prison**

If Advocates of incarceration.. . hoped that the penitentiary would rehabilitate its inmates. Whereas philosophers perceived a ceaseless state of war between chattel slaves and their masters, criminologists hoped to negotiate a peace treaty of sorts within the prison walls. Yet herein lurked a paradox: if the penitentiary's internal regime resembled that of the plantation so closely that the two were often loosely equated, how could the prison possibly function to rehabilitate criminals?" -Adam Jay Hirsch

The prison is not the only institution that has posed complex challenges to the people who have lived with it and have become so inured to its presence that they could not conceive of society without it. Within the history of the United States the system of slavery immediately comes to mind. Although as early as the American Revolution antislavery advocates promoted the elimination of African bondage, it took almost a century to achieve the abolition of the "peculiar institution." White antislavery abolitionists such as John Brown and William Lloyd Garrison were represented in the dominant media of the period as extremists and fanatics. When Frederick Douglass embarked on his career as an antislavery orator, white people-even those who were passionate abolitionists-refused to believe that a black slave could display such intelligence. The belief in the permanence of slavery was so widespread that even white abolitionists found it difficult to imagine black people as equals.

It took a long and violent civil war in order to legally disestablish the "peculiar institution. II Even though the Thirteenth Amendment to the u.s. Constitution outlawed involuntary servitude, white supremacy continued to be embraced by vast numbers of people and became deeply inscribed in new institutions. One of these post-slavery institutions was lynching, which was widely accepted for many decades thereafter. Thanks to the work of figures such as Ida B. Wells, an antilynching campaign was gradually legitimized during the first half of the twentieth century. The NAACP, an organization that continues to conduct legal challenges against discrimination, evolved from these efforts to abolish lynching.

Segregation ruled the South until it was outlawed a century after the abolition of slavery. Many people who lived under Jim Crow could not envision a legal

system defined by racial equality. When the governor of Alabama personally attempted to prevent Arthurine Lucy from enrolling in the University of Alabama, his stance represented the inability to imagine black and white people ever peaceably living and studying together. "Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" are the most well known words of this politician, who was forced to repudiate them some years later when segregation had proved far more vulnerable than he could have imagined.

Although government, corporations, and the dominant media try to represent racism as an unfortunate aberration of the past that has been relegated to the graveyard of u.s. history, it continues to profoundly influence contemporary structures, attitudes, and behaviors. Nevertheless, anyone who would dare to call for the reintroduction of slavery, the organization of lynch mobs, or the reestablishment of legal segregation would be summarily dismissed. But it should be remembered that the ancestors of many of today's most ardent liberals could not have imagined life without slavery, life without lynching, or life without segregation. The 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerances held in Durban, South Africa, divulged the immensity of the global task of eliminating racism. There may be many disagreements regarding what counts as racism and what are the most effective strategies to eliminate it. However, especially with the downfall of the apartheid regime in South Africa, there is a global consensus that racism should not define the future of the planet.

I have referred to these historical examples of efforts to dismantle racist institutions because they have considerable relevance to our discussion of prisons and prison abolition. It is true that slavery, lynching, and segregation acquired such a stalwart ideological quality that many, if not most, could not foresee their decline and collapse. Slavery, lynching, and segregation are certainly compelling examples of social institutions that, like the prison, were once considered to be as everlasting as the sun. Yet, in the case of all three examples, we can point to movements that assumed the radical stance of announcing the obsolescence of these institutions. It may help us gain perspective on the prison if we try to imagine how strange and discomforting the debates about the obsolescence of slavery must have been to those who took the "peculiar institution" for granted-and especially to those who reaped direct benefits from this dreadful system of racist exploitation. And even though there was widespread resistance among black slaves, there were even some among them who assumed that they and their progeny would be always subjected to the tyranny of slavery.

I have introduced three abolition campaigns that were eventually more or less

successful to make the point that social circumstances transform and popular attitudes shift, in part in response to organized social movements. But I have also evoked these historical campaigns because they all targeted some expression of racism. U. S. chattel slavery was a system of forced labor that relied on racist ideas and beliefs to justify the relegation of people of African descent to the legal status of property. Lynching was an extralegal institution that surrendered thousands of African-American lives to the violence of ruthless racist mobs. Under segregation, black people were legally declared second-class citizens, for whom voting, job, education, and housing rights were drastically curtailed, if they were available at all.

What is the relationship between these historical expressions of racism and the role of the prison system today? Exploring such connections may offer us a different perspective on the current state of the punishment industry. If we are already persuaded that racism should not be allowed to define the planet's future and if we can successfully argue that prisons are racist institutions, this may lead us to take seriously the prospect of declaring prisons obsolete.

For the moment I am concentrating on the history of antiblack racism in order to make the point that the prison reveals congealed forms of antiblack racism that operate in clandestine ways. In other words, they are rarely recognized as racist. But there are other racialized histories that have affected the development of the U. S. punishment system as well—the histories of Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian-Americans. These racisms also congeal and combine in the prison. Because we are so accustomed to talking about race in terms of black and white, we often fail to recognize and contest expressions of racism that target people of color who are not black. Consider the mass arrests and detention of people of Middle Eastern, South Asian, or Muslim heritage in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center.

This leads us to two important questions: Are prisons racist institutions? Is racism so deeply entrenched in the institution of the prison that it is not possible to eliminate one without eliminating the other? These are questions that we should keep in mind as we examine the historical links between U.S. slavery and the early penitentiary system. The penitentiary as an institution that simultaneously punished and rehabilitated its inhabitants was a new system of punishment that first made its appearance in the United States around the time of the American Revolution. This new system was based on the replacement of capital and corporal punishment by incarceration.

Imprisonment itself was new neither to the United States nor to the world, but until the creation of this new institution called the penitentiary, it served as a prelude to punishment. People who were to be subjected to some form of



corporal punishment were detained in prison until the execution of the punishment. With the penitentiary, incarceration became the punishment itself. As is indicated in the designation "penitentiary," imprisonment was regarded as rehabilitative and the penitentiary prison was devised to provide convicts with the conditions for reflecting on their crimes and, through penitence, for reshaping their habits and even their souls. Although some antislavery advocates spoke out against this new system of punishment during the revolutionary period, the penitentiary was generally viewed as a progressive reform, linked to the larger campaign for the rights of citizens.

In many ways, the penitentiary was a vast improvement over the many forms of capital and corporal punishment inherited from the English. However, the contention that prisoners would refashion themselves if only given the opportunity to reflect and labor in solitude and silence disregarded the impact of authoritarian regimes of living and work. Indeed, there were significant similarities between slavery and the penitentiary prison. Historian Adam Jay Hirsch has pointed out:

One may perceive in the penitentiary many reflections of chattel slavery as it was practiced in the South. Both institutions subordinated their subjects to the will of others. Like Southern slaves, prison inmates followed a daily routine specified by their superiors. Both institutions reduced their subjects to dependence on others for the supply of basic human services such as food and shelter. Both isolated their subjects from the general population by confining them to a fixed habitat. And both frequently coerced their subjects to work, often for longer hours and for less compensation than free laborers.

As Hirsch has observed, both institutions deployed similar forms of punishment, and prison regulations were, in fact, very similar to the Slave Codes-the laws that deprived enslaved human beings of virtually all rights. Moreover, both prisoners and slaves were considered to have pronounced proclivities to crime. People sentenced to the penitentiary in the North, white and black alike, were popularly represented as having a strong kinship to enslaved black people.

The ideologies governing slavery and those governing punishment were profoundly linked during the earliest period of U.S. history. While free people could be legally sentenced to punishment by hard labor, such a sentence would in no way change the conditions of existence already experienced by slaves. Thus, as Hirsch further reveals, Thomas Jefferson, who supported the sentencing of convicted people to hard labor on road and water projects, also pointed out that he would exclude slaves from this sort of punishment. Since slaves already hard labor, sentencing them to penal labor would not mark a difference in their

condition. Jefferson suggested banishment to other countries instead.

Particularly in the United States, race has always played a central role in constructing presumptions of criminality. After the abolition of slavery, former slave states passed new legislation revising the Slave Codes in order to regulate the behavior of free blacks in ways similar to those that had existed during slavery. The new Black Codes proscribed a range of actions—such as vagrancy, absence from work, breach of job contracts, the possession of firearms, and insulting gestures or acts—that were criminalized only when the person charged was black. With the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, slavery and involuntary servitude were putatively abolished. However, there was a significant exception. In the wording of the amendment, slavery and involuntary servitude were abolished "except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted."<sup>19</sup> According to the Black Codes, there were crimes defined by state law for which only black people could be "duly convicted." Thus, former slaves, who had recently been extricated from a condition of hard labor for life, could be legally sentenced to penal servitude.

In the immediate aftermath of slavery, the southern states hastened to develop a criminal justice system that could legally restrict the possibilities of freedom for newly released slaves. Black people became the prime targets of a developing convict lease system, referred to by many as a reincarnation of slavery. The Mississippi Black Codes, for example, declared vagrant anyone who was guilty of theft, had run away [from a job, apparently], was drunk, was wanton in conduct or speech, had neglected job or family, handled money carelessly, and . . . all other idle and disorderly persons.<sup>20</sup> Thus, vagrancy was coded as a black crime, one punishable by incarceration and forced labor, sometimes on the very plantations that previously had thrived on slave labor.

Mary Ellen Curtin's study of Alabama prisoners during the decades following emancipation discloses that before the four hundred thousand black slaves in that state were set free, ninety-nine percent of prisoners in Alabama's penitentiaries were white. As a consequence of the shifts provoked by the institution of the Black Codes, within a short period of time, the overwhelming majority of Alabama's convicts were black.<sup>21</sup> She further observes:

Although the vast majority of Alabama's antebellum population were white, the popular perception was that the South's true criminals were its black slaves. In the 1870s the growing number of black prisoners in the South further buttressed the belief that African Americans were inherently criminal and, in particular, prone to larceny.

In 1883, Frederick Douglass had already written about the South's tendency to "impute crime to color."<sup>22</sup> When a particularly egregious crime was committed,

he noted, not only was guilt frequently assigned to a black person regardless of the perpetrator's race, but white men sometimes sought to escape punishment by disguising themselves as black. Douglass would later recount one such incident that took place in Granger County, Tennessee, in which a man who appeared to be black was shot while committing a robbery. The wounded man, however, was discovered to be a respectable white citizen who had colored his face black. The above example from Douglass demonstrates how whiteness, in the words of legal scholar Cheryl Harris, operates as property.<sup>23</sup> According to Harris, the fact that white identity was possessed as property meant that rights, liber- and self-identity were affirmed for white people, while being denied to black people. The latter's only access to whiteness was through "passing." Douglass's comments indicate how this property interest in whiteness was easily reversed in schemes to deny black people their rights to due process. Interestingly, cases similar to the one Douglass discusses above emerged in the United States during the 1990s: in Boston, Charles Stuart murdered his pregnant wife and attempted to blame an anonymous black man, and in Union, South Carolina, Susan Smith killed her children and claimed they had been abducted by a black carjacker. The racialization of crime-the tendency to "impute crime to color," to use Frederick Douglass's words-did not wither away as the country became increasingly removed from slavery. Proof that crime continues to be imputed to color resides in the many evocations of "racial profiling" in our time. That it is possible to be targeted by the police for no other reason than the color of one's skin is not mere speculation. Police departments in major urban areas have admitted the existence of formal procedures designed to maximize the numbers of African-Americans and Latinos arrested even in the absence of probable cause. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, vast numbers of people of Middle Eastern and South Asian heritage were arrested and detained by the police agency known as Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS). The INS is the federal agency that claims the largest number of armed agents, even more than the FBI. During the post-slavery era, as black people were integrated into southern penal systems--and as the penal system became a system of penal servitude-the punishments associated with slavery became further incorporated into the penal system. "Whipping," as Matthew Mancini has observed, "was the preeminent form of punishment under slavery and the lash, along with the chain, became the very emblem of servitude for slaves and prisoners. As indicated above, black people were imprisoned under the laws assembled in the various Black Codes of the southern states, which, because they were re-articulations of the Slave Codes, tended to racialize penalty and link it closely with previous regimes of slavery. The expansion of the convict lease system and the county chain gang meant that

the antebellum criminal justice system, which focused far more intensely on black people than on whites, defined southern criminal justice largely as a means of controlling black labor. According to Mancini: Among the multifarious debilitating legacies of slavery was the conviction that blacks could only labor in a certain way-the way experience had shown them to have labored in the past: in gangs, subjected to constant supervision, and under the discipline of the lash. Since these were the requisites of slavery, and since slaves were blacks, Southern whites almost universally concluded that blacks could not work unless subjected to such intense surveillance and discipline.

Scholars who have studied the convict lease system point out that in many important respects, convict leasing was far worse than slavery, an insight that can be gleaned from titles such as *One Dies, Get Another* (by Mancini), *Worse Than Slavery* (David Oshinsky's work on Parchman Prison),<sup>27</sup> and *Twice the Work of Free Labor* (Alex Lichtenstein's examination of the political economy of convict leasing).<sup>28</sup> Slave owners may have been concerned for the survival of individual slaves, who, after all, represented significant investments. Convicts, on the other hand, were leased not as individuals, but as a group, and they could be worked literally to death without affecting the profitability of a convict crew.

According to descriptions by contemporaries, the conditions under which leased convicts and county chain gangs lived were far worse than those under which black people had lived as slaves. The records of Mississippi plantations in the Yazoo Delta during the late 1880s indicate that

the prisoners ate and slept on bare ground, without blankets or mattresses, and often without clothes. They were punished for "slow hoeing" (ten lashes), "sorry planting" (five lashes), and "being light with cotton" (five lashes). Some who attempted to escape were whipped "till the blood ran down their legs"; others had a metal spur riveted to their feet. Convicts dropped from exhaustion, pneumonia, malaria, frostbite, consumption, sunstroke, dysentery, gunshot wounds, and poisoning (the constant rubbing of chains and leg irons against bare flesh).

The appalling treatment to which convicts were subjected under the lease system recapitulated and further extended the regimes of slavery. If, as Adam Tay Hirsch contends, the early incarnations of the U.S. penitentiary in the North tended to mirror the institution of slavery in many important respects, the post-Civil War evolution of the punishment system was in very literal ways the continuation of a slave system, which was no longer legal in the "free" world. The population of convicts, whose racial composition was dramatically transformed by the abolition of slavery, could be subjected to such intense exploitation and to such horrendous modes of punishment precisely because they

continued to be perceived as slaves.

Historian Mary Ann Curtin has observed that many scholars who have acknowledged the deeply entrenched racism of the post-Civil War structures of punishment in the South have failed to identify the extent to which racism colored commonsense understandings of the circumstances surrounding the wholesale criminalization of black communities. Even antiracist historians, she contends, do not go far enough in examining the ways in which black people were made into criminals. They point out-and this, she says, is indeed partially true-that in the aftermath of emancipation, large numbers of black people were forced by their new social situation to steal in order to survive. It was the transformation of petty thievery into a felony that relegated substantial numbers of black people to the "involuntary servitude" legalized by the Thirteenth Amendment. What Curtin suggests is that these charges of theft were frequently fabricated outright. They "also served as subterfuge for political revenge. After emancipation the courtroom became an ideal place to exact racial retribution". In this sense, the work of the criminal justice system was intimately related to the extralegal work of lynching. Alex Lichtenstein, whose study focuses on the role of the convict lease system in forging a new labor force for the South, identifies the lease system, along with the new Jim Crow laws, as the central institution in the development of a racial state.

New South capitalists in Georgia and elsewhere were able to use the state to recruit and discipline a convict labor force, and thus were able to develop their states' resources without creating a wage labor force, and without undermining planters' control of black labor. In fact, quite the opposite: the penal system could be used as a powerful sanction against rural blacks who challenged the racial order upon which agricultural labor control relied.

Lichtenstein discloses, for example, the extent to which the building of Georgia railroads during the nineteenth century relied on black convict labor. He further reminds us that as we drive down the most famous street in Atlanta Peachtree Street-we ride on the backs of convicts: "The renowned Peachtree Street and the rest of Atlanta's well paved roads and modern transportation infrastructure, which helped cement its place as the commercial hub of the modern South, were originally laid by convicts".

Lichtenstein's major argument is that the convict lease was not an irrational regression; it was not primarily a throwback to pre-capitalist modes of production. Rather, it was a most efficient and most rational deployment of racist strategies to swiftly achieve industrialization in the South. In this sense, he argues, "convict labor was in many ways in the vanguard of the region's first tentative, ambivalent, steps toward modernity.

Those of us who have had the opportunity to visit nineteenth-century mansions that were originally constructed on slave plantations are rarely content with an aesthetic appraisal of these structures, no matter how beautiful they may be. Sufficient visual imagery of toiling black slaves circulate enough in our environment for us to imagine the brutality that hides just beneath the surface of these wondrous mansions. We have learned how to recognize the role of slave labor, as well as the racism it embodied. But black convict labor remains a hidden dimension of our history. It is extremely unsettling to think of modern, industrialized urban areas as having been originally produced under the racist labor conditions of penal servitude that are often described by historians as even worse than slavery.

I grew up in the city of Birmingham, Alabama. Because of its mines-coal and iron ore-and its steel mills that remained active until the de-industrialization process of the 1980s, it was widely known as "the Pittsburgh of the South. " The fathers of many of my friends worked in these mines and mills. It is only recently that I have learned that the black miners and steelworkers I knew during my childhood inherited their place in Birmingham's industrial development from black convicts forced to do this work under the lease system. As Curtin observes:

Many ex-prisoners became miners because Alabama used prison labor extensively in its coal mines. By 1888 all of Alabama's able male prisoners were leased to two major mining companies: the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company (TCI) and Sloss Iron and Steel Company. For a charge of up to \$18.50 per month per man, these corporations "leased," or rented prison laborers and worked them in coal mines.

Learning about this little-acknowledged dimension of black and labor history has caused me to reevaluate my own childhood experiences.

One of the many ruses racism achieves is the virtual erasure of historical contributions by people of color. Here we have a penal system that was racist in many respects-discriminatory arrests and sentences, conditions of work, modes of punishment-together with the racist erasure of the significant contributions made by black convicts as a result of racist coercion. Just as it is difficult to imagine how much is owed to convicts relegated to penal servitude during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we find it difficult today to feel a connection with the prisoners who produce a rising number of commodities that we take for granted in our daily lives. In the state of California, public colleges and universities are provided with furniture produced by prisoners, the vast majority of whom are Latino and black.

There are aspects of our history that we need to interrogate and rethink, the

recognition of which may help us to adopt more complicated, critical postures toward the present and the future. I have focused on the work of a few scholars whose work urges us to raise questions about the past, present, and future. Curtin, for example, is not simply content with offering us the possibility of reexamining the place of mining and steelwork in the lives of black people in Alabama. She also uses her research to urge us to think about the uncanny parallels between the convict lease system in the nineteenth century and prison privatization in the twenty-first.

In the late nineteenth century, coal companies wished to keep their skilled prison laborers for as long as they could, leading to denials of "short time". Today, a slightly different economic incentive can lead to similar consequences. CCA [Corrections Corporation of America] is paid per prisoner. If the supply dries up, or too many are released too early, their profits are affected. Longer prison terms mean greater profits, but the larger point is that the profit motive promotes the expansion of imprisonment.

The persistence of the prison as the main form of punishment, with its racist and sexist dimensions, has created this historical continuity between the nineteenth- and earlytwentieth-century convict lease system and the privatized prison business today. While the convict lease system was legally abolished, its structures of exploitation have reemerged in the patterns of privatization, and, more generally, in the wide-ranging corporatization of punishment that has produced a prison industrial complex. If the prison continues to dominate the landscape of punishment throughout this century and into the next, what might await coming generations of impoverished African-Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian-Americans? Given the parallels between the prison and slavery, a productive exercise might consist in speculating about what the present might look like if slavery or its successor, the convict lease system, had not been abolished.

To be sure, I am not suggesting that the abolition of slavery and the lease system has produced an era of equality and justice. On the contrary, racism surreptitiously defines social and economic structures in ways that are difficult to identify and thus are much more damaging. In some states, for example, more than one-third of black men have been labeled felons. In Alabama and Florida, once a felon, always a felon, which entails the loss of status as a rights-bearing citizen. One of the grave consequences of the powerful reach of the prison was the 2000 (selection of George W. Bush as president. If only the black men and women denied the right to vote because of an actual or presumed felony record had been allowed to cast their ballots, Bush would not be in the White House today. And perhaps we would not be dealing with the awful costs of the War on

Terrorism declared during the first year of his administration. If not for his election, the people of Iraq might not have suffered death, destruction, and environmental poisoning by u.s. military forces.

As appalling as the current political situation may be, imagine what our lives might have become if we were still grappling with the institution of slavery-or the convict lease system or racial segregation. But we do not have to speculate about living with the consequences of the prison. There is more than enough evidence in the lives of men and women who have been claimed by ever more repressive institutions and who are denied access to their families, their communities, to educational opportunities, to productive and creative work, to physical and mental recreation. And there is even more compelling evidence about the damage wrought by the expansion of the prison system in the schools located in poor communities of color that replicate the structures and regimes of the prison. When children attend schools that place a greater value on discipline and security than on knowledge and intellectual development, they are attending prep schools for prison. If this is the predicament we face today, what might the future hold if the prison system acquires an even greater presence in our society? In the nineteenth century, antislavery activists insisted that as long as slavery continued, the future of democracy was bleak indeed. In the twenty-first century, antiprison activists insist that a fundamental requirement for the revitalization of democracy is the long-overdue abolition of the prison system.



## Chapter 3. Imprisonment and Reform

"One should recall that the movement for reforming the prisons, for controlling their functioning is not a recent phenomenon. It does not even seem to have originated in a recognition of failure. Prison 'reform' is virtually contemporary with the prison itself: it constitutes, as it were, its programme." - Michel Foucault

It is ironic that the prison itself was a product of concerted efforts by reformers to create a better system of punishment. If the words "prison reform" so easily slip from our lips, it is because "prison" and "reform" have been inextricably linked since the beginning of the use of imprisonment as the main means of punishing those who violate social norms. As I have already indicated, the origins of the prison are associated with the American Revolution and therefore with the resistance to the colonial power of England. Today this seems ironic, but incarceration within a penitentiary was assumed to be humane-at least far more humane than the capital and corporal punishment inherited from England and other European countries. Foucault opens his study, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, with a description of a 1757 execution in Paris. The man who was put to death was first forced to undergo a series of formidable tortures ordered by the court. Red-hot pincers were used to burn away the flesh from his limbs, and molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, and other substances were melted together and poured onto the wounds. Finally, he was drawn and quartered, his body burned, and the ashes tossed into the wind. Under English common law, a conviction for sodomy led to the punishment of being buried alive, and convicted heretics also were burned alive. "The crime of treason by a female was punished initially under the common law by burning alive the defendant. However, in the year 1790 this method was halted and the punishment became strangulation and burning of the corpse.

European and American reformers set out to end macabre penalties such as this, as well as other forms of corporal punishment such as the stocks and pillories, whippings, brandings, and amputations. Prior to the appearance of punitive incarceration, such punishment was designed to have its most profound effect not so much on the person punished as on the crowd of spectators. Punishment was, in essence, public spectacle. Reformers such as John Howard in England and Benjamin Rush in Pennsylvania argued that punishment-if

carried out in isolation, behind the walls of the prison-would cease to be revenge and would actually reform those who had broken the law.

It should also be pointed out that punishment has not been without its gendered dimensions. Women were often punished within the domestic domain, and instruments of torture were sometimes imported by authorities into the household. In seventeenth-century Britain, women whose husbands identified them as quarrelsome and un-accepting of male dominance were punished by means of a gossip's bridle, or ilbranks," a headpiece with a chain attached and an iron bit that was introduced into the woman's mouth. Although the branking of women was often linked to a public parade, this contraption was sometimes hooked to a wall of the house, where the punished woman remained until her husband decided to release her. I mention these forms of punishment inflicted on women because, like the punishment inflicted on slaves, they were rarely taken up by prison reformers.

Other modes of punishment that predated the rise of the prison include banishment, forced labor in galleys, transportation, and appropriation of the accused's property. The punitive transportation of large numbers of people from England, for example, facilitated the initial colonization of Australia. Transported English convicts also settled the North American colony of Georgia. During the early 1700s, one in eight transported convicts were women, and the work they were forced to perform often consisted of prostitution.

Imprisonment was not employed as a principal mode of punishment until the eighteenth century in Europe and the nineteenth century in the United States. And European prison systems were instituted in Asia and Africa as an important component of colonial rule. In India, for example, the English prison system was introduced during the second half of the eighteenth century, when jails were established in the regions of Calcutta and Madras. In Europe, the penitentiary movement against capital and other corporal punishments reflected new intellectual tendencies associated with the Enlightenment, activist interventions by Protestant reformers, and structural transformations associated with the rise of industrial capitalism. In Milan in 1764, Cesare Beccaria published his *Essay on Crimes and Punishments*, which was strongly influenced by notions of equality advanced by the philosophes-especially Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu. Beccaria argued that punishment should never be a private matter, nor should it be arbitrarily violent; rather, it should be public, swift, and as lenient as possible. He revealed the contradiction of what was then a distinctive feature of imprisonment-the fact that it was generally imposed prior to the defendant's guilt or innocence being decided.

However, incarceration itself eventually became the penalty, bringing about a

distinction between imprisonment as punishment and pretrial detention or detention until the infliction of punishment. The process through which imprisonment developed into the primary mode of state inflicted punishment was very much related to the rise of capitalism and to the appearance of a new set of ideological conditions. These new conditions reflected the rise of the bourgeoisie as the social class whose interests and aspirations furthered new scientific, philosophical, cultural, and popular ideas. It is thus important to grasp the fact that the prison as we know it today did not make its appearance on the historical stage as the superior form of punishment for all times. It was simply-though we should not underestimate the complexity of this process-what made most sense at a particular moment in history. We should therefore question whether a system that was intimately related to a particular set of historical circumstances that prevailed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can lay absolute claim on the twenty-first century.

It may be important at this point in our examination to acknowledge the radical shift in the social perception of the individual that appeared in the ideas of that era. With the rise of the bourgeoisie, the individual came to be regarded as a bearer of formal rights and liberties. The notion of the individual's inalienable rights and liberties was eventually memorialized in the French and American Revolution. "Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite" from the French Revolution and "We hold these truths to be self-evident: all men are created equal . . . from the American Revolution were new and radical ideas, even though they were not extended to women, workers, Africans! and Indians. Before the acceptance of the sanctity of individual rights, imprisonment could not have been understood as punishment. If the individual was not perceived as possessing inalienable rights and liberties, then the alienation of those rights and liberties by removal from society to a space tyrannically governed by the state would not have made sense. Banishment beyond the geographical limits of the town may have made sense, but not the alteration of the individual's legal status through imposition of a prison sentence.

Moreover, the prison sentence, which is always computed in terms of time, is related to abstract quantification, evoking the rise of science and what is often referred to as the Age of Reason. We should keep in mind that this was precisely the historical period when the value of labor began to be calculated in terms of time and therefore compensated in another quantifiable way, by money. The computability of state punishment in terms of months, years-resonates with the role of labor-time as the basis for computing the value of capitalist commodities. Marxist theorists of punishment have noted that precisely the historical period during which the commodity form arose is the era during which penitentiary

sentences emerged as the primary form of punishment.

Today, the growing social movement contesting the supremacy of global capitalism a movement that directly challenges the rule of the human, animal, and plant populations, as well as its natural resources-by corporations that are primarily interested in the increased production and circulation of ever more profitable commodities. This is a challenge to the supremacy of the commodity form, a rising resistance to the contemporary tendency to commodify every aspect of planetary existence. The question we might consider is whether this new resistance to capitalist globalization should also incorporate resistance to the prison.

Thus far I have largely used gender-neutral language to describe the historical development of the prison and its reformers. But convicts punished by imprisonment in emergent penitentiary systems were primarily male. This reflected the deeply gender-biased structure of legal, political, and economic rights. Since women were largely denied public status as rights-bearing individuals, they could not be easily punished by the deprivation of such rights through imprisonment.<sup>43</sup> This was especially true of married women, who had no standing before the law. According to English common law, marriage resulted in a state of "civil death," as symbolized by the wife's assumption of the husband's name. Consequently, she tended to be punished for revolting against her domestic duties rather than for failure in her meager public responsibilities. The relegation of white women to domestic economies prevented them from playing a cant role in the emergent commodity realm. This was especially true since wage labor was typically gendered as male and racialized as white. It is not fortuitous that domestic corporal punishment for women survived long after these modes of punishment had become obsolete for (white) men. The persistence of domestic violence painfully attests to these historical modes of gendered punishment.

Some scholars have argued that the word "penitentiary" may have been used first in connection with plans outlined in England in 1758 to house "penitent prostitutes." In 1777, John Howard, the leading Protestant proponent of penal reform in England, published *The State of the Prisons*,<sup>44</sup> in which he conceptualized imprisonment as an occasion for religious self-reflection and self-reform. Between 1787 and 1791, the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham published his letters on a prison model he called the panopticon. Bentham claimed that criminals could only internalize productive labor habits if they were under constant surveillance. According to his panopticon model, prisoners were to be housed in single cells on circular tiers, all facing a multilevel guard tower. By means of blinds and a complicated play of light and

darkness, the prisoners-who would not see each other at all-would be unable to see the warden. From his vantage point, on the other hand, the warden would be able to see all of the prisoners. However-and this was the most significant aspect of Bentham's mammoth panopticon-because each individual prisoner would never be able to determine where the warden's gaze was focused, each prisoner would be compelled to act, that is, work, as if he were being watched at all times. If we combine Howard's emphasis on disciplined self reflection with Bentham's ideas regarding the technology of internalization designed to make surveillance and discipline the purview of the individual prisoner, we can begin to see how such a conception of the prison had far-reaching implications. The conditions of possibility for this new form of punishment were strongly anchored in a historical era during which the working class needed to be constituted as an army of self-disciplined individuals capable of performing the requisite industrial labor for a developing capitalist system. John Howard's ideas were incorporated in the Penitentiary Act of 1799, which opened the way for the modern prison. While Jeremy Bentham's ideas influenced the development of the first national English penitentiary, located in Millbank and opened in 1816, the first full-fledged effort to create a panopticon prison was in the United States.

The Western State Penitentiary in Pittsburgh, based on a revised architectural model of the panopticon, opened in 1826. But the penitentiary had already made its appearance in the United States. Pennsylvania's Walnut Street Jail housed the first state penitentiary in the United States, when a portion of the jail was converted in 1790 from a detention facility to an institution housing convicts whose prison sentences simultaneously became punishment and occasions for penitence and reform. Walnut Street's austere regime-total isolation in single cells where prisoners lived, ate, worked, read the Bible (if, indeed, they were literate), and supposedly reflected and repented-came to be known as the Pennsylvania system. This regime would constitute one of that era's two major models of imprisonment. Although the other model, developed in Auburn, New York, was viewed as a rival to the Pennsylvania system, the philosophical basis of the two models did not differ substantively. The Pennsylvania model, which eventually crystallized in the Eastern State Penitentiary in Cherry Hill-the plans for which were approved in 1821-emphasized total isolation, silence, and solitude, whereas the Auburn model called for solitary cells but labor in common. This mode of prison labor, which was called congregate, was supposed to unfold in total silence. Prisoners were allowed to be with each other as they worked, but only under condition of silence. Because of its more efficient labor practices, Auburn eventually became the dominant model, both for the United States and Europe. Why would eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reformers

become so invested in creating conditions of punishment based on solitary confinement? Today, aside from death, solitary confinement-next to torture, or as a form of torture-is considered the worst form of punishment imaginable. Then, however, it was assumed to have an emancipatory effect. The body was placed in conditions of solitude in order to allow the soul to flourish. It is not accidental that most of the reformers of that era were deeply religious and therefore saw the architecture and of the penitentiary as emulating the architecture and regimes of monastic life. Still, observers of the new penitentiary saw, early on, the real potential for insanity in solitary confinement. In an often-quoted passage of his *American Notes*, Charles Dickens prefaced a description of his 1842 visit to Eastern Penitentiary with the observation that "the system here is rigid, strict, and hopeless solitary confinement. I believe it, in its effects, to be cruel and wrong."

In its intention I am well convinced that it is kind, humane, and meant for reformation; but I am persuaded that those who devised this system of Prison Discipline, and those benevolent gentlemen who carry it into execution, do not know what it is that they are doing. I believe that very few men are capable of estimating the immense amount of torture and agony that this dreadful punishment, prolonged for years, inflicts upon the sufferers . . . I am only the more convinced that there is a depth of terrible endurance in it which none but the sufferers themselves can fathom, and which no man has a right to inflict upon his fellow-creature. I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body . . .because its wounds are not upon the surface, and it extorts few cries that human ears can hear; therefore I the more denounce it, as a secret punishment which slumbering humanity is not roused up to stay. Unlike other Europeans such as Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont, who believed that such punishment would result in moral renewal and thus mold convicts into better citizens, Dickens was of the opinion that "[t]hose who have undergone this punishment MUST pass into society again morally unhealthy and diseased."<sup>48</sup> This early critique of the penitentiary and its regime of solitary confinement troubles the notion that imprisonment is the most suitable form of punishment for a democratic society.

The current construction and expansion of state and federal super-maximum security prisons, whose putative purpose is to address disciplinary problems within the penal system, draws upon the historical conception of the penitentiary, then considered the most progressive form of punishment. Today African-Americans and Latinos are vastly overrepresented in these supermax prisons and control units, the first of which emerged when federal correctional

authorities to send prisoners housed throughout the system whom they deemed to be "dangerous" to the federal prison in Marion, Illinois. In 1983! the entire prison was "locked down,"! which meant that prisoners were confined to their cells twenty-three hours a day. This lockdown became permanent, thus furnishing the general model for the control unit and supermax prison. Today, there are approximately super-maximum security federal and state prisons located in thirty-six states and many more supermax units in virtually every state in the country. A description of supermaxes in a 1997 Human Rights Watch report sounds chillingly like Dickens's description of Eastern State Penitentiary. What is different, however, is that all references to individual rehabilitation have disappeared.

Inmates in super-maximum security facilities are usually held in single cell lock-down, commonly referred to as solitary confinement . . . [C]ongregate activities with other prisoners are usually prohibited; other prisoners cannot even be seen from an inmate's cell; communication with other prisoners is prohibited or difficult (consisting, for of shouting from cell to cell); visiting and telephone privileges are limited. The new generation of super-maximum security facilities also rely on state-of-the-art technology for monitoring and controlling prisoner conduct and movement, utilizing, for example, video monitors and remote controlled electronic doors. "These prisons represent the application of sophisticated, modern technology dedicated to the task of social control, and they isolate, regulate and surveil more effectively than anything that has preceded them".

I have highlighted the similarities between the early U.S. penitentiary-with its aspirations toward individual rehabilitation-and the repressive supermaxes of our era as a reminder of the mutability of history. What was once regarded as progressive and even revolutionary represents today the marriage of technological superiority and political backwardness. No one-not even the most ardent defenders of the supermax-would try to argue today that absolute segregation, including sensory deprivation, is restorative and healing. The prevailing justification for the supermax is that the horrors it creates are the perfect complement for the horrifying personalities deemed the worst of the worst by the prison system. In other words, there is no pretense that rights are respected, there is no concern for the individual, there is no sense that men and women incarcerated in super-maxes deserve anything approaching respect and comfort. According to a 1999 report issued by the National Institute of Corrections, generally, the overall constitutionality of these [supermax] programs remains unclear. As larger numbers of inmates with a greater of characteristics, backgrounds, and behaviors are incarcerated in these facilities,

the likelihood of legal challenge is increased.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, absolute solitude and strict regimentation of the prisoner's every action were viewed as strategies for transforming habits and ethics. That is to say, the idea that imprisonment should be the main form of punishment reflected a belief in the potential of white mankind for progress, not only in science and industry, but at the level of the individual member of society as well. Prison reformers mirrored Enlightenment assumptions of progress in every aspect of human-or to be more precise, white Western-society. In his 1987 study *Fiction and the Architecture of England*, John Bender proposes the very intriguing argument that the emergent literary genre of the novel furthered a discourse of progress and individual transformation that encouraged attitudes toward punishment to These attitudes, he suggests, heralded the conception and construction of penitentiary prisons during the latter part of the eighteenth century as a reform suited to the capacities of those who were deemed human.

Reformers who called for the imposition of penitentiary architecture and regimes on the then existing structure of the prison aimed their critiques at the prisons that were primarily used for purposes of pretrial detention or as an alternative punishment for those who were unable to pay fines exacted by the courts. John Howard, the most well known of these reformers, was what you might today call a prison activist. Beginning in 1773, at the age of forty-seven, he initiated a series of visits that took him "to every institution for the poor in Europe . . . [a campaign] which cost him his fortune and finally his life in a typhus war of the Russian army at Cherson in 1791. At the conclusion of his first trip abroad, he successfully ran for the office of sheriff in Bedfordshire. As sheriff he investigated the prisons under his own jurisdiction and later "set out to visit every prison in England and Wales to document the evils he had first observed at Bedford".

Bender argues that the novel helped facilitate these campaigns to transform the old prisons-which were filthy and in disarray, and which thrived on the bribery of the wardens-into well-ordered rehabilitative penitentiaries. He shows that novels such as *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe* emphasized "the power of confinement to reshape personality" and popularized some of the ideas that moved reformers to action. As Bender points out, the eighteenth century reformers criticized the old prisons for their chaos, their lack of organization and classification, for the easy circulation of alcohol and prostitution they permitted, and for the prevalence of contagion and disease.

The reformers, primarily Protestant, among whom Quakers were especially dominant, couched their ideas in large part in religious frameworks. Though



John Howard was not himself a Quaker—he was an independent Protestant—nevertheless [h]e was drawn to Quaker asceticism and adopted the dress "of a plain Friend." His own brand of piety was strongly reminiscent of the Quaker traditions of silent prayer, "suffering" introspection, and faith in the illumining power of God's light. Quakers, for their part, were bound to be drawn to the idea of imprisonment as a purgatory, as a forced withdrawal from the distractions of the senses into silent and solitary confrontation with the self. Howard conceived of a convict's process of reformation in terms similar to the spiritual awakening of a believer at a Quaker meeting.

However, according to Michael Ignatieff, Howard's contributions did not so much reside in the religiosity of his reform efforts. The originality of Howard's indictment lies in its "scientific," not in its moral character. Elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1756 and author of several scientific papers on climatic variations in Bedfordshire, Howard was one of the first philanthropists to attempt a systematic statistical description of a social problem.

Likewise, Bender's analysis of the relationship between the novel and the penitentiary emphasizes the extent to which the philosophical underpinnings of the prison reformer's campaigns echoed the materialism and utilitarianism of the English Enlightenment. The campaign to reform the prisons was a project to impose order, classification, cleanliness, good work habits, and self-consciousness. He argues that people detained within the old prisons were not severely restricted—they sometimes even enjoyed the freedom to move in and out of the prison. They were not compelled to work and, depending on their own resources, could eat and drink as they wished. Even sex was sometimes available! as prostitutes were sometimes allowed temporary entrance into the prisons. Howard and other reformers called for the imposition of rigid rules that would "enforce solitude and penitence, cleanliness and work". The new penitentiaries, according to Bender, "supplanting both the old prisons and houses of correction! explicitly reached toward . . . three goals: maintenance of order within a largely urban labor force, salvation of the soul, and rationalization of personality." He argues that this is precisely what was narratively accomplished by the novel. It ordered and classified social life, it represented individuals as conscious of their surroundings and as self-aware and self-fashioning. Bender thus sees a kinship between two major developments of the eighteenth century—the rise of the novel in the cultural sphere and the rise of the penitentiary in the socio-legal sphere. If the novel as a cultural form helped to produce the penitentiary, then prison reformers must have been influenced by the ideas generated by and through the eighteenth-century novel.

Literature has continued to play a role in campaigns around the prison. During

the twentieth century, prison writing, in particular! has periodically experienced waves of popularity. The public recognition of prison writing in the United States has historically coincided with the influence of social movements calling for prison reform and/or abolition. Robert Burns's *I Am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain* and the 1932 Hollywood film upon which it was based, played a central role in the campaign to abolish the chain gang. During the 1970s, which were marked by intense organizing within, outside, and across prison walls, numerous works authored by prisoners followed the 1970 publication of George Jackson's *Soledad Brother* and the anthology I coedited with Bettina Aptheker, *If They Come in the Morning*. While many prison writers during that era had discovered the emancipatory potential of writing on their own, relying either on the education they had received prior to their imprisonment or on their tenacious efforts at self-education, others pursued their writing as a direct result of the expansion of prison educational programs during that era. Mumia Abu-Jamal, who has challenged the contemporary dismantling of prison education programs, asks in *Death Row*, what societal interest is served by prisoners who remain illiterate? What social benefit is there in ignorance? How are people corrected while imprisoned if their education is outlawed? Who profits (other than the prison establishment itself) from stupid prisoners?

A practicing journalist before his arrest in 1982 on charges of killing Philadelphia policeman Daniel Faulkner, Abu Jamal has regularly produced articles on capital punishment, focusing especially on its racial and class disproportions. His ideas have helped to link critiques of the death penalty with the more general challenges to the expanding U.S. prison system and are particularly helpful to activists who seek to associate death penalty abolitionism with prison abolitionism. His prison writings have been published in both popular and scholarly journals (such as *The Nation* and *Yale Law Tournai*) as well as in three collections, *Live from Death Row*, *Death Blossoms*, and *All Things Censored*. Abu-Jamal and many other prison writers have strongly criticized the prohibition of Pell Grants for prisoners, which was enacted in the 1994 crime bill, as indicative of the contemporary pattern of dismantling educational programs behind bars. As creative writing courses for prisoners were defunded, virtually every literary journal publishing prisoners' writing eventually collapsed. Of the scores of magazines and newspapers produced behind walls, only the *Angolite* at Louisiana's Angola Prison and *Prison Legal News* at Washington State Prison remain. What this means is that precisely at a time of consolidating a significant writing culture behind bars, repressive strategies are being deployed to dissuade prisoners from educating themselves.

If the publication of Malcolm X's autobiography marks a pivotal moment in

the development of prison literature and a moment of vast promise for prisoners who try to make education a major dimension of their time behind bars, contemporary prison practices are systematically dashing those hopes. In the 1950s, Malcolm's prison education was a dramatic example of prisoners' ability to turn their incarceration into a transformative experience. With no available means of organizing his quest for knowledge, he proceeded to read a dictionary, copying each word in his own hand. By the time he could immerse himself in reading, he noted, "months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life." Then, according to Malcolm, prisoners who demonstrated an unusual interest in reading were assumed to have embarked upon a journey of self-rehabilitation and were frequently allowed special privileges-such as checking out more than the maximum number of books. Even so, in order to pursue this self-education, Malcolm had to work against the prison regime-he often read on his cell floor, long after lights-out, by the glow of the corridor light, taking care to return to bed each hour for the two minutes during which the guard marched past his cell. The contemporary disestablishment of writing and other prison educational programs is indicative of the official disregard today for rehabilitative strategies, particularly those that encourage individual prisoners to acquire autonomy of the mind. The documentary film *The Last Graduation* describes the role prisoners played in establishing a four-year college program at New York's Greenhaven Prison and, twenty-two years later, the official decision to dismantle it. According to Eddie Ellis, who spent twenty-five years in prison and is currently a well-known leader of the antiprison movement, "As a result of Attica, college programs came into the prisons.

In the aftermath of the 1971 prisoner rebellion at Attica and the government-sponsored massacre, public opinion began to favor prison reform. Forty-three Attica prisoners and eleven guards and civilians were killed by the National Guard, who had been ordered to retake the prison by Governor Nelson Rockefeller. The leaders of the prison rebellion had been very specific about their demands. In their "practical demands" they expressed concerns about diet, improvement in the quality of guards, more realistic rehabilitation programs, and better education programs. They also wanted religious freedom, freedom to engage in political activity, and an end to censorship-all of which they saw as indispensable to their educational needs. As Eddie Ellis observes in *The Last Graduation*,

Prisoners very early recognized the fact that they needed to be better educated, that the more education they had, the better they would be able to deal with themselves and their problems, the problems of the prisons and the problems of

the communities from which most of them came.

Lateef Islam, another former prisoner featured in this documentary, said, "We held classes before the came. We taught each other, and sometimes under penalty of a beat-up."

After the Attica Rebellion, more than five hundred prisoners were transferred to Greenhaven, including some of the leaders who continued to press for educational programs. As a direct result of their demands, Marist College, a New York state college near Greenhaven, began to offer college-level courses in 1973 and eventually established the infrastructure for an on-site four-year college program. The program thrived for twenty-two years. Some of the many prisoners who earned their degrees at Greenhaven pursued postgraduate studies after their release. As the documentary powerfully demonstrates, the program produced dedicated men who left prison and offered their newly acquired knowledge and skills to their communities on the outside.

In 1994, consistent with the general pattern of creating more prisons and more repression within all prisons, Congress took up the question of withdrawing college funding for inmates. The congressional debate concluded with a decision to add an amendment to the 1994 crime bill that eliminated all Pell Grants for prisoners, thus effectively defunding all higher educational programs. After twenty two years, Marist College was compelled to terminate its program at Greenhaven Prison. Thus, the documentary revolves around the very last graduation ceremony on July 15, 1995, and the poignant process of removing the books that, in many ways, symbolized the possibilities of freedom. Or, as one of the Marist professors said, "They see books as full of gold." The prisoner who for many years had served as a clerk for the college sadly reflected, as books were being moved, that there was nothing left to do in prison-except perhaps bodybuilding. But, he asked, "what's the use of building your body if you can't build your mind?" Ironically, not long after educational programs were disestablished, weights and bodybuilding equipment were also removed from most U.S. prisons.

## **Chapter 4. How Gender Structures The Prison System**

"I have been told that I will never leave prison if I continue to fight the system. My answer is that one must be alive in order to leave prison, and our current standard of medical care is tantamount to a death sentence. Therefore, I have no choice but to continue . . . Conditions within the institution continually re-invoke memories of violence and oppression, often with devastating results. Unlike other incarcerated women who have come forward to reveal their impressions of prison, I do not feel 'safer' here because 'the abuse has stopped.' It has not stopped. It has shifted shape and paced itself differently, but it is as insidious and pervasive in prison as ever it was in the world I know outside these walls. What has ceased is my ignorance of the facts concerning abuse-and my willingness to tolerate it in silence." - Marcia Bunny

Over the last five years, the prison system has received far more attention by the media than at any time since the period following the 1971 Attica Rebellion. However, with a few important exceptions, women have been left out of the public discussions about the expansion of the u.s. prison system. I am not suggesting that simply bringing women into the existing conversations on jails and prisons will deepen our analysis of state punishment and further the project of prison abolition. Addressing issues that are specific to women's prisons is of vital importance, but it is equally important to shift the way we think about the prison system as a whole. Certainly women's prison practices are gendered, but so, too, are men's prison practices. To assume that men's institutions constitute the norm and women's institutions are marginal is, in a sense, to participate in the very normalization of prisons that an abolitionist approach seeks to contest. Thus, the title of this chapter is not "Women and the Prison System," but rather "How Gender Structures the Prison System." Moreover, scholars and activists who are involved in feminist projects should not consider the structure of state punishment as marginal to their work. Forwardlooking research and organizing strategies should recognize that the deeply gendered character of punishment both reflects and further entrenches the gendered structure of the larger society.

Women prisoners have produced a small but impressive body of literature that has illuminated significant aspects of the organization of punishment that would have otherwise remained unacknowledged. Assata Shakur's memoirs, for

example, reveal the dangerous intersections of racism, male domination, and state strategies of political repression. In 1977 she was convicted on charges of murder and assault in connection with a 1973 incident that left one New Jersey state trooper dead and another wounded. She and her companion, Zayd Shakur, who was killed during the shootout, were the targets of what we now name racial profiling and were stopped by state troopers under the pretext of a broken taillight. At the time Assata Shakur, known then as Joanne Chesimard, was underground and had been anointed by the police and the media as the "Soul of the Black Liberation Army." By her 1977 conviction, she either had been acquitted or had charges dismissed in six other cases-upon the basis of which she had been declared a fugitive in the first place. Her attorney, Lennox Hinds, has pointed out that since it was proven that Assata Shakur did not handle the gun with which the state troopers were shot, her mere presence in the automobile, against the backdrop of the media demonization to which she was subjected, constituted the basis of her conviction. In the foreword to Shakur's autobiography Hinds writes:

In the history of New Jersey, no woman pretrial detainee or prisoner has ever been treated as she was, continuously confined in a men's prison, under twenty-four-hour surveillance of her most intimate functions, without intellectual sustenance, adequate medical attention, and exercise, and without the company of other women for all the years she was in their custody.

There is no doubt that Assata Shakur's status as a black political prisoner accused of killing a state trooper caused her to be singled out by the authorities for unusually cruel treatment. However, her own account emphasizes the extent to which her individual experiences reflected those of other imprisoned women, especially black and Puerto Rican women. Her description of the strip search, which focuses on the internal examination of body cavities, is especially revealing: Joan Bird and Afeni Shakur [members of the Black Panther Party] had told me about it after they had been bailed out in the Panther 21 trial. When they had told me, I was horrified. "You mean they really put their hands inside you, to search you?" I had asked. "Uh-huh," they answered. Every woman who has ever been on the rock, or in the old house of detention, can tell you about it. The women call it "getting the" or, more vulgarly, "getting fucked." "What happens if you refuse?" I had asked Afeni. "They lock you in the hole and they don't let you out until you consent to be searched internally."

I thought about refusing, but I sure as hell didn't want to be in the hole. I had had enough of solitary. The "internal search" was as humiliating and disgusting as it sounded. You sit on the edge of this table and the nurse holds your legs open and sticks a finger in your vagina and moves it around. She has a plastic

glove on. Some of them try to put one finger in your and another one up your rectum at the same time.

I have quoted this passage so extensively because it exposes an everyday routine in women's prisons that verges on sexual assault as much as it is taken for granted. Having been imprisoned in the Women's House of Detention to which Joan Bird and Afeni Shakur refer, I can personally affirm the veracity of their claims. Over thirty years after Bird and Afeni Shakur were released and after I myself spent several months in the Women's House of Detention, this issue of the strip search is still very much on the front burner of women's prison activism. In 2001 Sisters Inside, an Australian support organization for women prisoners, launched a national campaign against the strip search, the slogan of which was "Stop State Sexual Assault-" Assata Shakur's autobiography provides an abundance of insights about the gendering of state punishment and reveals the extent to which women's prisons have held on to oppressive patriarchal practices that are considered obsolete in the "free world". She spent six years in several jails and prisons before escaping in 1979 and receiving political asylum by the Republic of Cuba in 1984, where she lives today. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn wrote an earlier account of life in a womens prison, *The Alderson Story: My as a Political Prisoner*. At the height of the McCarthy era, Flyml, a labor activist and Communist leader, was convicted under the Smith Act and served two years in Alderson Federal Reformatory for Women from 1955 to 1957. Following the dominant model for women's prisons during that period, Alderson's regimes were based on the assumption that "criminal" women could be rehabilitated by assimilating correct womanly behaviors-that is, by becoming experts in domesticity-especially cooking, cleaning, and sewing. Of course, training designed to produce better wives and mothers among middle-class white women effectively produced skilled domestic servants among black and poor women. Flynn's book provides vivid descriptions of these everyday regimes. Her autobiography is located in a tradition of prison writing by political prisoners that also includes women of this era. Contemporary writings by women political prisoners today include poems and short stories by Ericka Huggins and Susan Rosenberg, analyses of the prison industrial complex by Linda Evans, and curricula for HIV/AIDS education in women's prisons by Kathy Boudin and the members of the Bedford Hills ACE collective.

Despite the availability of perceptive portrayals of life in women's prisons, it has been extremely difficult to persuade the public-and even, on occasion, to persuade prison activists who are primarily concerned with the plight of male prisoners-of the centrality of gender to an understanding of state punishment. Although men constitute the vast majority of prisoners in the world, important

aspects of the operation of state punishment are missed if it is assumed that women are marginal and thus undeserving of attention. The most frequent justification for the inattention to women prisoners and to the particular issues surrounding women's imprisonment is the relatively small proportion of women among incarcerated populations throughout the world. In most countries, the percentage of women among prison populations hovers around five. However, the economic and political shifts of the 1980s—the globalization of economic markets, the de-industrialization of the U.S. economy, the dismantling of such social service programs as Aid to Families of Dependent Children, and, of course, the prison construction boom—produced a significant acceleration in the rate of women's imprisonment both inside and outside the United States. In fact, women remain today the fastest-growing sector of the U.S. prison population. This recent rise in the rate of women's imprisonment points directly to the economic context that produced the prison industrial complex and that has had a devastating impact on men and women alike.

It is from this perspective of the contemporary expansion of prisons, both in the United States and throughout the world, that we should examine some of the historical and ideological aspects of state punishment imposed on women. Since the end of the eighteenth century, when, as we have seen, imprisonment began to emerge as the dominant form of punishment, convicted women have been represented as essentially different from their male counterparts. It is true that men who commit the kinds of transgressions that are regarded as punishable by the state are labeled as social deviants. Nevertheless, masculine criminality has always been deemed more "normal" than feminine criminality. There has always been a tendency to regard those women who have been publicly punished by the state for their misbehaviors as significantly more aberrant and far more threatening to society than their numerous male counterparts.

In seeking to understand this gendered difference in the perception of prisoners, it should be kept in mind that as the prison emerged and evolved as the major form of public punishment, women continued to be routinely subjected to forms of punishment that have not been acknowledged as such. For example, women have been incarcerated in psychiatric institutions in greater proportions than in prisons.<sup>79</sup> Studies indicating that women have been even more likely to end up in mental facilities than men suggest that while jails and prisons have been dominant institutions for the control of men, mental institutions have served a similar purpose for women. That deviant men have been constructed as criminal, while deviant women have been constructed as insane. Regimes that reflect this assumption continue to inform the women's prison. Psychiatric drugs continue to be distributed far more extensively to imprisoned women than to



their male counterparts. A Native American woman incarcerated in the Women's Correctional Center in Montana related her with psychotropic drugs to sociologist Luana Ross: Haldol is a drug they who can't cope with lockup. It makes you feel dead, paralyzed. And then I started getting side effects from Haldol. I wanted to fight anybody, any of the officers. I was screaming at them and telling them to get out of my face, so the doctor said, "We can't have that." And, they put me on Tranxene. I don't take pills; I never had trouble sleeping until I got here. Now I'm supposed to see [the counselor] again because of my dreams. If you got a problem, they're not going to take care of it. They're going to put you on drugs so they can control you.

Prior to the emergence of the penitentiary and thus of the notion of punishment as "doing time," the use of confinement to control beggars, thieves, and the insane did not necessarily distinguish among these categories of deviancy. At this phase in the history of punishment-prior to the American and French Revolutions-the classification process through which criminality is differentiated from poverty and mental illness had not yet developed. As the discourse on criminality and the corresponding institutions to control it distinguished the "criminal" from the "insane" the gendered distinction took hold and continued to structure penal policies. Gendered as female, this category of insanity was highly sexualized. When we consider the impact of class and race we can say that for white and affluent women, this equalization tends to serve as evidence for emotional and mental but for black and poor women, it has pointed to criminality.

It should also be kept in mind that until the abolition of slavery, the vast majority of black women were subject to regimes of punishment that differed significantly from those experienced by white women. As slaves, they were directly and often brutally disciplined for conduct considered perfectly normal in a context of freedom. Slave punishment was visibly gendered-special penalties, were, for example, reserved for pregnant women unable to reach the quotas that determined how long and how fast they should work. In the slave narrative of Moses Grandy, an especially brutal form of whipping is described in which the woman was required to lie on the ground with her stomach positioned in a hole, whose purpose was to safeguard the fetus (conceived as future slave labor). If we expand our definition of punishment under slavery, we can say that the coerced sexual relations between slave and master constituted a penalty exacted on women, if only for the sole reason that they were slaves. In other words, the deviance of the slave master was transferred to the slave woman, whom he victimized. Likewise, sexual abuse by prison guards is translated into hyper-sexuality of women prisoners. The notion that "female deviance" always has a

sexual dimension persists in the contemporary era, and this intersection of criminality and sexuality continues to be racialized. Thus, white women labeled as "criminals" are more closely associated with blackness than their "normal" counterparts. Prior to the emergence of the prison as the major form of public punishment, it was taken for granted that violators of the law would be subjected to corporal and frequently capital penalties. What is not generally recognized is the connection between state-inflicted corporal punishment and the physical assaults on women in domestic spaces. This form of bodily discipline has continued to be routinely meted out to women in the context of intimate relationships, but it is rarely understood to be related to state punishment. Quaker reformers in the United States-especially the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, founded in 1787-played a pivotal role in campaigns to substitute imprisonment for corporal punishment. Following in the tradition established by Elizabeth Fry in England, Quakers were also responsible for extended crusades to institute separate prisons for women. Given the practice of incarcerating criminalized women in men's prisons, the demand for separate women's prisons was viewed as quite radical during this period. Fry formulated principles govern-prison reform for women in her 1827 work, *Observations in Visiting, Superintendence and Government of Female Prisoners*, which were taken up in the United States by women such as Josephine Shaw Lowell and Abby Hopper Gibbons. In the 1870s, Lowell and Gibbons helped to lead the campaign in New York for separate prisons for women. Prevailing attitudes toward women convicts differed from those toward men convicts, who were assumed to have forfeited rights and liberties that women generally could not claim even in the "free world". Although some women were warehoused in penitentiaries, the institution itself was gendered as male, for by and large no particular arrangements were made to accommodate sentenced women. The women who served in penal institutions between 1820 and 1870 were not subject to the prison reform experienced by male inmates. Officials employed isolation, silence, and hard labor to rehabilitate male prisoners. The lack of accommodations for female inmates made isolation and silence impossible for them and productive labor was not considered an important part of their routine. The neglect of female prisoners, however, was rarely benevolent. Rather, a pattern of overcrowding, harsh treatment, and sexual abuse recurred throughout prison histories.

Male punishment was linked ideologically to penitence and reform. The very forfeiture of rights and liberties implied that self-reflection, religious study, and work, male convicts could achieve redemption and could recover these rights and liberties. However, since women were not acknowledged as securely in

possession of these rights, they were not eligible to participate in this process of redemption.

According to dominant views, women convicts were irrevocably fallen women, with no possibility of salvation. If male criminals were considered to be public individuals who had simply violated the social contract, female criminals were seen as having transgressed fundamental moral principles of womanhood. The who, following Elizabeth Fry, argued that women were capable of redemption, did not really contest these ideological assumptions about women/s place. In other words, they did not question the very notion of "fallen women." Rather, they simply opposed the idea that "fallen women" could not be saved. They could be saved/ the reformers contended, and toward that end they advocated separate penal facilities and a specifically female approach to punishment. Their approach called for architectural models that replaced cells with cottages and "rooms" in a way that was supposed to infuse domesticity into prison life. This model facilitated a regime devised to reintegrate criminalized women into the domestic life of wife and mother. They did not/ however, acknowledge the class and race underpinnings of this regime. Training that was, on the surface, designed to produce good wives and mothers in effect steered poor women (and especially black women) into "free world" jobs in domestic service. Instead of stay-at-home skilled wives and mothers, many women prisoners would become maids, cooks, and washerwomen for more affluent women. A female custodial staff, the reformers also argued, would minimize the sexual temptations, which they believed were often at the root of female criminality.

When the reform movement calling for separate prisons for women emerged in England and the United States during the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Fry, Josephine Shaw, and other advocates argued against the established idea that criminal women were beyond the reach of moral rehabilitation. Like male convicts, who presumably could be "corrected" by rigorous prison regimes, female convicts, they suggested/ could also be molded into moral beings by differently gendered imprisonment regimes. Architectural changes, domestic regimes, and an all-female custodial staff were implemented in the reformatory program proposed by reformers,<sup>82</sup> and eventually women's prisons became as strongly anchored to the social landscape as men's prisons, but even more invisible. Their greater invisibility was as much a reflection of the way women/s domestic duties under patriarchy were assumed to be normal, natural/ and consequently invisible as it was of the relatively small numbers of women incarcerated in these new institutions.

Twenty-one years after the first English reformatory for women was

established in London in 1853, the first U.S. reformatory for women was opened in Indiana. The aim was to train the prisoners in the "important" female role of domesticity. Thus an important role of the reform movement in women's prisons was to encourage and ingrain "appropriate" gender roles, such as vocational training in cooking, sewing and cleaning. To accommodate these goals, the reformatory cottages were usually designed with kitchens, living rooms, and even some nurseries for prisoners with infants.

However, this feminized public punishment did not affect all women in the same way. When black and Native American women were imprisoned in reformatories, they often were segregated from white women. Moreover, they tended to be disproportionately sentenced to men's prisons. In the southern states in the aftermath of the Civil War, black women endured the cruelties of the convict lease system unmitigated by the feminization of punishment neither their sentences nor the labor they were compelled to do were lessened by virtue of their gender. As the U.S. prison system evolved during the twentieth century, feminized modes of punishment-the cottage system domestic training, and so on-were designed ideologically to reform white women, relegating women of color in large part to realms of public punishment that made no pretense of offering them femininity.

Moreover as Lucia Zedner has pointed out sentencing practices for women within the reformatory system often required women of all racial backgrounds to do more time than men for similar offenses. "This differential was justified on the basis that women were sent to reformatories not to be punished in proportion to the seriousness of their offense but to be reformed and retrained, a process that, it was argued, required time. At the same time, Zedner points out, this tendency to send women to prison for longer terms than men was accelerated by the eugenics movement, "which sought to have 'genetically inferior' women removed from social circulation for as many of their childbearing years as possible". At the beginning of the twenty-first century, women's prisons have begun to look more like their male counterparts particularly facilities constructed in the contemporary era of the prison industrial complex. As corporate involvement in punishment expands in ways that would have been unimaginable just two decades ago, the prisons presumed goal of rehabilitation has been thoroughly displaced by incapacitation as the major objective of imprisonment. As I have already pointed out, now that the population of U.S. prisons and jails has surpassed two million people, the rate of increase in the numbers of women prisoners has exceeded that of men. As criminologist Elliot Currie has pointed out, for most of the period after World War II, the female incarceration rate hovered at around 8 per 100,000 it did not reach double digits until 1977.

Today it is 51 per 100,000 . . . At the current rates there will be more women in American prisons in the year 2010 than there were inmates of both sexes in 1970. When we combine the effects of race and gender, the nature of these shifts in the prison population is even clearer. The prison incarceration rate for black women today exceeds that for white men as recently as 1980.

Luana Ross's study of Native American women incarcerated in the Women's Correctional Center in Montana argues that "prisons, as employed by the Euro-American system, operate to keep Native Americans in a colonial situation. She points out that Native people are vastly overrepresented in the country's federal and state prisons. In Montana, where she did her research, they constitute 6 percent of the general population, but 7.3 percent of the imprisoned population. Native women are even more disproportionately present in Montana's prison system. constitute 25 percent of all women imprisoned by the state. Thirty years ago, around the time of the Attica uprising and the murder of George Jackson at San Quentin radical opposition to the prison system identified it as a principal site of state violence and repression. In part as a reaction to the invisibility of women prisoners in this movement and in part as a consequence of the rising women's liberation movement, specific campaigns developed in defense of the rights of women prisoners. Many of these campaigns put forth-and continue to advance-radical critiques of state repression and violence. Within the correctional community, however, feminism has been influenced largely by liberal constructions of gender equality.

In contrast to the nineteenth-century reform movement, which was grounded in an ideology of gender difference, late-twentieth-century "reforms" have relied on a "separate but equal" model. This "separate but equal" approach often has been applied uncritically, ironically resulting in demands for more repressive conditions in order to render women's facilities "equal" to men's. A clear example of this can be discovered in a memoir, *The Warden Wore Pink*, written by a former warden of Huron Valley Women's Prison in Michigan. During the 1980s, the author, Tekla Miller, advocated a change in policies within the Michigan correctional system that would result in women prisoners being treated the same as men prisoners. With no trace of irony, she characterizes as "feminist" her own fight for "gender equality" between male and female prisoners and for equality between male and female institutions of incarceration. One of these campaigns focuses on the unequal allocation of weapons, which she sought to remedy:

Arsenals in men's prisons are large rooms with shelves of shotguns, rifles, hand guns, ammunition, gas canisters, and riot equipment . . . Huron Valley Women's arsenal was a small, five feet by two feet closet that held two rifles,

eight shotguns, two bullhorns, five handguns, four gas canisters, and twenty sets of restraints. It does not occur to her that a more productive version of feminism would also question the organization of state punishment for men as well and, in my opinion, would seriously consider the proposition that the institution as a whole gendered as it is—calls for the kind of critique that might lead us to consider its abolition.

Miller also describes the case of an attempted escape by a woman prisoner. The prisoner climbed over the razor ribbon but was captured after she jumped to the ground on the other side. This escape attempt occasioned a debate about the disparate treatment of men and women escapees. Miller's position was that guards should be instructed to shoot at women just as they were instructed to shoot at men. She argued that parity for women and men prisoners should consist in their equal right to be fired upon by guards. The outcome of the debate, Miller observed, was that escaping women prisoners in medium or higher [security] prisons are treated the same way as men. A warning shot is fired. If the prisoner fails to halt and is over the fence, an officer is allowed to shoot to injure. If the officer's life is in danger, the officer can shoot to kill.

Paradoxically, demands for parity with men's prisons, instead of creating greater educational, vocational, and health opportunities for women prisoners, often have led to more repressive conditions for women. This is not only a consequence of deploying liberal—that is, formalistic— notions of equality, but of, more dangerous, allowing male prisons to function as the punishment norm. Miller points out that she attempted to prevent a female prisoner, whom she characterizes as a "murderer" serving a long term, from participating in graduation ceremonies at the University of Michigan because male murderers were not given such privileges. (Of course, she does not indicate the nature of the woman's murder charges—whether, for instance, she was convicted of killing an abusive partner, as is the case for a substantial number of women convicted of murder). Although Miller did not succeed in preventing the inmate from participating in the commencement, in addition to her cap and gown, the prisoner was made to wear leg chains and handcuffs during the ceremony. This is indeed a bizarre example of feminist demands for equality within the prison system.

A widely publicized example of the use of repressive paraphernalia historically associated with the treatment of male prisoners to create "equality" for female prisoners was the 1996 decision by Alabama's prison commissioner to establish women's chain gangs. After Alabama became the first state to reinstitute chain gangs in 1995, then State Corrections Commissioner Ron Jones announced the following year that women would be shackled while they cut

grass, picked up trash, or worked a vegetable garden at Julia Tutwiler State Prison for Women. This attempt to institute chain gangs for women was in part a response to lawsuits by male prisoners, who charged that male chain gangs discriminated against men by virtue of their gender.<sup>92</sup> However, immediately after Jones's announcement, Governor Fob James, who obviously was pressured to prevent Alabama from acquiring the dubious distinction of being the only U.S. state to have equal-opportunity chain gangs, fired him.

Shortly after Alabama's embarrassing flirtation with the possibility of chain gangs for women, Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Maricopa County, Arizona-represented in the media as "the toughest sheriff in America"-held a press conference to announce that because he was "an equal opportunity incarcerator," he was establishing the country's first female chain gang. When the plan was implemented, newspapers throughout the country carried a photograph of chained women cleaning Phoenix's streets. Even though this may have been a publicity stunt designed to bolster the fame of Sheriff Arpaio, the fact that this women's chain gang emerged against the backdrop of a generalized increase in the repression inflicted on women prisoners is certainly cause for alarm. Women's prisons throughout the country increasingly include sections known as security housing units. The regimes of solitary confinement and sensory deprivation in the security housing unit (SHU) in these sections within women's prisons are smaller versions of the rapidly proliferating super-maximum security prisons. Since the population of women in prison now consists of a majority of women of color, the historical resonances of slavery, colonization, and genocide should not be missed in these images of women in chains and shackles.

As the level of repression in women's prisons increases, and, paradoxically, as the influence of domestic prison regimes recedes, sexual abuse-which, like domestic violence, is yet another dimension of the privatized punishment of women-has become an institutionalized component of punishment behind prison walls. Although guard-on-prisoner sexual abuse is not sanctioned as such, the widespread leniency with which offending officers are treated suggests that for women, prison is a space in which the threat of sexualized violence that looms in the larger society is effectively sanctioned as a routine aspect of the landscape of punishment behind prison walls.

According to a 1996 Human Rights Watch report on the sexual abuse of women in U.S. prisons: Our findings indicate that being a woman prisoner in U.S. state prisons can be a terrifying experience. If you are sexually abused, you cannot escape from your abuser. Grievance or investigatory procedures, where they exist, are often ineffectual, and correctional employees continue to engage in abuse because they believe they will rarely be held accountable,

administratively or criminally. Few people outside the prison walls know what is going on or care if they do know. Fewer still do anything to address the problem.

The following excerpt from the summary of this report, entitled *All Too Familiar: Sexual Abuse of Women in U.S. State Prisons*, reveals the extent to which women's prison environments are violently sexualized, thus recapitulating the familiar violence that characterizes many women's private lives:

We found that male correctional employees have vaginally, anally, and orally raped female prisoners and sexually assaulted and abused them. We found that in the course of committing such gross misconduct, male officers have not only used actual or threatened physical force, but have also used their near total authority to provide or deny goods and privileges to female prisoners to compel them to have sex or, in other cases, to reward them for having-done so. In other cases, male officers have violated their most basic professional duty and engaged in sexual contact with female prisoners absent the use of threat of force or any material exchange. In addition to engaging in sexual relations with prisoners, male officers have used mandatory pat-frisks or room searches to grope women's breasts, buttocks, and vaginal areas and to view them inappropriately while in a state of undressing the housing or bathroom areas. Male correctional officers and staff have also engaged in regular verbal degradation and harassment of female prisoners, thus contributing to a custodial environment in the state prisons for women that is often highly sexualized and excessively hostile.

The violent sexualization of prison life within women's institutions raises a number of issues that may help us develop further our critique of the prison system. Ideologies of sexuality-and particularly the intersection of race and sexuality-have had a profound effect on the representations of and treatment received by women of color both within and outside prison. Of course, black and Latino men experience a perilous continuity in the way they are treated in school, where they are disciplined as potential criminals; in the streets, where they are subjected to racial profiling by the police; and in prison, where they are warehoused and deprived of virtually all of their rights. For women, the continuity of treatment from the free world to the universe of the prison is even more complicated, since they also confront forms of violence in prison that they have confronted in their homes and intimate relationships. The criminalization of black and Latina women includes persisting images of hypersexuality that serve to justify sexual assaults against them both in and outside of prison. Such images were vividly rendered in a Nightline television series filmed in November 1999 at a location at California's Valley State Prison for Women. Many of the women interviewed by Ted Koppel complained that they received frequent and unnecessary pelvic examinations, including when they visited the doctor with



such routine illnesses as colds. In an attempt to justify these examinations, the chief medical officer explained that women prisoners had rare opportunities for "male contact," and that they therefore welcomed these superfluous gynecological exams. Although this officer was eventually removed from his position as a result of these comments, his reassignment did little to alter the pervasive vulnerability of imprisoned women to sexual abuse. Studies in female prisons throughout the world indicate that sexual abuse is an abiding, though unacknowledged, form of punishment to which women, who have the misfortune of being sent to prison, are subjected. This is one aspect of life in prison that women can expect to encounter, either directly or indirectly, regardless of the written policies that govern the institution. In June 1998, Radhika Coomaraswamy, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Violence Against Women, visited federal and state prisons as well as Immigration and Naturalization detention facilities in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Minnesota, Georgia, and California. She was refused permission to visit women's prisons in Michigan, where serious allegations of sexual abuse were pending. In the aftermath of her visits, Coomaraswamy announced that sexual misconduct by prison staff is widespread in American women's prisons. This clandestine institutionalization of sexual abuse violates one of the guiding principles of the United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, a UN instrument first adopted in 1955 and used as a guideline by many governments to achieve what is known as "good prison practice." However, the U.S. government has done little to publicize these rules and it is probably the case that most correctional personnel have never heard of these UN standards. According to the Standard Minimum Rules, Imprisonment and other measures which result in cutting off an offender from the outside world are afflictive by the very fact of taking from the person the right of self-determination by depriving him of his liberty. Therefore the prison system shall not, except as incidental to justifiable segregation or the maintenance of discipline, aggravate the suffering inherent in such a situation?<sup>7</sup>

Sexual abuse is surreptitiously incorporated into one of the most habitual aspects of women's imprisonment, the strip search. As activists and prisoners themselves have painted out, the state itself is directly implicated in this routinization of sexual abuse, both in permitting such conditions that render women vulnerable to explicit sexual coercion carried out by guards and other prison staff and by incorporating into routine policy such practices as the strip search and body cavity search. Australian lawyer/activist Amanda George has pointed out that [t]he acknowledgement that sexual assault does occur in institutions for people with intellectual disabilities, prisons, psychiatric hospitals,

youth training centers and police stations, usually centers around the criminal acts of rape and sexual assault by individuals employed in those institutions. These offenses, though they are rarely reported, are clearly understood as being "crimes" for which the individual and not the state is responsible. At the same time as the state deplores "unlawful" sexual assaults by its employees, it actually uses sexual assault as a means of control.

In Victoria, prison and police officers are vested with the power and responsibility to do acts which, if done outside of work hours, would be crimes of sexual assault. If a person does not consent to being stripped naked by these officers, force can lawfully be used to do it . . . These legal strip searches are, in the author's view, sexual assaults within the definition of indecent assault in the (Vic) as amended in section 39.

At a November 2001 conference on women in prison held by the Brisbane-based organization Sisters Inside, Amanda George described an action performed before a national gathering of correctional personnel working in women's prisons. Several women seized control of the stage and, some playing guards, others playing the roles of prisoners, dramatized a strip search. According to George, the gathering was so repulsed by this enactment of a practice that occurs routinely in women's prisons everywhere that many of the participants felt compelled to disassociate themselves from such practices, insisting that this was not what they did. Some of the guards, George said, simply cried upon watching representations of their own actions outside the prison context. What they must have realized is that "without the uniform, without the power of the state, [the strip search] would be sexual assault".

But why is an understanding of the pervasiveness of sexual abuse in women's prisons an important element of a radical analysis of the prison system, and especially of those forward-looking analyses that lead us in the direction of abolition? Because the call to abolish the prison as the dominant form of punishment cannot ignore the extent to which the institution of the prison has stockpiled ideas and practices that are hopefully approaching obsolescence in the larger society, but that retain all their ghastly vitality behind prison walls. The destructive combination of racism and misogyny, however much it has been challenged by social movements, scholarship, and art over the last three decades, retains all its awful consequences within women's prisons. The relatively uncontested presence of sexual abuse in women's prisons is one of many such examples. The increasing evidence of a U.S. prison industrial complex with global resonances leads us to think about the extent to which the many corporations that have acquired an investment in the expansion of the prison system are, like the state, directly implicated in an institution that perpetuates

violence against women.

## Chapter 5. The Prison Industrial Complex

"For private business prison labor is like a pot of gold. No strikes. No union organizing. No health benefits, unemployment insurance, or workers' compensation to pay. No language barriers, as in foreign countries. New leviathan prisons are built on thousands of eerie acres of factories inside walls. Prisoners do data entry for Chevron, make telephone reservations for TWA, raise hogs, shovel manure, and make circuit boards, limousines, waterbeds, and lingerie for Victoria's Secret, all at a fraction of the cost of 'free labor.'" -Linda Evans and Eve Goldberg.

The exploitation of prison labor by private corporations is one aspect among an array of relationships linking corporations, government, correctional communities, and media. These relationships constitute what we now call a prison industrial complex. The term "prison industrial complex" was introduced by activists and scholars to contest prevailing beliefs that increased levels of crime were the root cause of mounting prison populations. Instead, they argued, prison construction and the attendant drive to fill these new structures with human bodies have been driven by ideologies of racism and the pursuit of profit. Social historian Mike Davis first used the term in relation to California's penal system, which, he observed, already had begun in the 1990s to rival agribusiness and land development as a major economic and political force.

To understand the social meaning of the prison today within the context of a developing prison industrial complex means that punishment has to be conceptually severed from its seemingly indissoluble link with crime. How often do we encounter the phrase "crime and punishment"? To what extent has the perpetual repetition of the phrase "crime and punishment" in literature, as titles of television shows, both fictional and documentary, and in everyday conversation made it extremely difficult to think about punishment beyond this connection? How have these portrayals located the prison in a causal relation to crime as a natural, necessary, and permanent effect, thus inhibiting serious debates about the viability of the prison today?

The notion of a prison industrial complex insists on understandings of the punishment process that take into account economic and political structures and ideologies, rather than focusing myopically on individual criminal conduct and efforts to "curb crime." The fact, for example, that many corporations with

global markets now rely on prisons as an important source of profit helps us to understand the rapidity with which prisons began to proliferate precisely at a time when official studies indicated that the crime rate was falling. The notion of a prison industrial complex also insists that the racialization of prison populations-and this is not only true of the United States, but of Europe, South America, and Australia as well-is not an incidental feature.

Thus, of the prison industrial complex undertaken by abolitionist activists and scholars are very much linked to critiques of the global persistence of racism. Antiracist and other social justice movements are incomplete with attention to the politics of imprisonment. At the 2001 United Nations World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, a few individuals active in abolitionist campaigns in various countries attempted to bring this connection to the attention of the international community. They pointed out that the expanding system of prisons throughout the world both relies on and further promotes structures of racism even though its proponents may adamantly maintain that it is race-neutral. Some critics of the prison system have employed the term "correctional industrial complex" and others "penal industrial complex." These and the term I have chosen to underscore, "prison industrial complex" all clearly resonate with the historical concept of a "military industrial complex" whose usage dates back to the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower. It may seem ironic that a Republican president was the first to underscore a growing and dangerous alliance between the military and corporate worlds, but it clearly seemed right to antiwar activists and scholars during the era of the Vietnam War. Today, some activists mistakenly argue that the prison industrial complex is moving into the space vacated by the military industrial complex. However, the so called War on Terrorism initiated by the Bush administration in the aftermath of the 2002 attacks on the World Trade Center has made it very clear that the links between the military, corporations, and government are growing stronger, not weaker. A more cogent way to define the relationship between the military industrial complex and the prison industrial complex would be to call it symbiotic. These two complexes mutually support and promote each other and, in fact, often share technologies. During the early nineties, when defense production was temporarily on the decline, this connection between the military industry and the criminal justice/punishment industry was acknowledged in a 1994 Wall Street Journal article entitled "Making Crime Pay: The Cold War of the '90s": Parts of the defense establishment are cashing in, too, sensing a logical new line of business to help them offset military cutbacks. Westinghouse Electric Corp., Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Co, GDE Systems (a division of the old General Dynamics) and Alliant Techsystems Inc., for

instance, are pushing crimefighting equipment and have created special divisions to retool their defense technology. The article describes a conference sponsored by the National Institute of Justice, the research arm of the Justice Department, entitled "Law Enforcement Technology in the 21st Century". The secretary of defense was a major presenter at this conference, which explored topics such as, the role of the defense industry, particularly for dual use and conversion". Hot topics: defense-industry technology that could lower the level of violence involved in crime fighting. Sandia National Laboratories, for instance, is experimenting with a dense foam that can be sprayed at suspects, temporarily blinding and deafing-them under breathable bubbles. Stinger Corporation is working on 'smart guns' which will fire only for the owner, and retractable spiked barrier strips to unfurl in front of fleeing vehicles. Westinghouse is promoting the "smart car" in which minicomputers could be linked up with big mainframes at the police department! allowing for speedy booking of prisoners, as well as quick exchanges of information.

But an analysis of the relationship between the military and prison industrial complex is not only concerned with the transference of technologies from the military to the law enforcement industry. What may be even more important to our discussion is the extent to which both share important structural features. Both systems generate huge profits from processes of social destruction. Precisely that which is advantageous to those corporations, elected officials, and government agents who have obvious stakes in the expansion of these systems begets and devastation for poor and racially dominated communities in the United States and throughout the world. The transformation of imprisoned bodies-and they are in their majority bodies of color-into sources of profit who consume and also often produce all kinds of commodities, devours public funds, which might otherwise be available for social programs such as education, housing, childcare, recreation, and drug programs.

Punishment no longer constitutes a marginal area of the larger economy. Corporations producing all kinds of goods-from buildings to electronic devices and hygiene products-and providing all kinds of services-from meals to therapy and healthcare-are now directly involved in the punishment business. That is to say, companies that one would assume are far removed from the work of state punishment have developed major stakes in the perpetuation of a prison system whose historical obsolescence is therefore that much more difficult to recognize. It was during the decade of the 1980s that corporate ties to the punishment system became more extensive and entrenched than ever before. But throughout the history of the U.S. prison system, prisoners have always constituted a potential source of profit. For example, they have served as valuable subjects in

medical research, thus positioning the prison as a major link between universities and corporations.

During the post-World War II period, for example, medical experimentation on captive populations helped to hasten the development of the pharmaceutical industry. According to Allen Hornblum, the number of American medical research programs that relied on prisoners as subjects rapidly expanded as zealous doctors and researchers, grantmaking universities, and a burgeoning pharmaceutical industry raced for greater market share. Society's marginal people were, as they had always been, the grist for the medical-pharmaceutical mill, and prison inmates in particular would become the raw materials for postwar profit-making and academic advancement.

Hornblum's book, *Acres of Skin: Human Experiments at Holmesburg Prison*, highlights the career of research dermatologist Albert Kligman, who was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. Kligman "conducted hundreds of experiments on the men housed in Holmesburg Prison and, in the process, trained many researchers to use what were later recognized as unethical research methods".

When Dr. Kligman entered the aging prison he was awed by the potential it held for his research. In 1966, he recalled in a newspaper interview: All I saw before me were acres of skin. It was like a farmer seeing a fertile field for the first time." The hundreds of inmates walking aimlessly before him represented a unique opportunity for unlimited and undisturbed medical research. He described it in this interview as "an anthropoid colony, mainly healthy" under perfect control conditions.

By the time the experimentation program was shut down in 1974 and new federal regulations prohibited the use of prisoners as subjects for academic and corporate research, numerous cosmetics and skin creams had already been tested. Some of them had caused great harm to these subjects and could not be marketed in their original form. Johnson and Johnson, Ortho Pharmaceutical, and Dow Chemical are only a few of the corporations that reaped great material benefits from these experiments.

The potential impact of corporate involvement in punishment could have been glimpsed in the Kligman experiments at Holmesburg Prison as early as the 1950s and 1960s. However, it was not until the 1980s and the increasing globalization of capitalism that the massive surge of capital into the punishment economy began. The de-industrialization processes that resulted in plant shutdowns throughout the country created a huge pool of vulnerable human beings, a pool of people for whom no further jobs were available. This also brought more people into contact with social services, such as AFDC Aid to

Families with Dependent Children and other welfare agencies. At the same time, we experienced the privatization and corporatization of services that were previously run by government. The most obvious example of this privatization process was the transformation of government-run hospitals and health services into a gigantic complex of what are euphemistically called health maintenance organizations. In this sense we might also speak of a "medical industrial complex. In fact, there is a connection between one of the first private hospital companies, Hospital Corporation of America known today as HCA-and Corrections Corporation of America Board members of HCA, which today has two hundred hospitals and seventy outpatient surgery centers in twenty-four states, England, and Switzerland helped to start Correctional Corporations of America in 1983. In the context of an economy that was driven by an unprecedented pursuit of profit, no matter what the human cost, and the concomitant dismantling of the welfare state, poor people's abilities to survive became increasingly constrained by the looming presence of the prison. The massive prison-building project that began in the 1980s created the means of concentrating and managing what the capitalist system had implicitly declared to be a human surplus. In the meantime, elected officials and the dominant media justified the new draconian sentencing practices, sending more and more people to prison in the frenzied drive to build more and more prisons by arguing that this was the only way to make our communities safe from murderers, rapists, and robbers.

The media, especially television . . . have a vested interest in perpetuating the notion that crime is out of control. With new competition from cable networks and 24-hour news channels, TV news and programs about crime . . . have proliferated madly.

According to the Center for Media and Public Affairs, crime coverage was the number-one topic on the nightly news over the past decade. From 1990 to 1998, homicide rates dropped by half nationwide, but homicide stories on the three major networks rose almost fourfold.

During the same period when crime rates were declining, prison populations soared. According to a recent report by the U.S. Department of Justice, at the end of the year 2001, there were 2,100,146 people incarcerated in the United States. The terms and numbers as they appear in this government report require some preliminary discussion. I hesitate to make un-mediated use of such statistical evidence because it can discourage the very critical thinking that ought to be elicited by an understanding of the prison industrial complex. It is precisely the abstraction of numbers that plays such a central role in criminalizing those who experience the misfortune of imprisonment. There are many different kinds



of men and women in the prisons, jails, and INS and military detention centers, whose lives are erased by the Bureau of Justice Statistics figures. The numbers recognize no distinction between the woman who is imprisoned on drug conspiracy and the man who is in prison for killing his wife, a man who might actually end up spending less time behind bars than the woman.

With this observation in mind, the statistical breakdown is as follows: There were 1,324,465 people in "federal and state prisons," 15,852 in "territorial prisons," 631,240 in "local jails," 8,761 in "Immigration and Naturalization Service detention facilities," 2,436 in "military facilities," 1,912 in "jails in Indian country," and 108,965 in "juvenile facilities." In the ten years between 1990 and 2000, 351 new places of confinement were opened by states and more than 528,000 beds were added, amounting to 1,320 state facilities, representing an eighty-one percent increase. Moreover, there are currently 84 federal facilities and 264 private facilities.

The government reports, from which these figures are taken, the extent to which incarceration rates are slowing down. The Bureau of Justice Statistics report entitled "Prisoners in 2001" introduces the study by indicating that the Nation's prison population grew 1.1%, which was less than the average annual growth of 3.8% since year end 1995. During 2001 the prison population rose at the lowest rate since 1972 and had the smallest absolute increase since 1979." 1 1 However small the increase, these numbers themselves would defy the imagination were they not so neatly classified and rationally organized. To place these figures in historical perspective, try to imagine how people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries-and indeed for most of the twentieth century-who welcomed the new, and then quite extraordinary, system of punishment called the prison might have responded had they known that such a colossal number of lives would be eventually claimed permanently by this institution. I have already shared my own memories of a time three decades ago when the prison population was comprised of a tenth of the present numbers.

The prison industrial complex is fueled by privatization patterns that, it will be recalled, have also drastically transformed health care, education, and other areas of our lives. Moreover, the prison privatization trends-both the increasing presence of corporations in the prison economy and the establishment of private prisons-are reminiscent of the historical efforts to create a profitable punishment industry based on the new supply of "free" black male laborers in the aftermath of the Civil War. Steven drawing from the work of Norwegian criminologist Nils Christie, argues: [companies] that service the criminal system need sufficient quantities of raw materials to guarantee long-term growth . . . In the criminal justice field, the raw material is and industry will do what is

necessary to guarantee a steady supply. For the supply of prisoners to grow, criminal justice policies must ensure a sufficient number of incarcerated Americans regardless of whether crime is rising or the incarceration is necessary.

In the post-Civil War era, emancipated black men and women comprised an enormous reservoir of labor at a time when planters-and industrialists-could no longer rely on slavery, as they had done in the past. This labor became increasingly available for use by private agents precisely through the convict lease system, discussed earlier, and related systems such as debt peonage. Recall that in the aftermath of slavery, the penal population drastically shifted, so that in the South it rapidly became disproportionately black. This transition set the historical stage for the easy acceptance of disproportionately black prison populations today. According to 2002 Bureau of Justice Statistics, African-Americans as a whole now represent the majority of county, state, and federal prisoners, with a total of 803,400 black inmates, more than the total number of white inmates. If we include Latinos, we must add another 283,000 bodies of color.

As the rate of increase in the incarceration of black prisoners continues to rise, the racial composition of the incarcerated population is approaching the proportion of black prisoners to white during the era of the southern convict lease and county chain gang systems. Whether this human raw material is used for purposes of labor or for the consumption of commodities provided by a number of corporations directly implicated in the prison industrial complex, it is clear that black bodies are considered dispensable within the "free world" but as a major source of profit in the prison world.

The privatization characteristic of convict contemporary parallels, as companies such as CCA and Wackenhut literally run prisons for profit. At the beginning of the twenty first century, the numerous private prison companies operating in the United States own and operate facilities that hold 91,828 federal and state prisoners. Texas and Oklahoma can claim the number of people in private prisons. But New Mexico imprisons forty-four percent of its prison population in private facilities, and states such as Montana, Alaska, and Wyoming turned over more than twenty-five percent of their prison population to private companies. In arrangements reminiscent of the convict lease system, federal, state, and county governments pay private companies a fee for each inmate, which means that private companies have a stake in retaining prisoners as long as possible, and in their facilities filled. In the state of there are thirty-four government-owned, privately run jails in which approximately 5,500 out-of-state prisoners are incarcerated. These facilities generate about eighty million dollars annually for Texas.<sup>116</sup> One dramatic example involves Capital

Corrections Resources, Inc., which operates the Brazoria Detention Center, a government owned facility located forty miles outside of Houston, Texas. Brazoria came to public attention in August 1997 when a videotape broadcast on national television showed prisoners there being bitten by police dogs and viciously kicked in the groin and stepped on by guards. The inmates, forced to crawl on the floor, also were being shocked with stun guns, while guards-who referred to one black prisoner as "boy"-shouted, "Crawl faster!" In the aftermath of the release of this tape, the state of Missouri withdrew the 415 prisoners it housed in the Brazoria Detention Center. Although few references were made in the accompanying news reports to the indisputably racialized character of the guards' outrageous behavior, in the section of the Brazoria videotape that was shown on national television, black male prisoners were seen to be the primary targets of the guards' attacks.

The thirty-two-minute Brazoria tape, represented by the jail authorities as a training tape-allegedly showing corrections officers "what not to do"-was made in September 1996, after a guard allegedly smelled marijuana in the jail. Important evidence of the abuse that takes place behind the walls and gates of private prisons, it came to light in connection with a lawsuit filed by one of the prisoners who was bitten by a dog; he was suing Brazoria County for a hundred thousand dollars in damage. The Brazoria jailors' actions---which, according to prisoners there, were far worse than depicted on the tape-are indicative not only of the ways in which many prisoners throughout the country are treated, but of generalized attitudes toward people locked up in jails and prisons.

According to an Associated Press news story, the Missouri inmates, once they had been transferred back to their home state from Brazoria, told the Kansas City Star:

[G]uards at the Brazoria County Detention Center used cattle prods and other forms of intimidation to win respect and force prisoners to say, "I love Texas." "What you saw on tape wasn't a fraction of what happened that day," said inmate Louis Watkins, referring to the videotaped cell-block raid of September 18, 1996. "I've never seen anything like that in the movies".

In 2000 there were twenty-six for-profit prison corporations in the United States that operated approximately 150 facilities in twenty-eight states.<sup>119</sup> The largest of these companies, CCA and Wackenhut, control 76.4 percent of the private prison market globally. CCA is headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee, and until 2001, its largest shareholder was the multinational headquartered in Paris, Sodexho Alliance! which, through its U.S. subsidiary, Sodexho Marriott, provides catering services at nine hundred U.S. colleges and universities. The Prison Moratorium Project, an organization promoting youth activism, led a

protest campaign against Sodexho Marriott on campuses throughout the country. Among the campuses that dropped Sodexho were SUNY Albany, Goucher College, and James Madison University. Students had staged sit-ins and organized rallies on more than fifty campuses before Sodexho divested its holdings in CCA in fall 2001.

Though private prisons represent a fairly small proportion of prisons in the United States, the privatization model is quickly becoming the primary mode of organizing punishment in many other countries.<sup>121</sup> These companies have tried to take advantage of the expanding population of women prisoners, both in the United States and globally. In 1996, the first private women's prison was established by CCA in Melbourne, Australia. The government of Victoria adopted the U.S. model of privatization in which financing, design, construction, and ownership of the prison are awarded to one contractor and the government pays them back for construction over twenty years. This means that it is virtually impossible to remove the contractor because that contractor owns the prison.

As a direct consequence of the campaign organized by prison activist groups in Melbourne, Victoria withdrew the contract from CCA in 2001. However, a significant portion of Australia's prison system remains privatized. In the fall of 2002, the government of Queensland renewed Wackenhut's contract to run a 710-bed prison in Brisbane. The value of the five-year contract is \$66.5 million. In addition to the facility in Brisbane, Wackenhut manages eleven other prisons in Australia and New Zealand and furnishes health care services in eleven public prisons in the state of Victoria. In the press release announcing this contract renewal, Wackenhut describes its global business activities as follows:

WCC, a world leader in the privatized corrections industry, has contracts/awards to manage 60 correctional/detention facilities in North America, Europe, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand with a total of approximately 43,000 beds. WCC also provides prisoner transportation services, electronic monitoring for home detainees, correctional health care and mental health services. WCC offers government agencies a turnkey approach to the development of new correctional and mental health institutions that includes design, construction, financing, and operations.

But to understand the reach of the prison industrial complex, it is not enough to evoke the looming power of the private prison business. By definition, those companies court the state within and outside the United States for the purpose of obtaining prison contracts, bringing punishment and profit together in a menacing embrace. Still, this is only the most visible dimension of the prison industrial complex, and it should not lead us to the more comprehensive corporatization that is a feature of contemporary punishment. As compared to

earlier historical eras, the prison economy is no longer a small, identifiable, and containable set of markets. Many corporations, whose names are highly recognizable by "free world" consumers, have discovered new possibilities for expansion by selling their products to correctional facilities.

In the 1990s, the variety of corporations making money from prisons is truly dizzying, ranging from Dial Soap to Famous Amos cookies, from AT&T to health-care providers. In 1995 Dial Soap sold \$100,000 worth of its product to the New York City jail system alone. When VitaPro Foods of Montreal, Canada, contracted to supply inmates in the state of Texas with its soy-based meat substitute, the contract was worth \$34 million a year. Among the many businesses that advertise in the yellow pages on the corrections.com Web site are Archer Daniel Midlands, Nestle Food Service, Ace Hardware, Polaroid, Hewlett-Packard, RJ Reynolds, and the communications companies Sprint, AT&T, Verizon, and Ameritech. One conclusion to be drawn here is that even if private prison companies were prohibited-an unlikely prospect, indeed-the prison industrial complex and its many strategies for profit would remain relatively intact. Private prisons are direct sources of profit for the companies that run them, but public prisons have become so thoroughly saturated with the profit-producing products and services of private corporations that the distinction is not as meaningful as one might suspect. Campaigns against privatization that represent public prisons as an adequate alternative to private prisons can be misleading. A major reason for the profitability of private prisons consists in the nonunion labor they employ, and this important distinction should be highlighted. Nevertheless, public prisons are now equally tied to the corporate economy and constitute an ever-growing source of capitalist profit.

Extensive corporate investment in prisons has significantly raised the stakes for antiprison work. It means that serious antiprison activists must be willing to look much further in their analyses and organizing strategies than the actual institution of the prison. Prison reform rhetoric, which has always undergirded dominant critiques of the prison system, will not work in this new situation. If reform approaches have tended to bolster the permanence of the prison in the past, they certainly will not suffice to challenge the economic and political relationships that sustain the prison today. This means that in the era of the prison industrial complex, activists must pose hard questions about the relationship between global capitalism and the spread of U.S.-style prisons throughout the world.

The global prison economy is indisputably dominated by the United States. This economy not only consists of the products, services, and ideas that are directly marketed to other governments, but it also exercises an enormous

influence over the development of the style of state punishment throughout the world. One dramatic example can be seen in the opposition to Turkey's attempts to transform its prisons. In October 2000, prisoners in Turkey, many of whom are associated with left political movements, began a "death fast" as a way of dramatizing their opposition to the Turkish government's decision to introduce "IF-Type," or U.S.-style, prisons. Compared to the traditional dormitory-style facilities, these new prisons consist of one- to three-person cells, which are opposed by the prisoners because of the regimes of isolation they facilitate and because mistreatment and torture are far more likely in isolation. In December 2000, thirty prisoners were killed in clashes with security forces in twenty prisons.<sup>126</sup> As of September 2002, more than fifty prisoners have died of hunger, including two women, Gulnihal Yilmaz and Birsan Hosver, who were among the most recent prisoners to succumb to the death fast.

"IF-Type" prisons in Turkey were inspired by the recent emergence of the super-maximum security-or super max-prison in the United States, which presumes to control otherwise unmanageable prisoners by holding them in permanent solitary confinement and by subjecting them to varying degrees of sensory deprivation. In its 2002 World Report, Human Rights Watch paid particular attention to the concerns raised by the spread of ultra-modern "super-maximum" security prisons. Originally prevalent in the United States, . . . the supermax model was increasingly followed in other countries. Prisoners confined in such facilities spent an average of twenty-three hours a day in their cells, enduring extreme social isolation, enforced idleness, and extraordinarily limited recreational and educational opportunities. While prison authorities defended the use of supermaximum security facilities by asserting that they held only the most dangerous, disruptive, or escape prone inmates, few safeguards existed to prevent other prisoners from being arbitrarily or discriminatorily transferred to such facilities. In Australia, the inspector of custodial services found that some prisoners were held indefinitely in special high security units without knowing why or when their isolation would end. Among the many countries that have recently constructed super-maximum security prisons is South Africa. Construction was completed on the supermax prison in Kokstad, KwaZulu-Natal in August 2000, but it was not officially opened until May 2002. Ironically, the reason given for the delay was the competition for water between the prison and a new low-cost housing development. I am highlighting South Africa's embrace of the supermax because of the apparent ease with which this most repressive version of the U.S. prison has established itself in a country that has just recently initiated the project of building a democratic, nonracist, and nonsexist society. South Africa was the first country in the world to create

constitutional assurances for gay rights, and it immediately abolished the death penalty after the dismantling of apartheid. Nevertheless, following the example of the United States, the South African prison system is expanding and becoming more oppressive. The U.S. private prison company Wackenhut has secured several contracts with the South African government and by constructing private prisons further legitimizes the trend toward privatization (which affects the availability of basic services from utilities to education) in the economy as a whole.

South Africa's participation in the prison industrial complex constitutes a major impediment to the creation of a democratic society. In the United States, we have already felt the insidious and socially damaging effects of prison expansion. The dominant social expectation is that young black, Latino, Native American, and Southeast Asian men and increasingly women as well will move naturally from the free world into prison, where, it is assumed, they belong.

Despite the importance of antiracist social movements over the last half century, racism hides from view within institutional structures, and its most reliable refuge is the prison system.

The racist arrests of vast numbers of immigrants from Middle Eastern countries in the aftermath of the attacks on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent withholding of information about the names and numbers of people held in INS detention centers, some of which are owned and operated by private corporations, do not augur a democratic future. The uncontested detention of increasing numbers of undocumented immigrants from the global South has been aided considerably by the structures and ideologies associated with the prison industrial complex. We can hardly move in the direction of justice and equality in the twenty-first century if we are unwilling to recognize the enormous role played by this system in extending the power of racism and xenophobia.

Radical opposition to the global prison industrial complex sees the antiprison movement as a vital means of expanding the terrain on which the quest for democracy will unfold. This movement is thus antiracist, anticapitalist, antisexist, and antihomophobic. It calls for the abolition of the prison as the dominant mode of punishment but at the same time recognizes the need for genuine solidarity with the millions of men, women, and children who are behind bars. A major challenge of this movement is to do the work that will create more humane, habitable environments for people in prison without bolstering the permanence of the prison system. How, then, do we accomplish this balancing act of passionately attending to the needs of prisoners—calling for less violent conditions, an end to state sexual assault, improved physical and

mental health care, greater access to drug programs, better educational work opportunities, unionization of prison labor, more connections with families and communities, shorter or alternative sentencing and at the same time call for alternatives to sentencing altogether, no more prison construction, and abolitionist strategies that question the place of the prison in our future?



## Chapter 6. Abolitionists Alternatives

"Forget about reform; it's time to talk about abolishing jails and prisons in American society. Still-abolition? Where do you put the prisoners? The 'criminals'? What's the alternative? First, having no alternative at all would create less crime than the present criminal training centers do. Second, the only full alternative is building the kind of society that does not need prisons: A decent redistribution of power and income so as to put out the hidden fire of burning envy that now flames up in crimes of property-both burglary by the poor and embezzlement by the affluent. And a decent sense of community that can support, reintegrate and truly rehabilitate those who suddenly become filled with fury or despair, and that can face them not as objects-'criminals'-but as people who have committed illegal acts, as have almost all of us." -Arthur Waskow, Institute for Policy Studies

If jails and prisons are to be abolished, then what will replace them? This is the puzzling question that often interrupts further consideration of the prospects for abolition. Why should it be so difficult to imagine alternatives to our current system of incarceration? There are a number of reasons why we tend to balk at the idea that it may be possible to eventually create an entirely different-and perhaps more egalitarian-system of justice. First of all, we think of the current system, with its exaggerated dependence on imprisonment, as an unconditional standard and thus have great difficulty envisioning any other way of dealing with the more than two million people who are currently being held in the country's jails, prisons, youth facilities, and immigration detention centers. Ironically, even the anti-death penalty campaign tends to rely on the assumption that life imprisonment is the most rational alternative to capital punishment. As important as it may be to abolish the death penalty, we should be conscious of the way the contemporary campaign against capital punishment has a propensity to recapitulate the very historical patterns that led to the emergence of the prison as the dominant form of punishment. The death penalty has coexisted with the prison, though imprisonment was supposed to serve as an alternative to corporal and capital punishment. This is a major dichotomy. A critical engagement with this dichotomy would involve taking seriously the possibility of linking the goal of death penalty abolitionism with strategies for prison abolition.

It is true that if we focus myopically on the existing system-and perhaps this is

the problem that leads to the assumption that imprisonment is the only alternative to death-it is very hard to imagine a structurally similar system capable of handling such a vast population of lawbreakers. If, however, we shift our attention from the prison, perceived as an isolated institution, to the set of relationships that comprise the prison industrial complex, it may be easier to think about alternatives. In other words, a more complicated framework may yield more options than if we simply attempt to discover a single substitute for the prison system. The first step, then, would be to let go of the desire to discover one single alternative system of punishment that would occupy the same footprint as the prison system.

Since the 1980s, the prison system has become increasingly ensconced in the economic, political and ideological life of the United States and the transnational trafficking in U.S. commodities, culture, and ideas. Thus, the prison industrial complex is much more than the sum of all the jails and prisons in this country. It is a set of symbiotic relationships among correctional communities, transnational corporations, media conglomerates, guards' unions, and legislative and court agendas. If it is true that the contemporary meaning of punishment is fashioned through these relationships, then the most effective abolitionist strategies will contest these relationships and propose alternatives that pull them apart. What, then, would it mean to imagine a system in which punishment is not allowed to become the source of corporate profit? How can we imagine a society in which race and class are not primary determinants of punishment? Or one in which punishment itself is no longer the central concern in the making of justice?

An abolitionist approach that seeks to answer questions such as these would require us to imagine a constellation of alternative strategies and institutions, with the ultimate aim of removing the prison from the social and ideological landscapes of our society. In other words, we would not be looking for prison like substitutes for the prison, such as house arrest safeguarded by electronic surveillance bracelets. Rather, positing de-carceration as our overarching strategy, we would try to envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment-demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance.

The creation of new institutions that lay claim to the space now occupied by the prison can eventually start to crowd out the prison so that it would inhabit increasingly smaller areas of our social and psychic landscape. Schools can therefore be seen as the most powerful alternative to jails and prisons. Unless the current structures of violence are eliminated from schools in impoverished communities of color-including the presence of armed security guards and

police-and unless schools become places that encourage the joy of learning, these schools will remain the major conduits to prisons. The alternative would be to transform schools into vehicles for de-carceration. Within the health care system, it is important to emphasize the current scarcity of institutions available to poor people who suffer severe mental and emotional illnesses. There are currently more people with mental and emotional disorders in jails and prisons than in mental institutions. This call for new facilities designed to assist poor people should not be taken as an appeal to re-institute the old system of mental institutions, which were and in many cases still are-as repressive as the prisons. It is simply to suggest that the racial and class disparities in care available to the affluent and the deprived need to be eradicated, thus creating another vehicle for decarceration.

To reiterate, rather than try to imagine one single alternative to the existing system of incarceration, we might envision an array of alternatives that will require radical transformations of many aspects of our society. Alternatives that fail to address racism, male dominance, homophobia, class bias, and other structures of domination will not, in the final analysis, lead to decarceration and will not advance the goal of abolition.

It is within this context that it makes sense to consider the decriminalization of drug use as a significant component of a larger strategy to simultaneously oppose structures of racism within the criminal justice system and further the abolitionist agenda of decarceration. Thus, with respect to the project of challenging the role-played by the so-called War on Drugs in bringing huge numbers of people of color into the prison system, proposals to decriminalize drug use should be linked to the development of a constellation of free, community-based programs accessible to all people who wish to tackle their drug problems. This is not to suggest that all people who use drugs-or that only people who use illicit receive such help. However, anyone, regardless of economic status, who wishes to conquer drug addiction should be able to enter treatment programs.

Such institutions are, indeed, available to affluent communities. The most well known program is the 'Betty Ford', which, according to its web site, "accepts patients dependent on alcohol and other mood altering chemicals. Treatment services are open to all men and women eighteen years of age and older regardless of race, creed, sex, national origin, religion or sources of payment for care."<sup>130</sup> However, the cost for the first six days is \$1,175 per day, and after that \$525 per day. If a person requires thirty days of treatment, the cost would amount to \$19,000, almost twice the annual salary of a person working a minimum-wage job.

Poor people deserve to have access to effective, voluntary drug treatment programs. Like the Betty Ford program, their operation should not be under the auspices of the criminal justice system. As at the Ford Center, family members also should be permitted to participate. But unlike the Betty Ford program, they should be free of charge. For such programs to count as "abolitionist alternatives," they would not be linked-unlike existing programs, to which individuals are "sentenced"-to imprisonment as a last resort.

The campaign to decriminalize drug use-from marijuana to heroin-is international in scope and has led countries such as the Netherlands to revise their laws, legalizing personal use of such drugs as marijuana and hashish. The Netherlands also has a history of legalized sex work, another area in which there has been extensive campaigning for decriminalization. In the cases of drugs and sex work, decriminalization would simply require repeal of all those laws that individuals who use drugs and who work in the sex industry. The decriminalization of alcohol use serves as a historical example. In both these cases, decriminalization would advance the abolitionist strategy of decarceration-that is, the consistent reduction in the numbers of people who are sent to prison-with the ultimate aim of dismantling the prison system as the dominant mode of punishment. A further challenge for abolitionists is to identify other behaviors that might be appropriately decriminalized as preliminary steps toward abolition.

One obvious and very urgent aspect of the work of decriminalization is associated with the defense of immigrants' rights. The growing numbers of immigrants-especially since the attacks on September 11, 2001-who are incarcerated in immigrant detention centers, as well as in jails and prisons, can be halted by dismantling the processes that punish people for their failure to enter this country without documents. Current campaigns that call for the decriminalization of undocumented immigrants are making important contributions to the overall struggle against the prison industrial complex and are challenging the expansive reach of racism and male dominance. When women from countries in the southern region are imprisoned because they have entered this country to escape sexual violence, instead of being granted refugee status, this reinforces the generalized tendency to punish people who are persecuted in their intimate lives as a direct consequence of pandemics of violence that continue to be legitimized by ideological and legal structures.

Within the United States, the "battered women's syndrome" legal defense reflects an attempt to argue that a woman who kills an abusive spouse should not be convicted of murder. This defense has been abundantly criticized, both by detractors and proponents of feminism; the former do not want to recognize the

pervasiveness and dangers of intimate violence against women and the latter challenge the idea that the legitimacy of this defense resides in the assertion that those who kill their batterers are not responsible for their actions. The point feminist movements attempt to make-regardless of their specific positions on battered women's syndrome-is that violence against women is a pervasive and complicated social problem that cannot be solved by imprisoning women who fight back against their abusers. Thus, a vast range of alternative strategies of minimizing violence against women-within intimate relationships and within relationships to the state should be the focus of our concern.

The alternatives toward which I have gestured thus far and this is only a small selection of examples, which can also include job and living wage programs, alternatives to the disestablished welfare program, community-based recreation, and many more-are associated both directly and indirectly with the existing system of criminal justice. But, however mediated their relation might be to the current system of jails and prisons, these alternatives are attempting to reverse the impact of the prison industrial complex on our world. As they contest racism and other networks of social domination, their implementation will certainly advance the abolitionist agenda of decarceration.

Creating agendas of decarceration and broadly casting the net of alternatives helps us to do the ideological work of pulling apart the conceptual link between crime and punishment. This more nuanced understanding of the social role of the punishment system requires us to give up our usual way of thinking about punishment as an inevitable consequence of crime. We would recognize that "punishment" does not follow from "crime" in the neat and logical sequence offered by discourses that insist on the justice of imprisonment, but rather punishment-primarily through imprisonment (and sometimes death)-is linked to the agendas of politicians, the profit drive of corporations, and media representations of crime. Imprisonment is associated with the racialization of those most likely to be punished. It is associated with their class and, as we have seen, gender structures the punishment system as well. If we insist that abolitionist alternatives trouble these relationships, that they strive to disarticulate crime and punishment, race and punishment, class and punishment, and gender and punishment, then our focus must not rest only on the prison system as an isolated institution but must also be directed at all the social relations that support the permanence of the prison.

An attempt to create a new conceptual terrain for imagining alternatives to imprisonment involves the ideological work of questioning why "criminals" have been constituted as a class and, indeed, a class of human beings undeserving of the civil and human rights accorded to others. Radical

criminologists have long pointed out that the category "lawbreakers" is far greater than the category of individuals who are deemed criminals since, many point out, almost all of us have broken the law at one time or another. Even President Bill Clinton admitted that he had smoked marijuana at one time, insisting, though, that he did not inhale. However, acknowledged disparities in the intensity of police surveillance-as indicated by the present-day currency of the term "racial profiling" which ought to cover far more territory than "driving while black or brown"-account in part for racial and class-based disparities in arrest and imprisonment rates. Thus, if we are willing to take seriously the consequences of a racist and class-biased justice system, we will reach the conclusion that enormous numbers of people are in prison simply because they are, for example, black, Chicano, Vietnamese, Native American or poor, regardless of their ethnic background. They are sent to prison, not so much because of the crimes they may have indeed committed, but largely because their communities have been criminalized. Thus, programs for decriminalization will not only have to address specific activities that have been criminalized-such as drug use and sex work-but also criminalized populations and communities.

It is against the backdrop of these more broadly conceived abolitionist alternatives that it makes sense to take up the question of radical transformations within the existing justice system. Thus, aside from minimizing, through various strategies, the kinds of behaviors that will bring people into contact with the police and justice systems, there is the question of how to treat those who assault the rights and bodies of others. Many organizations and individuals both in the United States and other countries offer alternative modes of making justice. In limited instances, some governments have attempted to implement alternatives that range from conflict resolution to restorative or reparative justice. Such scholars as Herman Bianchi have suggested that crime needs to be defined in terms of tort and, instead of criminal law, should be reparative law. In his words, "[The lawbreaker] is thus no longer an evil-minded man or woman, but simply a debtor, a liable person whose human duty is to take responsibility for his or her acts, and to assume the duty of repair".

There is a growing body of literature on reshaping systems of justice around strategies of reparation, rather than retribution, as well as a growing body of experiential evidence of the advantages of these approaches to justice and of the democratic possibilities they promise. Instead of rehearsing the numerous debates that have emerged over the last decades-including the most persistent question, "What will happen to the murderers and rapists?"-I will conclude with a story of one of the most dramatic successes of these experiments in reconciliation. I refer to the case of Amy Biehl, the white Fulbright scholar from

Newport Beach, California, who was killed by young South African men in Guguletu, a black township in Capetown, South Africa.

In 1993, when South Africa was on the cusp of its transition, Amy Biehl was devoting a significant amount of her time as a foreign student to the work of rebuilding South Africa. Nelson Mandela had been freed in 1990, but had not yet been elected president. On August 25, Biehl was driving several black friends to their home in Guguletu when a crowd shouting antiwhite slogans confronted her, and some of them stoned and stabbed her to death. Four of the men participating in the attack were convicted of her murder and sentenced to eighteen years in prison. In 1997, Linda and Peter Biehl-Amy's mother and father-decided to support the amnesty petition the men presented to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The four apologized to the Biehls and were released in July 1998. Two of them-Easy Nofemela and Ntobeko Peni-later met with the Biehls, who, despite much pressure to the contrary, agreed to see them. According to Nofemela, he wanted to say more about his own sorrow for killing their daughter than what had been possible during Truth and Reconciliation hearings. "I know you lost a person you love," he says he told them during that meeting. "I want you to forgive me and take me as your child."

The Biehls, who had established the Amy Biehl Foundation in the aftermath of their daughter's death, asked Nofemela and Peni to work at the Guguletu branch of the foundation. Nofemela became an instructor in an after-school sports program and Peni an administrator. In June 2002, they accompanied Linda Biehl to New York, where they all spoke before the American Family Therapy Academy on reconciliation and restorative justice. In a Boston Globe interview, Linda Biehl, when asked how she now feels about the men who killed her daughter, said, "I have a lot of love for them." After Peter Biehl died in 2002, she bought two plots of land for them in memory of her husband so that Nofemela and Peni can build their own homes. A few days after the September 11 attacks, the Biehls had been asked to speak at a synagogue in their community. According to Peter Biehl, "We tried to explain that sometimes it pays to shut up and listen to what other people have to say, to ask: 'Why do these terrible things happen?' instead of simply reacting.

**Murray Bookchin**

# **The Communalist Project**

**2002**

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Whether the twenty-first century will be the most radical of times or the most reactionary – or will simply lapse into a gray era of dismal mediocrity – will depend overwhelmingly upon the kind of social movement and program that social radicals create out of the theoretical, organizational, and political wealth that has accumulated during the past two centuries of the revolutionary era.

The direction we select, from among several intersecting roads of human development, may well determine the future of our species for centuries to come. As long as this irrational society endangers us with nuclear and biological weapons, we cannot ignore the possibility that the entire human enterprise may come to a devastating end. Given the exquisitely elaborate technical plans that the military-industrial complex has devised, the self-extermination of the human species must be included in the futuristic scenarios that, at the turn of the millennium, the mass media are projecting – the end of a human future as such.

Lest these remarks seem too apocalyptic, I should emphasize that we *also* live in an era when human creativity, technology, and imagination have the capability to produce extraordinary material achievements and to endow us with societies that allow for a degree of freedom that far and away exceeds the most dramatic and emancipatory visions projected by social theorists such as Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Karl Marx, and Peter Kropotkin.<sup>[1]</sup> Many thinkers of the postmodern age have obtusely singled out science and technology as the principal threats to human well-being, yet few disciplines have imparted to humanity such a stupendous knowledge of the innermost secrets of matter and life, or provided our species better with the ability to alter every important feature of reality and to improve the well-being of human and nonhuman life-forms.

We are thus in a position either to follow a path toward a grim “end of history,” in which a banal succession of vacuous events replaces genuine progress, or to move on to a path toward the *true* making of history, in which humanity genuinely progresses toward a rational world. We are in a position to choose between an ignominious finale, possibly including the catastrophic nuclear oblivion of history itself, and history’s rational fulfillment in a free, materially abundant society in an aesthetically crafted environment.

Notwithstanding the technological marvels that competing enterprises of the ruling class (that is, the bourgeoisie) are developing in order to achieve

hegemony over one another, little of a subjective nature that exists in the existing society can redeem it. Precisely at a time when we, as a species, are capable of producing the means for amazing objective advances and improvements in the human condition and in the nonhuman natural world – advances that could make for a free and rational society – we stand almost naked morally before the onslaught of social forces that may very well lead to our physical immolation. Prognoses about the future are understandably very fragile and are easily distrusted. Pessimism has become very widespread, as capitalist social relations become more deeply entrenched in the human mind than ever before, and as culture regresses appallingly, almost to a vanishing point. To most people today, the hopeful and very radical certainties of the twenty-year period between the Russian Revolution of 1917-18 and the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 seem almost naïve.

Yet our decision to create a better society, and our choice of the way to do it, must come *from within ourselves*, without the aid of a deity, still less a mystical “force of nature” or a charismatic leader. If we choose the road toward a better future, our choice must be the consequence of our ability – and *ours alone* – to learn from the material lessons of the past and to appreciate the real prospects of the future. We will need to have recourse, not to ghostly vagaries conjured up from the murky hell of superstition or, absurdly, from the couloirs of the academy, but to the innovative attributes that make up our very humanity and the *essential* features that account for natural and social development, as opposed to the social pathologies and accidental events that have sidetracked humanity from its self-fulfillment in consciousness and reason. Having brought history to a point where nearly *everything* is possible, at least of a material nature – and having left behind a past that was permeated ideologically by mystical and religious elements produced by the human imagination – we are faced with a new challenge, one that has never before confronted humanity. We must consciously create our own world, not according to demonic fantasies, mindless customs, and destructive prejudices, but according to the canons of *reason, reflection, and discourse* that uniquely belong to our own species.

What factors should be decisive in making our choice? First, of great significance is the immense accumulation of social and political experience that is available to revolutionaries today, a storehouse of knowledge that, properly conceived, could be used to avoid the terrible errors that our predecessors made and to spare humanity the terrible plagues of failed revolutions in the past. Of indispensable importance is the potential for a new theoretical springboard that has been created by the history of ideas, one that provides the

means to catapult an emerging radical movement beyond existing social conditions into a future that fosters humanity's emancipation.

But we must also be fully aware of the scope of the problems that we face. We must understand with complete clarity *where* we stand in the development of the prevailing capitalist order, and we have to grasp *emergent* social problems and address them in the program of a new movement. Capitalism is unquestionably the most dynamic society ever to appear in history. By definition, to be sure, it *always* remains a system of commodity exchange in which objects that are made for sale and profit pervade and mediate most human relations. Yet capitalism is also a highly *mutable* system, continually advancing the brutal maxim that whatever enterprise does not grow at the expense of its rivals must die. Hence "growth" and perpetual change become the very laws of life of capitalist existence. This means that capitalism *never* remains permanently in only one form; it must *always* transform the institutions that arise from its basic social relations.

Although capitalism became a dominant society only in the past few centuries, it long existed on the periphery of earlier societies: in a largely commercial form, structured around trade between cities and empires; in a craft form throughout the European Middle Ages; in a hugely industrial form in our own time; and if we are to believe recent seers, in an informational form in the coming period. It has created not only new technologies but also a great variety of economic and social structures, such as the small shop, the factory, the huge mill, and the industrial and commercial complex. Certainly the capitalism of the Industrial Revolution has not completely disappeared, any more than the isolated peasant family and small craftsman of a still earlier period have been consigned to complete oblivion. Much of the past is always incorporated into the present; indeed, as Marx insistently warned, there is no "pure capitalism," and none of the earlier forms of capitalism fade away until radically new social relations are established and become overwhelmingly dominant. But today capitalism, even as it coexists with and utilizes precapitalist institutions for its own ends (see Marx's *Grundrisse* for this dialectic), now reaches into the suburbs and the countryside with its shopping malls and newly styled factories. Indeed, it is by no means inconceivable that one day it will reach beyond our planet. In any case, it has produced not only new commodities to create and feed new wants but new social and cultural *issues*, which in turn have given rise to new supporters and antagonists of the existing system. The famous first part of Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*, in which they celebrate capitalism's wonders, would have to be periodically rewritten to keep pace with the achievements – as well as the

horrors – produced by the bourgeoisie’s development.

One of the most striking features of capitalism today is that in the Western world the highly simplified two-class structure – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – that Marx and Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto*, predicted would become dominant under “mature” capitalism (and we have yet to determine what “mature,” still less “late” or “moribund” capitalism actually is) has undergone a process of reconfiguration. The conflict between wage labor and capital, while it has by no means disappeared, nonetheless lacks the *all-embracing importance* that it possessed in the past. Contrary to Marx’s expectations, the industrial working class is now dwindling in numbers and is steadily losing its traditional identity as a class – which by no means excludes it from a potentially broader and perhaps more extensive conflict of society as a whole against capitalist social relations. Present-day culture, social relations, cityscapes, modes of production, agriculture, and transportation have remade the traditional proletariat, upon which syndicalists and Marxists were overwhelmingly, indeed almost mystically focused, into a largely petty-bourgeois stratum whose mentality is marked by its own bourgeois utopianism of “consumption for the sake of consumption.” We can foresee a time when the proletarian, whatever the color of his or her collar or place on the assembly line, will be completely replaced by automated and even miniaturized means of production that are operated by a few white-coated manipulators of machines and by computers.

By the same token, the living standards of the traditional proletariat and its material expectations (no small factor in the shaping of social consciousness!) have changed enormously, soaring within only a generation or two from near poverty to a comparatively high degree of material affluence. Among the children and grandchildren of former steel and automobile workers and coal miners, who have no proletarian class identity, a college education has replaced the high school diploma as emblematic of a new class status. In the United States once-opposing class interests have converged to a point that almost 50 percent of American households own stocks and bonds, while a huge number are proprietors of one kind or another, possessing their own homes, gardens, and rural summer retreats.

Given these changes, the stern working man or woman, portrayed in radical posters of the past with a flexed, highly muscular arm holding a bone-crushing hammer, has been replaced by the genteel and well-mannered (so-called) “working middle class.” The traditional cry “Workers of the world, unite!” in its old historical sense becomes ever more meaningless. The class-consciousness of the proletariat, which Marx tried to awaken in *The Communist Manifesto*,

has been hemorrhaging steadily and in many places has virtually disappeared. The more existential class struggle has not been eliminated, to be sure, any more than the bourgeoisie could eliminate gravity from the existing human condition, but unless radicals today become aware of the fact that it has been *narrowed* down largely to the individual factory or office, they will fail to see that a new, perhaps more expansive form of social consciousness can emerge in the generalized struggles that face us. Indeed, this form of social consciousness can be given a refreshingly new meaning as the concept of the rebirth of the *citoyen* – a concept so important to the Great Revolution of 1789 and its more broadly humanistic sentiment of sociality that it became the form of address among later revolutionaries summoned to the barricades by the heraldic crowing of the red French rooster.

Seen as a whole, the social condition that capitalism has produced today stands very much at odds with the simplistic class prognoses advanced by Marx and by the revolutionary French syndicalists. After the Second World War, capitalism underwent an enormous transformation, creating *broad new social issues* with extraordinary rapidity, issues that went beyond traditional proletarian demands for improved wages, hours, and working conditions: notably environmental, gender, hierarchical, civic, and democratic issues. Capitalism, in effect, has *generalized* its threats to humanity, particularly with climatic changes that may alter the very face of the planet, oligarchical institutions of a global scope, and rampant urbanization that radically corrodes the civic life basic to grassroots politics.

Hierarchy, today, is becoming as pronounced an issue as class – as witness the extent to which many social analyses have singled out managers, bureaucrats, scientists, and the like as emerging, ostensibly dominant groups. New and elaborate gradations of status and interests count today to an extent that they did not in the recent past; they blur the conflict between wage labor and capital that was once so central, clearly defined, and militantly waged by traditional socialists. Class categories are now intermingled with hierarchical categories based on race, gender, sexual preference, and certainly national or regional differences. *Status differentiations*, characteristic of hierarchy, tend to converge with class differentiations, and a more *all-inclusive* capitalistic world is emerging in which ethnic, national, and gender differences often surpass the importance of class differences in the public eye. This phenomenon is not entirely new: in the First World War countless German socialist workers cast aside their earlier commitment to the red flags of proletarian unity in favor of the national flags of their well-fed and parasitic rulers and went on to plunge bayonets into the bodies of French and Russian socialist workers – as they did,

in turn, under the national flags of their own oppressors.

At the same time capitalism has produced a new, perhaps paramount contradiction: the clash between an economy based on unending growth and the desiccation of the natural environment.<sup>[2]</sup> This issue and its vast ramifications can no more be minimized, let alone dismissed, than the need of human beings for food or air. At present the most promising struggles in the West, where socialism was born, seem to be waged less around income and working conditions than around nuclear power, pollution, deforestation, urban blight, education, health care, community life, and the oppression of people in underdeveloped countries – as witness the (albeit sporadic) antiglobalization upsurges, in which blue- and white-collar “workers” march in the same ranks with middle-class humanitarians and are motivated by common social concerns. Proletarian combatants become indistinguishable from middle-class ones. Burly workers, whose hallmark is a combative militancy, now march behind “bread and puppet” theater performers, often with a considerable measure of shared playfulness. Members of the working and middle classes now wear many different social hats, so to speak, challenging capitalism obliquely as well as directly on cultural as well as economic grounds.

Nor can we ignore, in deciding what direction we are to follow, the fact that capitalism, if it is not checked, will in the future – and not necessarily the very distant future – *differ appreciably from the system we know today*. Capitalist development can be expected to vastly alter the social horizon in the years ahead. Can we suppose that factories, offices, cities, residential areas, industry, commerce, and agriculture, let alone moral values, aesthetics, media, popular desires, and the like will not change immensely before the twenty-first century is out? In the past century, capitalism, above all else, has *broadened* social issues – indeed, the historical social question of how a humanity, divided by classes and exploitation, will create a society based on equality, the development of authentic harmony, and freedom – to include those whose resolution was barely foreseen by the liberatory social theorists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Our age, with its endless array of “bottom lines” and “investment choices,” now threatens *to turn society itself into a vast and exploitative marketplace*.<sup>[3]</sup>

The public with which the progressive socialist had to deal is also changing radically and will continue to do so in the coming decades. To *lag* in understanding behind the changes that capitalism is introducing and the new or broader contradictions it is producing would be to commit the recurringly disastrous error that led to the defeat of nearly all revolutionary upsurges in

the past two centuries. Foremost among the lessons that a new revolutionary movement must learn from the past is that it must *win over broad sectors of the middle class* to its new populist program. No attempt to replace capitalism with socialism ever had or will have the *remotest chance of success* without the aid of the discontented petty bourgeoisie, whether it was the intelligentsia and peasantry-in-uniform of the Russian Revolution or the intellectuals, farmers, shopkeepers, clerks, and managers in industry and even in government in the German upheavals of 1918-21. Even during the most promising periods of past revolutionary cycles, the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, the German Social Democrats, and Russian Communists *never* acquired absolute majorities in their respective legislative bodies. So-called “proletarian revolutions” were *invariably* minority revolutions, usually even *within the proletariat itself*, and those that succeeded (often briefly, before they were subdued or drifted historically out of the revolutionary movement) depended overwhelmingly on the fact that the bourgeoisie lacked active support among its own military forces or was simply socially demoralized.

Given the changes that we are witnessing and those that are still taking form, social radicals can no longer oppose the predatory (as well as immensely creative) capitalist system by using the ideologies and methods that were born in the first Industrial Revolution, when a factory proletariat seemed to be the principal antagonist of a textile plant owner. (Nor can we use ideologies that were spawned by conflicts that an impoverished peasantry used to oppose feudal and semifeudal landowners.) None of the professedly anticapitalist ideologies of the past – Marxism, anarchism, syndicalism, and more generic forms of socialism – retain the same relevance that they had at an earlier stage of capitalist development and in an earlier period of technological advance. Nor can any of them hope to encompass the multitude of new issues, opportunities, problems, and interests that capitalism has repeatedly created over time.

Marxism was the most comprehensive and coherent effort to produce a systematic form of socialism, emphasizing the material as well as the subjective historical preconditions of a new society. This project, in the present era of precapitalist economic decomposition and of intellectual confusion, relativism, and subjectivism, must never surrender to the new barbarians, many of whom find their home in what was once a barrier to ideological regression – the academy. We owe much to Marx’s attempt to provide us with a coherent and stimulating analysis of the commodity and commodity relations, to an activist philosophy, a systematic social theory, an objectively grounded or “scientific” concept of historical development, and a flexible political strategy. Marxist political ideas were eminently relevant to the needs of a terribly disoriented

proletariat and to the particular oppressions that the industrial bourgeoisie inflicted upon it in England in the 1840s, somewhat later in France, Italy, and Germany, and very presciently in Russia in the last decade of Marx's life. Until the rise of the populist movement in Russia (most famously, the *Narodnaya Volya*), Marx expected the emerging proletariat to become the great majority of the population in Europe and North America, and to inevitably engage in revolutionary class war as a result of capitalist exploitation and immiseration. And especially between 1917 and 1939, long after Marx's death, Europe was indeed beleaguered by a mounting class war that reached the point of outright workers' insurrections. In 1917, owing to an extraordinary confluence of circumstances – particularly with the outbreak of the First World War, which rendered several quasi-feudal European social systems terribly unstable – Lenin and the Bolsheviks tried to use (but greatly altered) Marx's writings in order to take power in an economically backward empire, whose size spanned eleven time zones across Europe and Asia.<sup>[4]</sup>

But for the most part, as we have seen, Marxism's economic insights belonged to an era of emerging factory capitalism in the nineteenth century. Brilliant as a theory of the material *preconditions* for socialism, it did not address the ecological, civic, and subjective forces or the *efficient* causes that could impel humanity into a movement for revolutionary social change. On the contrary, for nearly a century Marxism stagnated theoretically. Its theorists were often puzzled by developments that have passed it by and, since the 1960s, have mechanically appended environmentalist and feminist ideas to its formulaic *ouvrierist* outlook.

By the same token, anarchism – which, I believe, represents in its *authentic* form a highly individualistic outlook that fosters a radically unfettered lifestyle, often as a substitute for mass action – is far better suited to articulate a Proudhonian single-family peasant and craft world than a modern urban and industrial environment. I myself once used this political label, but further thought has obliged me to conclude that, its often-refreshing aphorisms and insights notwithstanding, it is simply not a social theory. Its foremost theorists celebrate its seeming openness to eclecticism and the liberatory effects of “paradox” or even “contradiction,” to use Proudhonian hyperbole. Accordingly, and without prejudice to the earnestness of many anarchistic practices, a case can be made that many of the ideas of social and economic reconstruction that in the past have been advanced in the name of “anarchy” were often drawn from Marxism (including my own concept of “post-scarcity,” which understandably infuriated many anarchists who read my essays on the subject). Regrettably, the use of socialistic terms has often prevented anarchists from telling us or



even understanding clearly *what* they are: individualists whose concepts of autonomy originate in a strong commitment to *personal* liberty rather than to *social* freedom, or socialists committed to a structured, institutionalized, and responsible form of social organization. Anarchism's idea of self-regulation (*auto-nomos*) led to a radical celebration of Nietzsche's all-absorbing will. Indeed the history of this "ideology" is peppered with idiosyncratic acts of defiance that verge on the eccentric, which not surprisingly have attracted many young people and aesthetes.

In fact anarchism represents the most extreme formulation of liberalism's ideology of unfettered autonomy, culminating in a celebration of heroic acts of defiance of the state. Anarchism's mythos of *self-regulation* (*auto nomos*) – the radical assertion of the *individual over or even against society* and *the personalistic absence of responsibility for the collective welfare* – leads to a radical affirmation of the all-powerful will so central to Nietzsche's ideological peregrinations. Some self-professed anarchists have even denounced mass social action as futile and alien to their private concerns and made a fetish of what the Spanish anarchists called *grupismo*, a small-group mode of action that is highly personal rather than social.

Anarchism has often been confused with revolutionary syndicalism, a highly *structured* and well-developed *mass* form of libertarian trade unionism that, unlike anarchism, was long committed to democratic procedures,<sup>[5]</sup> to discipline in action, and to organized, long-range revolutionary practice to eliminate capitalism. Its affinity with anarchism stems from its strong libertarian bias, but bitter antagonisms between anarchists and syndicalists have a long history in nearly every country in Western Europe and North America, as witness the tensions between the Spanish CNT and the anarchist groups associated with *Tierra y Libertad* early in the twentieth century; between the revolutionary syndicalist and anarchist groups in Russia during the 1917 revolution; and between the IWW in the United States and Sweden, to cite the more illustrative cases in the history of the libertarian labor movement. More than one American anarchist was affronted by Joe Hill's defiant maxim on the eve of his execution in Utah: "Don't mourn – Organize!" Alas, small groups were not quite the "organizations" that Joe Hill, or the grossly misunderstood idol of the Spanish libertarian movement, Salvador Seguí, had in mind. It was largely the shared word *libertarian* that made it possible for somewhat confused anarchists to coexist in the same organization with revolutionary syndicalists. It was often verbal confusion rather than ideological clarity that made possible the coexistence in Spain of the FAI, as represented by the anarchist Federica Montseny, with the syndicalists, as represented by

Juan Prieto, in the CNT-FAI, a truly confused organization if ever there was one.

Revolutionary syndicalism's destiny has been tied in varying degrees to a pathology called *douvrierisme*, or "workerism," and whatever philosophy, theory of history, or political economy it possesses has been borrowed, often piecemeal and indirectly, from Marx – indeed, Georges Sorel and many other professed revolutionary syndicalists in the early twentieth century expressly regarded themselves as Marxists and even more expressly eschewed anarchism. Moreover, revolutionary syndicalism lacks a strategy for social change beyond the general strike, which revolutionary uprisings such as the famous October and November general strikes in Russia during 1905 proved to be stirring but ultimately ineffectual. Indeed, as invaluable as the general strike may be as a prelude to direct confrontation with the state, they decidedly do not have the mystical capacity that revolutionary syndicalists assigned to them as means for social change. Their limitations are striking evidence that, as episodic forms of direct action, general strikes are not equatable with revolution nor even with profound social changes, which presuppose a mass movement and require years of gestation and a clear sense of direction. Indeed, revolutionary syndicalism exudes a typical *ouvrierist* anti-intellectualism that disdains attempts to formulate a purposive revolutionary direction and a reverence for proletarian "spontaneity" that, at times, has led it into highly self-destructive situations. Lacking the means for an analysis of their situation, the Spanish syndicalists (and anarchists) revealed only a minimal capacity to understand the situation in which they found themselves after their victory over Franco's forces in the summer of 1936 and no capacity to take "the next step" to institutionalize a workers' and peasants' form of government.

What these observations add up to is that Marxists, revolutionary syndicalists, and authentic anarchists all have a fallacious understanding of *politics*, which should be conceived as the civic arena and the institutions by which people democratically and directly manage their community affairs. Indeed the Left has repeatedly mistaken statecraft for politics by its persistent failure to understand that the two are not only radically different but exist in radical tension – in fact, opposition – to each other.<sup>[6]</sup> As I have written elsewhere, historically politics did not emerge from the state – an apparatus whose professional machinery is designed to dominate and facilitate the exploitation of the citizenry in the interests of a privileged class. Rather, politics, almost by definition, is the active engagement of free citizens in the handling their municipal affairs and in their defense of its freedom. One can almost say that politics is the "embodiment" of what the French revolutionaries

of the 1790s called *civicisme*. Quite properly, in fact, the word *politics* itself contains the Greek word for “city” or *polis*, and its use in classical Athens, together with *democracy*, connoted the *direct* governing of the city by its citizens. Centuries of civic degradation, marked particularly by the formation of classes, were necessary to produce the state and its corrosive absorption of the political realm.

A defining feature of the Left is precisely the Marxist, anarchist, and revolutionary syndicalist belief that *no distinction exists*, in principle, between the political realm and the statist realm. By emphasizing the nation-state – including a “workers’ state” – as the locus of economic as well as political power, Marx (as well as libertarians) notoriously failed to demonstrate how workers could *fully* and *directly* control such a state without the mediation of an empowered bureaucracy and essentially statist (or equivalently, in the case of libertarians, governmental) institutions. As a result, the Marxists unavoidably saw the political realm, which it designated a “workers’ state,” as a repressive entity, ostensibly based on the interests of a single class, the proletariat.

Revolutionary syndicalism, for its part, emphasized *factory control* by workers’ committees and confederal economic councils as the locus of social authority, thereby simply bypassing any popular institutions that existed outside the economy. Oddly, this was economic determinism with a vengeance, which, tested by the experiences of the Spanish revolution of 1936, proved completely ineffectual. A vast domain of real governmental power, from military affairs to the administration of justice, fell to the Stalinists and the liberals of Spain, who used their authority to subvert the libertarian movement – and with it, the revolutionary achievements of the syndicalist workers in July 1936, or what was dourly called by one novelist “The Brief Summer of Spanish Anarchism.”

As for anarchism, Bakunin expressed the typical view of its adherents in 1871 when he wrote that the new social order could be created “only through the development and organization of the nonpolitical or antipolitical social power of the working class in city and country,” thereby rejecting with characteristic inconsistency the very municipal politics which he sanctioned in Italy around the same year. Accordingly, anarchists have long regarded every *government* as *astate* and condemned it accordingly – a view that is a recipe for the elimination of *any* organized social life whatever. While the *state* is the instrument by which an *oppressive* and *exploitative* class regulates and coercively controls the behavior of an exploited class by a ruling class, a *government* – or better still, a *polity* – is an ensemble of institutions designed to

deal with the problems of consociational life in an orderly and hopefully fair manner. Every institutionalized association that constitutes a system for handling public affairs – with or without the presence of a state – is *necessarily* a government. By contrast, every state, although necessarily a form of government, is a force for class repression and control. Annoying as it must seem to Marxists and anarchist alike, the cry for a *constitution*, for a responsible and a responsive government, and even for *law* or *nomos* has been clearly articulated – and committed to print! – by the oppressed for centuries against the capricious rule exercised by monarchs, nobles, and bureaucrats. The libertarian opposition to law, not to speak of government as such, has been as silly as the image of a snake swallowing its tail. What remains in the end is nothing but a retinal afterimage that has no existential reality.

The issues raised in the preceding pages are of more than academic interest. As we enter the twenty-first century, social radicals need a socialism – libertarian and revolutionary – that is neither an extension of the peasant-craft “associationism” that lies at the core of anarchism nor the proletarianism that lies at the core of revolutionary syndicalism and Marxism. However fashionable the traditional ideologies (particularly anarchism) may be among young people today, a truly progressive socialism that is informed by libertarian as well as Marxian ideas but transcends these older ideologies must provide intellectual leadership. For political radicals today to simply resuscitate Marxism, anarchism, or revolutionary syndicalism and endow them with ideological immortality would be obstructive to the development of a relevant radical movement. A *new* and comprehensive revolutionary outlook is needed, one that is capable of systematically addressing the generalized issues that may potentially bring *most* of society into opposition to an ever-evolving and changing capitalist system.

The clash between a predatory society based on *indefinite expansion* and nonhuman nature has given rise to an ensemble of ideas that has emerged as the explication of the present social crisis and meaningful radical change. Social ecology, a coherent vision of social development that intertwines the mutual impact of hierarchy *and* class on the civilizing of humanity, has for decades argued that we must reorder social relations so that humanity can live in a protective balance with the natural world.<sup>[7]</sup>

Contrary to the simplistic ideology of “eco-anarchism,” social ecology maintains that an ecologically oriented society can be progressive rather than regressive, placing a strong emphasis not on primitivism, austerity, and denial but on material pleasure and ease. If a society is to be capable of making life not only vastly enjoyable for its members but also leisurely enough that they

can engage in the intellectual and cultural self-cultivation that is necessary for creating civilization and a vibrant political life, it must not denigrate technics and science but bring them into accord with visions human happiness and leisure. Social ecology is an ecology not of hunger and material deprivation but of plenty; it seeks the creation of a rational society in which waste, indeed excess, will be controlled by a new system of values; and when or if shortages arise as a result of irrational behavior, popular assemblies will establish rational standards of consumption by democratic processes. In short, social ecology favors management, plans, and regulations formulated democratically by popular assemblies, not freewheeling forms of behavior that have their origin in individual eccentricities.

It is my contention that Communalism is the overarching political category most suitable to encompass the fully thought out and systematic views of social ecology, including libertarian municipalism and dialectical naturalism.<sup>[8]</sup> As an ideology, Communalism draws on the best of the older Left ideologies – Marxism and anarchism, more properly the libertarian socialist tradition – while offering a wider and more relevant scope for our time. From Marxism, it draws the basic project of formulating a rationally systematic and coherent socialism that integrates philosophy, history, economics, and politics. Avowedly dialectical, it attempts to infuse theory with practice. From anarchism, it draws its commitment to antistatism and confederalism, as well as its recognition that hierarchy is a basic problem that can be overcome only by a libertarian socialist society.<sup>[9]</sup>

The choice of the term *Communalism* to encompass the philosophical, historical, political, and organizational components of a socialism for the twenty-first century has not been a flippant one. The word originated in the Paris Commune of 1871, when the armed people of the French capital raised barricades not only to defend the city council of Paris and its administrative substructures but also to create a nationwide confederation of cities and towns to replace the republican nation-state. Communalism as an ideology is not sullied by the individualism and the often explicit antirationalism of anarchism; nor does it carry the historical burden of Marxism's authoritarianism as embodied in Bolshevism. It does not focus on the factory as its principal social arena or on the industrial proletariat as its main historical agent; and it does not reduce the free community of the future to a fanciful medieval village. Its most important goal is clearly spelled out in a conventional dictionary definition: Communalism, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, is "a theory or system of government in which virtually

autonomous local communities are loosely bound in a federation.”<sup>[10]</sup>

Communalism seeks to recapture the meaning of politics in its broadest, most emancipatory sense, indeed, to fulfill the historic potential of the municipality as the developmental arena of mind and discourse. It conceptualizes the municipality, potentially at least, as a transformative development *beyond* organic evolution into the domain of *social* evolution. The city is the domain where the archaic blood-tie that was once limited to the unification of families and tribes, to the exclusion of outsiders, was – juridically, at least – dissolved. It became the domain where hierarchies based on parochial and sociobiological attributes of kinship, gender, and age could be eliminated and replaced by a free society based on a shared common humanity. Potentially, it remains the domain where the once-feared stranger can be fully absorbed into the community – initially as a protected resident of a common territory and eventually as a *citizen*, engaged in making policy decisions in the public arena. It is above all the domain where institutions and values have their roots not in zoology but in civil human activity.

Looking beyond these historical functions, the municipality constitutes the only domain for an association based on the free exchange of ideas and a creative endeavor to bring the capacities of consciousness to the service of freedom. It is the domain where a mere *animalistic* adaptation to an existing and pregiven environment can be radically supplanted by *proactive, rational* intervention into the world – indeed, a world yet to be made and molded by reason – with a view toward ending the environmental, social, and political insults to which humanity and the biosphere have been subjected by classes and hierarchies. Freed of domination as well as material exploitation – indeed, recreated as a rational arena for human creativity in all spheres of life – the municipality becomes the *ethical* space for the good life. Communalism is thus no contrived product of mere fancy: it expresses an abiding concept and practice of political life, formed by a dialectic of social development and reason.

As an explicitly *political* body of ideas, Communalism seeks to recover and advance the development of the city (or *commune*) in a form that accords with its greatest potentialities and historical traditions. This is not to say that Communalism accepts the municipality as it is today. Quite to the contrary, the modern municipality is infused with many statist features and often functions as an agent of the bourgeois nation-state. Today, when the nation-state still seems supreme, the rights that modern municipalities possess cannot be dismissed as the epiphenomena of more basic economic relations. Indeed, to a great degree, they are the hard-won gains of commoners, who long defended them against assaults by ruling classes over the course of history – even

against the bourgeoisie itself.

The concrete political dimension of Communalism is known as libertarian municipalism, about which I have previously written extensively.<sup>[11]</sup> In its libertarian municipalist program, Communalism resolutely seeks to eliminate statist municipal structures and replace them with the institutions of a libertarian polity. It seeks to radically restructure cities' governing institutions into popular democratic assemblies based on neighborhoods, towns, and villages. In these popular assemblies, citizens – including the middle classes as well as the working classes – deal with community affairs on a face-to-face basis, making policy decisions in a direct democracy, and giving reality to the ideal of a humanistic, rational society.

Minimally, if we are to have the kind of free social life to which we aspire, *democracy* should be our form of a shared political life. To address problems and issues that transcend the boundaries of a single municipality, in turn, the democratized municipalities should join together to form a broader confederation. These assemblies and confederations, by their very existence, could then challenge the legitimacy of the state and statist forms of power. They could expressly be aimed at replacing state power and statecraft with popular power and a socially rational transformative politics. And they would become arenas where class conflicts could be played out and where classes could be eliminated.

Libertarian municipalists do not delude themselves that the state will view with equanimity their attempts to replace professionalized power with popular power. They harbor no illusions that the ruling classes will indifferently allow a Communalist movement to demand rights that infringe on the state's sovereignty over towns and cities. Historically, regions, localities, and above all towns and cities have desperately struggled to reclaim their local sovereignty from the state (albeit not always for high-minded purposes). Communalists' attempt to restore the powers of towns and cities and to knit them together into confederations can be expected to evoke increasing resistance from national institutions. That the new popular-assemblyist municipal confederations will embody a dual power against the state that becomes a source of growing political tension is obvious. Either a Communalist *movement* will be radicalized by this tension and will resolutely face all its consequences, or it will surely sink into a morass of compromises that absorb it back into the social order that it once sought to change. How the movement meets this challenge is a clear measure of its seriousness in seeking to change the existing political system and the social consciousness it develops as a source of public education and leadership.

Communalism constitutes a critique of hierarchical and capitalist society as a whole. It seeks to alter not only the political life of society but also its economic life. On this score, its aim is not to nationalize the economy or retain private ownership of the means of production but to *municipalize* the economy. It seeks to integrate the means of production into the existential life of the municipality, such that every productive enterprise falls under the purview of the local assembly, which decides how it will function to meet the interests of the community *as a whole*. The separation between life and work, so prevalent in the modern capitalist economy, must be overcome so that citizens' desires and needs, the artful challenges of creation in the course of production, and role of production in fashioning thought and self-definition are not lost. "Humanity makes itself," to cite the title of V. Gordon Childe's book on the urban revolution at the end of the Neolithic age and the rise of cities, and it does so not only intellectually and esthetically, but by expanding human needs as well as the productive methods for satisfying them. We discover ourselves – our potentialities and their actualization – through creative and useful work that not only transforms the natural world but leads to our self-formation and self-definition.

We must also avoid the parochialism and ultimately the desires for proprietorship that have afflicted so many self-managed enterprises, such as the "collectives" in the Russian and Spanish revolutions. Not enough has been written about the drift among many "socialistic" self-managed enterprises, even under the red and red-and-black flags, respectively, of revolutionary Russia and revolutionary Spain, toward forms of collective capitalism that ultimately led many of these concerns to compete with one another for raw materials and markets.<sup>[12]</sup>

Most importantly, in Communalist political life, workers of different occupations would take their seats in popular assemblies not as *workers* – printers, plumbers, foundry workers and the like, with special occupational interests to advance – but as *citizens*, whose overriding concern should be the *general interest* of the society in which they live. Citizens should be freed of their particularistic identity as workers, specialists, and individuals concerned primarily with their own particularistic interests. Municipal life should become a school for the formation of citizens, both by absorbing new citizens and by educating the young, while the assemblies themselves should function not only as permanent decision-making institutions but as arenas for *educating* the people in handling complex civic and regional affairs.<sup>[13]</sup>

In a Communalist way of life, conventional economics, with its focus on



prices and scarce resources, would be replaced by *ethics*, with its concern for human needs and the good life. Human solidarity – or *philia*, as the Greeks called it – would replace material gain and egotism. Municipal assemblies would become not only vital arenas for civic life and decision-making but centers where the shadowy world of economic logistics, properly coordinated production, and civic operations would be demystified and opened to the scrutiny and participation of the citizenry as a whole. The emergence of the *new citizen* would mark a transcendence of the particularistic class being of traditional socialism and the formation of the “new man” which the Russian revolutionaries hoped they could eventually achieve. Humanity would now be able to rise to the universal state of consciousness and rationality that the great utopians of the nineteenth century and the Marxists hoped their efforts would create, opening the way to humanity’s fulfillment as a species that embodies reason rather than material interest and that affords material post-scarcity rather than an austere harmony enforced by a morality of scarcity and material deprivation.<sup>[14]</sup>

Classical Athenian democracy of the fifth century B.C.E., the source of the Western democratic tradition, was based on face-to-face decision-making in communal assemblies of the people and confederations of those municipal assemblies. For more than two millennia, the political writings of Aristotle recurrently served to heighten our awareness of the city as the arena for the fulfillment of human potentialities for reason, self-consciousness, and the good life. Appropriately, Aristotle traced the emergence of the *polis* from the family or *oikos* – i.e., the realm of necessity, where human beings satisfied their basically animalistic needs, and where authority rested with the eldest male. But the association of several families, he observed, “aim[ed] at something more than the supply of daily needs”<sup>[15]</sup>; this aim initiated the earliest political formation, the village. Aristotle famously described man (by which he meant the adult Greek male<sup>[16]</sup>) as a “political animal” (*politikon zoon*) who presided over family members not only to meet their material needs but as the material precondition for his participation in political life, in which discourse and reason replaced mindless deeds, custom, and violence. Thus, “[w]hen several villages are united in a single complete community (*koinonon*), large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing,” he continued, “the *polis* comes into existence, *originating* in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life.”<sup>[17]</sup>

For Aristotle, and we may assume also for the ancient Athenians, the municipality’s proper functions were thus not strictly instrumental or even

economic. As the locale of human consociation, the municipality, and the social and political arrangements that people living there constructed, was humanity's *telos*, the arena par excellence where human beings, over the course of history, could actualize their potentiality for reason, self-consciousness, and creativity. Thus for the ancient Athenians, politics denoted not only the handling of the practical affairs of a polity but civic activities that were charged with moral obligation to one's community. All citizens of a city were expected to participate in civic activities as *ethical* beings.

Examples of municipal democracy were not limited to ancient Athens. Quite to the contrary, long before class differentiations gave rise to the state, many relatively secular towns produced the earliest institutional structures of local democracy. Assemblies of the people may have existed in ancient Sumer, at the very beginning of the so-called "urban revolution" some seven or eight thousand years ago. They clearly appeared among the Greeks, and until the defeat of the Gracchus brothers, they were popular centers of power in republican Rome. They were nearly ubiquitous in the medieval towns of Europe and even in Russia, notably in Novgorod and Pskov, which, for a time, were among the most democratic cities in the Slavic world. The assembly, it should be emphasized, began to approximate its truly modern form in the neighborhood Parisian sections of 1793, when they became the authentic motive forces of the Great Revolution and *conscious* agents for the making of a new body politic. That they were never given the consideration they deserve in the literature on democracy, particularly democratic Marxist tendencies and revolutionary syndicalists, is dramatic evidence of the flaws that existed in the revolutionary tradition.

These democratic municipal institutions normally existed in combative tension with grasping monarchs, feudal lords, wealthy families, and freebooting invaders until they were crushed, frequently in bloody struggles. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that *every great revolution in modern history had a civic dimension* that has been smothered in radical histories by an emphasis on class antagonisms, however important these antagonisms have been. Thus it is unthinkable that the English Revolution of the 1640s can be understood without singling out London as its terrain; or, by the same token, any discussions of the various French Revolutions without focusing on Paris, or the Russian Revolutions without dwelling on Petrograd, or the Spanish Revolution of 1936 without citing Barcelona as its most advanced social center. This centrality of the city is not a mere geographic fact; it is, above all, a profoundly political one, which involved the ways in which revolutionary masses aggregated and debated, the civic traditions that nourished them, and

the environment that fostered their revolutionary views.

Libertarian municipalism is an integral part of the Communalist framework, indeed its praxis, just as Communalism as a systematic body of revolutionary thought is meaningless without libertarian municipalism. The differences between Communalism and authentic or “pure” anarchism, let alone Marxism, are much too great to be spanned by a prefix such as *anarcho-*, *social*, *neo-*, or even *libertarian*. Any attempt to reduce Communalism to a mere variant of anarchism would be to deny the integrity of both ideas – indeed, to ignore their conflicting concepts of democracy, organization, elections, government, and the like. Gustave Lefrancais, the Paris Commune who may have coined this political term, adamantly declared that he was “a Communalist, not an anarchist.”<sup>[18]</sup>

Above all, Communalism is engaged with the problem of power.<sup>[19]</sup> In marked contrast to the various kinds of *communitarian* enterprises favored by many self-designated anarchists, such as “people’s” garages, print shops, food coops, and backyard gardens, adherents of Communalism mobilize themselves to electorally engage in a potentially important center of power – the municipal council – and try to compel it to create legislatively potent neighborhood assemblies. These assemblies, it should be emphasized, would make every effort to delegitimize and depose the statist organs that currently control their villages, towns, or cities and thereafter act as the real engines in the exercise of power. Once a number of municipalities are democratized along communalist lines, they would methodically confederate into municipal leagues and challenge the role of the nation-state and, through popular assemblies and confederal councils, try to acquire control over economic and political life.

Finally, Communalism, in contrast to anarchism, decidedly calls for decision-making by majority voting as the only equitable way for a large number of people to make decisions. Authentic anarchists claim that this principle – the “rule” of the minority by the majority – is authoritarian and propose instead to make decisions by consensus. Consensus, in which single individuals can veto majority decisions, threatens to abolish society *as such*. A free society is not one in which its members, like Homer’s lotus-eaters, live in a state of bliss without memory, temptation, or knowledge. Like it or not, humanity has eaten of the fruit of knowledge, and its memories are laden with history and experience. In a lived mode of freedom – contrary to mere café chatter – the rights of minorities to express their dissenting views will always be protected as fully as the rights of majorities. Any abridgements of those rights would be

instantly corrected by the community – hopefully gently, but if unavoidable, forcefully – lest social life collapse into sheer chaos. Indeed, the views of a minority would be treasured as potential source of new insights and nascent truths that, if abridged, would deny society the sources of creativity and developmental advances – for new ideas generally emerge from inspired minorities that gradually gain the centrality they deserve at a given time and place – until, again, they too are challenged as the conventional wisdom of a period that is beginning to pass away and requires new (minority) views to replace frozen orthodoxies.

It remains to ask: how are we to achieve this rational society? One anarchist writer would have it that the good society (or a true “natural” disposition of affairs, including a “natural man”) exists beneath the oppressive burdens of civilization like fertile soil beneath the snow. It follows from this mentality that all we are obliged to do to achieve the good society is to somehow eliminate the snow, which is to say capitalism, nation-states, churches, conventional schools, and other almost endless types of institutions that perversely embody domination in one form or another. Presumably an anarchist society – once state, governmental, and cultural institutions are merely removed – would emerge intact, ready to function and thrive as a free society. Such a “society,” if one can even call it such, would not require that we proactively *create* it: we would simply let the snow above it melt away. The process of rationally creating a free Communalist society, alas, will require substantially more thought and work than embracing a mystified concept of aboriginal innocence and bliss.

A Communalist society should rest, above all, on the efforts of a new radical organization to change the world, one that has a new political vocabulary to explain its goals, and a new program and theoretical framework to make those goals coherent. It would, above all, require dedicated individuals who are willing to take on the responsibilities of education and, yes, *leadership*. Unless words are not to become completely mystified and obscure a reality that exists before our very eyes, it should minimally be acknowledged that leadership *always* exists and does not disappear because it is clouded by euphemisms such as “militants” or, as in Spain, “influential militants.” It must also be acknowledge that many individuals in earlier groups like the CNT were not just “influential militants” but outright leaders, whose views were given more consideration – and deservedly so! – than those of others because they were based on more experience, knowledge, and wisdom, as well as the psychological traits that were needed to provide effective guidance. A serious libertarian approach to leadership would indeed acknowledge the reality and

crucial importance of leaders – all the more to establish the greatly needed formal *structures and regulations* that can effectively *control* and *modify* the activities of leaders and recall them when the membership decides their respect is being misused or when leadership becomes an exercise in the abusive exercise of power.

A libertarian municipalist movement should function, not with the adherence of flippant and tentative members, but with people who have been schooled in the movement's ideas, procedures and activities. They should, in effect, demonstrate a serious commitment to their organization – an organization whose structure is laid out explicitly in a formal *constitution* and appropriate *bylaws*. Without a democratically formulated and approved institutional framework whose members and leaders can be held accountable, clearly articulated standards of responsibility cease to exist. Indeed, it is precisely when a membership is no longer responsible to its constitutional and regulatory provisions that authoritarianism develops and eventually leads to the movement's immolation. Freedom from authoritarianism can best be assured only by the clear, concise, and detailed allocation of power, not by pretensions that power and leadership are forms of "rule" or by libertarian metaphors that conceal their reality. It has been precisely when an organization fails to articulate these regulatory details that the conditions emerge for its degeneration and decay.

Ironically, no stratum has been more insistent in demanding its freedom to exercise its will against regulation than chiefs, monarchs, nobles, and the bourgeoisie; similarly even well-meaning anarchists have seen individual autonomy as the true expression of freedom from the "artificialities" of civilization. In the realm of *true* freedom – that is, freedom that has been actualized as the result of consciousness, knowledge, and necessity – to know *what we can and cannot do* is more cleanly honest and true to reality than to avert the responsibility of knowing the limits of the lived world. Said a very wise man more than a century and a half ago: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please."

The need for the international Left to advance courageously beyond a Marxist, anarchist, syndicalist, or vague socialist framework toward a Communalist framework is particularly compelling today. Rarely in the history of leftist political ideas have ideologies been so wildly and irresponsibly muddled; rarely has ideology itself been so disparaged; rarely has the cry for "Unity!" on any terms been heard with such desperation. To be sure, the various tendencies that oppose capitalism should indeed unite around efforts to discredit and ultimately efface the market system. To such ends, unity is an

invaluable desideratum: a united front of the entire Left is needed in order to counter the entrenched system – indeed, culture – of commodity production and exchange, and to defend the residual rights that the masses have won in earlier struggles against oppressive governments and social systems.

The urgency of this need, however, does not require movement participants to abandon mutual criticism, or to stifle their criticism of the authoritarian traits present in anticapitalist organizations. Least of all does it require them to *compromise the integrity and identity of their various programs*. The vast majority of participants in today's movement are inexperienced young radicals who have come of age in an era of postmodernist relativism. As a consequence, the movement is marked by a chilling eclecticism, in which tentative opinions are chaotically mismarried to ideals that should rest on soundly objective premises.<sup>[20]</sup> In a milieu where the clear expression of ideas is not valued and terms are inappropriately used, and where argumentation is disparaged as “aggressive” and, worse, “divisive,” it becomes difficult to formulate ideas in the crucible of debate. Ideas grow and mature best, in fact, not in the silence and controlled humidity of an ideological nursery, but in the tumult of dispute and mutual criticism.

Following revolutionary socialist practices of the past, Communalists would try to formulate a minimum program that calls for satisfaction of the immediate concerns of the masses, such as improved wages and shelter or adequate park space and transportation. This minimum program would aim to satisfy the most elemental needs of the masses, to improve their access to the resources that make daily life tolerable. The maximum program, by contrast, would present an image of what human life could be like under libertarian socialism, at least as far as such a society is foreseeable in a world that is continually changing under the impact of seemingly unending industrial revolutions.

Even more, however, Communalists would see their program and practice as a process. Indeed, a transitional program in which each new demand provides the springboard for escalating demands that lead toward more radical and eventually revolutionary demands. One of the most striking examples of a transitional demand was the programmatic call in the late nineteenth century by the Second International for a popular militia to replace a professional army. In still other cases, revolutionary socialists demanded that railroads be publicly owned (or, as revolutionary syndicalists might have demanded, be controlled by railroad workers) rather than privately owned and operated. None of these demands were *in themselves* revolutionary, but they opened *pathways*, politically, to revolutionary forms of ownership and operation –

which, in turn, could be escalated to achieve the movement's maximum program. Others might criticize such step-by-step endeavors as "reformist," but Communalists do not contend that a Communalist society can be legislated into existence. What these demands try to achieve, in the short term, are new rules of engagement between the people and capital – rules that are all the more needed at a time when "direct action" is being confused with protests of mere events whose agenda is set entirely by the ruling classes.

On the whole, Communalism is trying to rescue a realm of public action and discourse that is either disappearing or that is being reduced to often-meaningless engagements with the police, or to street theater that, however artfully, reduces serious issues to simplistic performances that have no instructive influence. By contrast, Communalists try to build lasting organizations and institutions that can play a socially transformative role in the real world. Significantly, Communalists do not hesitate to run candidates in *municipal* elections who, if elected, would use what real power their offices confer to legislate popular assemblies into existence. These assemblies, in turn, would have the power ultimately to create effective forms of town-meeting government. Inasmuch as the emergence of the city – and city councils – long preceded the emergence of class society, councils based on popular assemblies are not inherently statist organs, and to participate seriously in municipal elections countervails reformist socialist attempts to elect statist delegates by offering the historic libertarian vision of municipal confederations as a practical, combative, and politically *credible* popular alternative to state power. Indeed, Communalist candidacies, which explicitly *denounce* parliamentary candidacies as opportunist, keep alive the debate over how libertarian socialism can be achieved – a debate that has been languishing for years.

There should be no self-deception about the opportunities that exist as a means of transforming our existing irrational society into a rational one. Our choices on how to transform the existing society are still on the table of history and are faced with immense problems. But unless present and future generations are beaten into complete submission by a culture based on queasy calculation as well as by police with tear gas and water cannons, we cannot desist from fighting for what freedoms we have and try to expand them into a free society wherever the opportunity to do so emerges. At any rate we now know, in the light of all the weaponry and means of ecological destruction that are at hand, that the need for radical change cannot be indefinitely deferred. What is clear is that human beings are much too intelligent not to have a rational society; the most serious question we face is whether they are rational enough to achieve one.

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[1] Many less-well-known names could be added to this list, but one that in particular I would like very much to single out is the gallant leader of the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party, Maria Spiridonova, whose supporters were virtually alone in proposing a workable revolutionary program for the Russian people in 1917-18. Their failure to implement their political insights and replace the Bolsheviks (with whom they initially joined in forming the first Soviet government) not only led to their defeat but contributed to the disastrous failure of revolutionary movements in the century that followed.

[2] I frankly regard this contradiction as more fundamental than the often-indiscernible tendency of the rate of profit to decline and thereby to render capitalist exchange inoperable—a contradiction to which Marxists assigned a decisive role in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

[3] Contrary to Marx's assertion that a society disappears only when it has exhausted its capacity for new technological developments, capitalism is in a state of permanent technological revolution—at times, frighteningly so. Marx erred on this score: it will take more than technological stagnation to terminate this system of social relations. As new issues challenge the validity of the entire system, the political and ecological domains will become all the more important. Alternatively, we are faced with the prospect that capitalism may pull down the entire world and leave behind little more than ashes and ruin—achieving, in short, the “capitalist barbarism” of which Rosa Luxemburg warned in her “Junius” essay.

[4] I use the word *extraordinary* because, by Marxist standards, Europe was still objectively unprepared for a socialist revolution in 1914. Much of the continent, in fact, had yet to be colonized by the capitalist market or bourgeois social relations. The proletariat—still a very conspicuous minority of the population in a sea of peasants and small producers—had yet to mature as a class into a significant force. Despite the opprobrium that has been heaped on Plekhanov, Kautsky, Bernstein et al., they had a better understanding of the failure of Marxist socialism to embed itself in proletarian consciousness than did Lenin. Luxemburg, in any case, straddled the so-called “social-patriotic” and “internationalist” camps in her image of a Marxist party's function, in contrast to Lenin, her principal opponent in the so-called “organizational question” in the Left of the wartime socialists, who was prepared to establish a “proletarian dictatorship” under all and any circumstances. The First World War was by no means inevitable, and it generated democratic and nationalist revolutions rather than proletarian ones. (Russia, in this respect, was no more a “workers' state” under Bolshevik rule than were the Hungarian and Bavarian “soviet” republics.) Not until 1939 was Europe placed in a position where a world war was inevitable. The revolutionary Left (to which I belonged at the time) frankly erred profoundly when it took a so-called “internationalist” position and refused to support the Allies (their imperialist pathologies notwithstanding) against the vanguard of world fascism, the Third Reich.

[5] Kropotkin, for example, rejected democratic decision-making procedures: “Majority rule is as defective as any other kind of rule,” he asserted. See Peter Kropotkin, “Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles,” in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, edited by Roger N. Baldwin (1927; reprinted by New York: Dover, 1970), p. 68.

[6] I have made the distinction between politics and statecraft in, for example, Murray Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities: Toward a New Politics of Citizenship* (1987; reprinted by London: Cassell, 1992), pp. 41-3, 59-61

[7] On social ecology, see Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (1982; reprinted by Warner, NH: Silver Brook, 2002); *The Modern Crisis* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987); and *Remaking Society* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989). The latter two books are out of print; some copies may be available from the Institute for Social Ecology in Plainfield, Vermont ([www.social-ecology.org](http://www.social-ecology.org)).

[8] Several years ago, while I still identified myself as an anarchist, I attempted to formulate a distinction between “social” and “lifestyle” anarchism, and I wrote an article that identified Communalism as “the democratic dimension of anarchism” (see *Left Green Perspectives*, no. 31, October 1994). I no longer believe that Communalism is a mere “dimension” of anarchism, democratic or otherwise; rather, it is a distinct ideology with a revolutionary tradition that has yet to be explored.

[9] To be sure, these points undergo modification in Communalism: for example, Marxism's historical



materialism, explaining the rise of class societies, is expanded by social ecology's explanation of the anthropological and historical rise of hierarchy. Marxian dialectical materialism, in turn, is transcended by dialectical naturalism; and the anarcho-communist notion of a very loose "federation of autonomous communes" is replaced with a confederation from which its *components*, functioning in a democratic manner through citizens' assemblies, may withdraw *only* with the approval of the *confederation as a whole*.

[10] What is so surprising about this minimalist dictionary definition is its overall accuracy: I would take issue only with its formulations "virtually autonomous" and "loosely bound," which suggest a parochial and particularistic, even irresponsible relationship of the components of a confederation to the whole.

[11] My writings on libertarian municipalism date back to the early 1970s, with "Spring Offensives and Summer Vacations," *Anarchos*, no. 4 (1972). The more significant works include *From Urbanization to Cities* (1987; reprinted by London: Cassell, 1992), "Theses on Libertarian Municipalism," *Our Generation* [Montreal], vol. 16, nos. 3-4 (Spring/Summer 1985); "Radical Politics in an Era of Advanced Capitalism," *Green Perspectives*, no. 18 (Nov. 1989); "The Meaning of Confederation," *Green Perspectives*, no. 20 (November 1990); "Libertarian Municipalism: An Overview," *Green Perspectives*, no. 24 (October 1991); and *The Limits of the City* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1974). For a concise summary, see Janet Biehl, *The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1998).

[12] For one such discussion, see Murray Bookchin, "The Ghost of Anarchosindicalism," *Anarchist Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1993).

[13] One of the great tragedies of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Spanish Revolution of 1936 was the failure of the masses to acquire more than the scantiest knowledge of social logistics and the complex interlinkages involved in providing for the necessities of life in a modern society. Inasmuch as those who had the expertise involved in managing productive enterprises and in making cities functional were supporters of the old regime, workers were in fact unable to actually take over the full control of factories. They were obliged instead to depend on "bourgeois specialists" to operate them, individuals who steadily made them the victims of a technocratic elite.

[14] I have previously discussed this transformation of workers from mere class beings into citizens, among other places, in *From Urbanization to Cities* (1987; reprinted by London: Cassell, 1995), and in "Workers and the Peace Movement" (1983), published in *The Modern Crisis* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987).

[15] Aristotle, *Politics* (1252 [b] 16), trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Revised Oxford Translation, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. 2, p. 1987.

[16] As a libertarian ideal for the future of humanity and a genuine domain of freedom, the Athenian *polis* falls far short of the city's ultimate promise. Its population included slaves, subordinated women, and franchiseless resident aliens. Only a minority of male citizens possessed civic rights, and they ran the city without consulting a larger population. Materially, the stability of the *polis* depended upon the labor of its noncitizens. These are among the several monumental failings that later municipalities would have to correct. The *polis* is significant, however, not an example of an emancipated community but for the successful functioning of its free *institutions*.

[17] Aristotle, *Politics* (1252 [b] 29-30), trans. Jowett; emphasis added. The words from the original Greek text may be found in the Loeb Classical Library edition: Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

[18] Lefrancais is quoted in Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (New York: Horizon Press, 1968), p. 393. I too would be obliged today to make the same statement. In the late 1950s, when anarchism in the United States was a barely discernible presence, it seemed like a sufficiently clear field in which I could develop social ecology, as well as the philosophical and political ideas that would eventually become dialectical naturalism and libertarian municipalism. I well knew that these views were not consistent with traditional anarchist ideas, least of all post-scarcity, which implied that a modern libertarian society rested on advanced material preconditions. Today I find that anarchism remains the very simplistic

individualistic and antirationalist psychology it has always been. My attempt to retain anarchism under the name of “social anarchism” has largely been a failure, and I now find that the term I have used to denote my views must be replaced with Communalism, which coherently integrates and goes beyond the most viable features of the anarchist and Marxist traditions. Recent attempts to use the word *anarchism* as a leveler to minimize the abundant and contradictory differences that are grouped under that term and even celebrate its openness to “differences” make it a diffuse catch-all for tendencies that properly should be in sharp conflict with one another.

[19] For a discussion of the very real problems created by anarchists’ disdain for power during the 1936 Spanish Revolution, see the appendix to this article, “Anarchism and Power in the Spanish Revolution.”

[20] I should note that by *objective* I do not refer merely to existential entities and events but also to potentialities that can be rationally conceived, nurtured, and in time actualized into what we would narrowly call realities. If mere substantiality were all that the term *objectivemeant*, no ideal or promise of freedom would be an objectively valid goal unless it existed under our very noses.

**Murray Bookchin**

**Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology:  
A Challenge for the Ecology  
Movement**

**1987**

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Retrieved on April 28, 2009 from [dwardmac.pitzer.edu](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu)

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The environmental movement has traveled a long way since those early Earth Day festivals when millions of school kids were ritualistically mobilized to clean up streets, while Arthur Godfrey, Barry Commoner, Paul Ehrlich, and a bouquet of manipulative legislators scolded their parents for littering the landscape with cans, newspapers, and bottles.

The movement has gone beyond a naïve belief that patchwork reforms and solemn vows by EPA bureaucrats to act more resolutely will seriously arrest the insane pace at which we are tearing down the planet. This shopworn Earth Day approach to engineering nature so that we can ravage the Earth with minimal effect on ourselves — an approach that I called environmentalism in the late 1960s, in contrast to social ecology — has shown signs of giving way to a more searching and radical mentality. Today the new word in vogue is ecology — be it deep ecology, human ecology, biocentric ecology, antihumanist ecology, or to use a term that is uniquely rich in meaning, social ecology.

Happily, the new relevance of ecology reveals a growing dissatisfaction among thinking people with attempts to use our vast ecological problems for cheaply spectacular and politically manipulative ends. As our forests disappear due to mindless cutting and increasing acid rain, as the ozone layer thins out because of the widespread use of fluorocarbons, as toxic dumps multiply all over the planet, as highly dangerous, often radioactive pollutants enter into our air, water, and food chains — all, and innumerable other hazards that threaten the integrity of life itself, raise far more basic issues than any that can be resolved by Earth Day clean-ups and faint-hearted changes in existing environmental laws.

For good reason, more and more people are trying to go beyond the vapid environmentalism of the early 1970s and develop a more fundamental, indeed a more radical, approach to the ecological crises that beleaguer us. They are looking for an ecological approach, one that is rooted in an ecological philosophy, ethics, sensibility, and image of nature, and ultimately for an ecological movement that will transform our domineering market society into a nonhierarchical cooperative society — a society that will live in harmony with nature because its members live in harmony with one another.

They are beginning to sense that there is a tie-in between the way people deal with one another, the way they behave as social beings — men with women, old with young, rich with poor, whites with people of color, First World with Third, elites with “masses” — and the way they deal with nature.

The question that now faces us is: What do we really mean by an ecological approach? What are a coherent ecological philosophy, ethics, and movement? How can the answers to these questions and many others fit together so that they form a meaningful and creative whole?

Just as the earlier environmental movement was filled with well-meaning spokesmen like Arthur Godfrey who sold detergents over television while driving “environmentally” sound electric cars, so today the newly emerging ecological movement is filled with well-meaning people who are riddled by a new kind of “spokesmen,” individuals who are selling their own wares — usually academic and personal careers.

If we are not to repeat the mistakes of the early 1970s with their hoopla about “population control,” their latent antifeminism, their elitism, their arrogance, and their ugly authoritarian tendencies, we must honestly and seriously appraise the new tendencies that today are going under the name of one or another form of ecology.

## Two Conflicting Tendencies

Let us agree from the outset that ecology is no magic term that unlocks the secret of our abuse of nature. It is a word that can be as easily abused, distorted, and tainted as democracy and freedom. Nor does ecology put us all — whoever “we” may be — in the same boat against environmentalists, who are simply trying to make a rotten society work by dressing it in green leaves and colorful flowers while ignoring the deep-seated roots of our ecological problems.

It is time to honestly face the fact that there are differences within today’s so-called ecology movement that are as serious as those between the environmentalism and ecologism of the early 1970s. There are barely disguised racists, survivalists, macho Daniel Boones, and outright social reactionaries who use the word ecology to express their views, just as there are deeply concerned naturalists, communitarians, social radicals, and feminists who use the word ecology to express theirs.

The differences between these two tendencies consist not only of quarrels with regard to theory, sensibility, and ethics. They have far-reaching practical and political consequences. They concern not only of the way we view nature, or humanity; or even ecology, but how we propose to change society and by what means.

The greatest differences that are emerging within the so-called ecology movement are between a vague, formless, often self-contradictory, and invertebrate thing called deep ecology and a long-developing, coherent, and socially oriented body of ideas that can best be called social ecology. Deep ecology has parachuted into our midst quite recently from the Sunbelt’s bizarre mix of Hollywood and Disneyland, spiced with homilies from Taoism, Buddhism, spiritualism, reborn Christianity, and in some cases eco-fascism, while social ecology draws its inspiration from such outstanding radical decentralist thinkers as Peter Kropotkin, William Morris, and Paul Goodman, among many others who have advanced a serious challenge to the present society with its vast hierarchical, sexist, class-ruled, statist apparatus and militaristic history.

Let us face these differences bluntly: deep ecology, despite all its social rhetoric, has virtually no real sense that our ecological problems have their

ultimate roots in society and in social problems. It preaches a gospel of a kind of “original sin” that accuses a vague species called humanity — as though people of color were equatable with whites, women with men, the Third World with the First, the poor with the rich, and the exploited with their exploiters.

Deep ecologists see this vague and undifferentiated humanity essentially as an ugly “anthropocentric” thing — presumably a malignant product of natural evolution — that is “overpopulating” the planet, “devouring” its resources, and destroying its wildlife and the biosphere — as though some vague domain of “nature” stands opposed to a constellation of nonnatural human beings, with their technology, minds, society, etc. Deep ecology, formulated largely by privileged male white academics, has managed to bring sincere naturalists like Paul Shepard into the same company as patently antihumanist and macho mountain men like David Foreman of Earth First! who preach a gospel that humanity is some kind of cancer in the world of life.

It was out of this kind of crude eco-brutalism that Hitler, in the name of “population control,” with a racial orientation, fashioned theories of blood and soil that led to the transport of millions of people to murder camps like Auschwitz. The same eco-brutalism now reappears a half-century later among self-professed deep ecologists who believe that Third World peoples should be permitted to starve to death and that desperate Indian immigrants from Latin America should be excluded by the border cops from the United States lest they burden “our” ecological resources.

This eco-brutalism does not come out of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. It appeared in *Simply Living*, an Australian periodical, as part of a laudatory interview of David Foreman by Professor Bill Devall, who co-authored *Deep Ecology* with Professor George Sessions, the authorized manifesto of the deep ecology movement. Foreman, who exuberantly expressed his commitment to deep ecology, frankly informed Devall that “When I tell people who the worst thing we could do in Ethiopia is to give aid — the best thing would be to just let nature seek its own balance, to let the people there just starve — they think this is monstrous... Likewise, letting the USA be an overflow valve for problems in Latin America is not solving a thing. It’s just putting more pressure on the resources we have in the USA.”

One can reasonably ask such compelling questions as what does it mean for nature to “seek its own balance” in East Africa, where agribusiness, colonialism, and exploitation have ravaged a once culturally and ecologically stable area. Or who is this all-American “our” that owns “the resources we have in the USA”? Are they the ordinary people who are driven by sheer need to cut timber, mine ores, and operate nuclear power plants? Or are they the

giant corporations that are not only wrecking the good old USA but have produced the main problems these days in Latin America that send largely Indian folk across the Rio Grande? As an ex-Washington lobbyist and political huckster, David Foreman need not be expected to answer these subtle questions in a radical way. But what is truly surprising is the reaction — more precisely, the lack of any reaction — that marked Professor Devall's behavior. Indeed, the interview was notable for the laudatory, almost reverential, introduction and description of Foreman that Devall prepared.



## What Is Deep Ecology?

Deep ecology is so much of a black hole of half-digested, ill-formed, and half-baked ideas that one can easily express utterly vicious notions like Foreman's and still sound like a fiery radical who challenges everything that is anti-ecological in the present realm of ideas. The very words deep ecology, in fact, clue is into the fact that we are not dealing with a body of clear ideas but with a bottomless pit in which vague notions and moods of all kinds can be such into the depths of an ideological toxic dump.

Does it make sense, for example, to counterpose deep ecology with superficial ecology, as though the word ecology were applicable to everything that involves environmental issues? Given this mindless use of ecology to describe anything of a biospheric nature, does it not completely degrade the rich meaning of the word ecology to append words like shallow and deep to it — adjectives that may be more applicable to gauging the depth of a cesspool than the depth of ideas? Arne Naess, the pontiff of deep ecology, who inflicted this vocabulary upon us, together with George Sessions and Bill Devall, who have been marketing it out of Ecotopia, have taken a pregnant word — ecology — and deprived it of any inner meaning and integrity by designating the most pedestrian environmentalists as ecologists, albeit shallow ones, in contrast to their notion of deep.

This is not mere wordplay. It tells us something about the mindset that exists among these “deep” thinkers. To parody the words shallow and deep ecology is to show not only the absurdity of this vocabulary but to reveal the superficiality of its inventors. Is there perhaps a deeper ecology than deep ecology? What is the deepest ecology of all that gives ecology its full due as a philosophy, sensibility, ethics, and movement for social change?

This kind of absurdity tells us more than we realize about the confusion Naess-Sessions-Devall, not to speak of eco-brutalists like Foreman, have introduced into the current ecology movement as it grew beyond the earlier environmental movement of the 1970s. Indeed, the Naess-Sessions-Devall trio rely very heavily upon the ease with which people forget the history of the ecology movement, the way in which the same wheel is reinvented every few years by newly arrived individuals who, well meaning as they may be, often accept a crude version of highly developed ideas that appeared earlier in time.

At best, these crudities merely echo in very unfinished form a corpus of views that were once presented in a richer context and tradition of ideas. At worst, they shatter such contexts and traditions, picking out tasty pieces that become utterly distorted when they reappear in an utterly alien framework. No regard is paid by such “deep thinkers” to the fact that the new context in which an idea is placed may utterly change the meaning of the idea itself. German National Socialism, which came to power in the Third Reich in 1933, was militantly “anticapitalist” and won many of its adherents from the German Social Democratic and Communist parties because of its anticapitalist denunciations. But its anticapitalism was placed in a strongly racist, imperialist, and seemingly naturalist context that extolled wilderness, sociobiology (the word had yet to be invented, but its “morality of the gene,” to use E. O. Wilson’s delicious expression, and its emphasis on “racial memory” to use William Irwin Thompson’s Jungian expression), and antirationalism, features one finds in latent or explicit form in Sessions and Devall’s Deep Ecology.<sup>1</sup>

Note well that neither Naess, Sessions, nor Devall has written a single line about decentralization, a nonhierarchical society, democracy, small-scale communities, local autonomy, mutual aid, communalism, and tolerance that was not worked out in painstaking detail and brilliantly contextualized into a unified and coherent outlook by Peter Kropotkin a century ago and his admirers from the 1930s to the 1960s in our own time. Great movements in Europe and an immense literature followed from these writers’ works — anarchist movements, I may add, like the Iberian Anarchist Federation in Spain, a tradition that is being unscrupulously red-baited by certain self-styled Greens as “leftist” and eco-anarchist. When George Sessions was asked at a recent ecofeminist conference about the differences between deep ecology and social ecology, he identified it as one between spiritualism and Marxism — this, a particularly odious and conscious falsehood!

But what the boys from Ecotopia proceed to do is to totally recontextualize the framework of these ideas, bringing in personalities and notions that basically change their radical libertarian thrust. Deep Ecology mingles Woody Guthrie, a Communist Party centralist who no more believed in decentralization than did Stalin (whom he greatly admired until his physical deterioration and death), with Paul Goodman, an anarchist who would have been mortified to be placed in the same tradition with Guthrie (18). In philosophy, Spinoza, a Jew in spirit if not in religious commitment, is intermingled with Heidegger, a former member of the Nazi Party in spirit as well as ideological affiliation — all in the name of a vague “process

philosophy.” Almost opportunistic in their use of catchwords and what George Orwell called doublespeak, “process philosophy” makes it possible for Sessions-Devall to add Alfred North Whitehead to their list of ideological ancestors because he called his ideas “processual,” although he would have differed profoundly from Heidegger, who earned his academic spurs in the Third Reich by repudiating his Jewish teacher, notably Edmund Husserl, in an ugly and shameful way.

One could go on indefinitely with this sloppy admixture of “ancestors,” philosophical traditions, social pedigrees, and religions that often have nothing in common with one another and, properly conceived, are commonly in sharp opposition with one another. Thus a repellent reactionary like Thomas Malthus and the neo-Malthusian tradition he spawned is celebrated with the same enthusiasm in Deep Ecology as Henry Thoreau, a radical libertarian who fostered a highly humanistic tradition. Eclecticism would be too mild a word for this kind of hodgepodge, one that seems shrewdly calculated to embrace everyone under the rubric of deep ecology who is prepared to reduce ecology to a religion rather than a systematic and deeply critical body of ideas. But behind all this is a pattern. The kind of “ecological” thinking that enters into the book seems to surface in an appendix called “Ecosophy T” by Arne Naess, who regales us with flow diagrams and corporate-type tables of organization that have more in common with logical positivist forms of exposition (Naess, in fact, was an acolyte of this repellent school of thought for years) than anything that could be truly called organic philosophy.

If we look beyond the spiritual “Eco-la-la” (to use a word coined by a remarkable ecofeminist, Chaia Heller), and examine the context in which demands like decentralization, small-scale communities, local autonomy, mutual aid, communalism, and tolerance are placed, the blurred images that Sessions and Devall create come into clearer focus. Decentralism, small-scale communities, local autonomy, even mutual aid and communalism are not intrinsically ecological or emancipatory. Few societies were more decentralized than European feudalism, which in fact was structured around small-scale communities, mutual aid, and the communal use of land. Local autonomy was highly prized and autarchy formed the economic key to feudal communities. Yet few societies were more hierarchical. Looming over medieval serfs, who were tied to the land by an “ecological” network of rights and duties that placed them on a status only slightly above that of slaves, were status groups that extended from villeins to barons, counts, dukes, and rather feeble monarchies. The manorial economy of the Middle Ages placed a high premium on autarchy or “self-sufficiency” and spirituality. Yet oppression was often

intolerable, and the great mass of people who belonged to that society lived in utter subjugation to their “betters” and the nobility.

If nature-worship, with its bouquet of wood sprites, animistic fetishes, fertility rites, and other such ceremonies, magicians, shamans and shamanesses, animal deities, goddesses and gods that presumably reflect nature and its forces — if all, taken together, pave the way to an ecological sensibility and society, then it is hard to understand how ancient Egypt managed to become and remain one of the most hierarchical and oppressive societies in the ancient world. The pantheon of ancient Egyptian deities is filled with animal and part-animal, part-human deities with all-presiding goddesses as well as gods. Indeed, the Nile River, which provided the “life-giving” waters of the valley, was used in a highly ecological manner. Yet the entire society was structured around the oppression of millions of serfs and opulent nobles, a caste system so fixed, exploitative, and deadening to the human spirit that one wonders how notions of spirituality can be given priority over the need for a critical evaluation of society and the need to restructure it.

That there were material beneficiaries of this spiritual Eco-la-la becomes clear enough in accounts of the priestly corporations that “communally” owned the largest tracts of land in Egyptian society. With a highly domesticated, spiritually passive, yielding, and will-less population — schooled for centuries in “flowing with the Nile,” to coin a phrase — the Egyptian ruling strata indulged themselves in an orgy of exploitation and power for centuries.

Even if one grants the need for a new sensibility and outlook — a point that has been made repeatedly in the literature of social ecology — one can look behind even this limited context of deep ecology to a still broader context: the love affair of deep ecology with Malthusian doctrines, a spirituality that emphasizes self-effacement, a flirtation with a supernaturalism that stands in flat contradiction to the refreshing naturalism that ecology has introduced into social theory; eruptions of a crude positivism in the spirit of Naess that works against a truly organic dialectic so needed to understand development, not merely bumper-sticker slogans; and a regular tendency to become unfocused, replacing ideas with moods, when Devall, for example, encounters a macho mountain man like Foreman. We shall see that all the bumper-sticker demands like decentralization, small-scale communities, local autonomy, mutual aid, communalism, tolerance, and even an avowed opposition to hierarchy go awry when placed in a larger context of Malthusian antihumanism and orgies about “biocentrism,” which marks the authentic ideological infrastructure of deep ecology.

## The Art of Evading Society

The seeming ideological tolerance that deep ecology celebrates has a sinister function of its own. It not only reduces richly nuanced ideas and conflicting traditions to their lowest common denominator; it legitimates extremely regressive, primitivistic, and even highly reactionary notions that gain respectability because they are buried in the company of authentically radical contexts and traditions.

Consider, for example, the “broader definition of community (including animals, plants); intuition of organic wholeness” with which Devall and Sessions regale their menu of “Dominant and Minority” positions (18–19). Nothing could seem more wholesome, more innocent of guile, than this “we are all one” bumper-sticker slogan. What the reader may not notice is that this all-encompassing definition of community erases all the rich and meaningful distinctions that exist not only between animal and plant communities but above all between nonhuman and human communities. If community is to be broadly defined as a universal “whole,” then a unique function that natural evolution has conferred on human society dissolves into a cosmic night that lacks differentiation, variety, and a wide array of functions. The fact is that human communities are consciously formed communities — that is to say, societies with an enormous variety of institutions, cultures that can be handed down from generation to generation, lifeways that can be radically changed for the better or worse, technologies that can be redesigned, innovated, or abandoned, and social, gender, ethnic, and hierarchical distinctions that can be vastly altered according to changes in consciousness and historical development. Unlike most so-called “animal societies” or, for that matter, communities, human societies are not instinctively formed or genetically programmed. Their destinies may be decided by factors — generally economic and cultural — that are beyond human control at times, to be sure; but what is particularly unique about human societies is that they can be racially changed by their members — and in ways that can be made to benefit the natural world as well as the human species.

Human society, in fact, constitutes a “second nature,” a cultural artifact, out of “first nature,” or primeval nonhuman nature. There is nothing wrong, unnatural, or ecologically alien about this fact. Human society, like plant and

animal communities, is in large part a product of natural evolution, no less than beehives or anthills. It is a product, moreover, of the human species, a species that is no less a product of nature than whales, dolphins, California condors, or prokaryotic cells. Second nature is also a product of mind — of a brain that can think in a richly conceptual manner and produce a highly symbolic form of communication. Taken together, second nature, the human species that forms it, and the richly conceptual form of thinking and communication so distinctive to it, emerges out of natural evolution no less than any other life-form and nonhuman community. This second nature is uniquely different from first nature in that it can act thoughtfully, purposefully, willfully, and depending up on the society we examine, creatively in the best ecological sense or destructively in the worst ecological sense. Finally, this second nature called society has its own history: its long process of grading out of first nature, of organizing or institutionalizing human relationships, human interactions, conflicts, distinctions, and richly nuanced cultural formations, and of actualizing its large number of potentialities — some eminently creative, others eminently destructive.

Finally, a cardinal feature of this product of natural evolution called society is its capacity to intervene in first nature — to alter it, again in ways that may be eminently creative or destructive. But the capacity of human beings to deal with first nature actively, purposefully, willfully, rationally, and one hopes ecologically is no less a product of evolution than the capacity of large herbivores to keep forests from eating away at grasslands or of earthworms to aerate the soil. Human beings and their societies alter first nature at best in a rational and ecological way — or at worst in an irrational and anti-ecological way. But the fact that they are constituted to act upon nature, to intervene in natural processes, to alter them in one way or another, is no less a product of natural evolution than the action of any life-form on its environment.

In failing to emphasize the uniqueness, characteristics, and functions of human societies, or placing them in natural evolution as part of the development of life, or giving full, indeed unique due to human consciousness as a medium for the self-reflective role of human thought as nature rendered self-conscious, deep ecologists essentially evade the social roots of the ecological crisis. They stand in marked distinction to writers like Kropotkin who outspokenly challenged the gross inequities in society that underpin the disequilibrium between society and nature. Deep ecology contains no history of the emergence of society out of nature, a crucial development that brings social theory into organic contact with ecological theory. It presents no explanation of — indeed, it reveals no interest in — the emergence of hierarchy

out of society, of classes out of hierarchy, of the State out of classes — in short, the highly graded social as well as ideological development that gets to the roots of the ecological problem in the social domination of women by men and of men by other men, ultimately giving rise to the notion of dominating nature in the first place.

Instead, what deep ecology gives us, apart from what it plagiarizes from radically different ideological contexts, is a deluge of Eco-la-la. Humanity surfaces in a vague and unearthly form to embrace everyone in a realm of universal guilt. We are then massaged into sedation with Buddhist and Taoist homilies about self-abnegation, biocentrism, and pop spiritualism that verges on the supernatural — this for a subject-matter, ecology, whose very essence is a return to earthy naturalism. We not only lose sight of the social and the differences that fragment humanity in to a host of human beings — men and women, ethnic groups, oppressors and oppressed; we lose sight of the individual self in an unending flow of Eco-la-la that preaches the “realization of self-in Self where ÔSelf” stands for organic wholeness” (67). That a cosmic “Self” is created that is capitalized should not deceive us into believing that it has any more reality than an equally cosmic “Humanity.” More of the same cosmic Eco-la-la appears when we are informed that “the phrase Ôone’ includes not only men, an individual human, but all humans, grizzly bears, whole rainforest ecosystems, mountains and rivers, the tiniest microbes in the soil and so on.”

A “Self” so cosmic that it has to be capitalized is no real self at all. It is an ideological category as vague, faceless, and depersonalized as the very patriarchal image of “man” that dissolves our uniqueness and rationality into a deadening abstraction.

## On Selfhood and Viruses

Such flippant abstractions of human individuality are extremely dangerous. Historically, a “self” that absorbs all real existential selves has been used from time immemorial to absorb individual uniqueness and freedom into a supreme individual who heads the State, churches of various sorts, adoring congregations — be they Eastern or Western — and spellbound constituencies, however much a “self” is dressed up in ecological, naturalistic, and biocentric attributes. The Paleolithic shaman regaled in reindeer skins and horns is the predecessor of the Pharaoh, the institutionalized Buddha, and in more recent times Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini.

That the egotistical, greedy, and soloist bourgeois self has always been a repellent being goes without saying, and deep ecology as personified by Devall and Sessions make the most of it. This kind of “critical” stance is easy to adopt; it can even find a place in *People* magazine. But is there not a free, independently minded, ecologically concerned, indeed idealist self with a unique personality that can think of itself as different from “whales, grizzly bears, whole rainforest ecosystems [no less!], mountains and rivers, the tiniest microbes in the soil, and so on”? Is it not indispensable, in fact, for the individual self to disengage itself from a pharaonic “Self,” discover its own capacities and uniqueness, indeed acquire a sense of personality, of self-control and self-direction — all traits indispensable for the achievement of freedom? Here, I may add, Heidegger and, yes, Nazism begin to grimace with satisfaction behind this veil of self-effacement and a passive personality so yielding that it can easily be shaped, distorted, and manipulated by a new “ecological” State machine with a supreme “SELF” embodied in a Leader, Guru, or Living God — all in the name of a “biocentric equality” that is slowly reworked as it has been so often in history into a social hierarchy. From Shaman to Monarch, from Priest or Priestess to Dictator, our warped social development has been marked by nature worshippers and their ritual Supreme Ones who produced unfinished individuals at best and who deindividuated the “self-in-Self” at worst, often in the name of the “Great Connected Whole” (to use exactly the language of the Chinese ruling classes who kept their peasantry in abject servitude, as Leon E. Stover points out in his *The Cultural Ecology of Chinese Civilization*).

What makes this Eco-la-la especially sinister today is that we are already



living in a period of massive deindividuation — not because deep ecology or Taoism is making any serious inroads into our own cultural ecology but because the mass media, the commodity culture, and a market society are “reconnecting” us into an increasingly depersonalized “whole” whose essence is passivity and a chronic vulnerability to economic and political manipulation. It is not from an excess of selfhood that we are suffering but of selfishness — the surrender of personality to the security afforded by corporations, centralized government, and the military. If selfhood is identified with a grasping, “anthropocentric,” and devouring personality, these traits are to be found not so much among ordinary people, who basically sense that they have no control over their destinies, as among the giant corporations and State leaders who are plundering not only the planet but also women, people of color, and the underprivileged. It is not deindividuation that the oppressed of the world require, much less passive personalities that readily surrender themselves to the cosmic forces — the “Self” that buffet them around, but reindividuation that will render them active agents in remaking society and arresting the growing totalitarianism that threatens to homogenize us all as part of a Western version of the “Great Connected Whole.”

We are also confronted with the delicious “and so on” that follows the “tiniest microbes in the soil” with which our deep ecologists identify the “Self.” Here we encounter another bit of intellectual manipulation that marks the Devall-Sessions anthology as a whole: the tendency to choose examples from God-Motherhood-and Flag for one’s own case and cast any other alternative vision in a demonic form. Why stop with the “tiniest microbes in the soil” and ignore the leprosy microbe, or the yearning and striving viruses that give us smallpox, polio, and more recently AIDS? Are they too not part of “all organisms and entities in the ecosphere ... of the interrelated whole ... equal in intrinsic worth,” as Devall and Sessions remind us in their effluvium of Eco-la-la? At which point, Naess, Devall, and Sessions immediately introduce a number of highly debatable qualifiers, i.e., “we should live with a minimum rather than a maximum impact on other species” (75) or “we have no right to destroy other living beings without sufficient reason” (75) or finally, even more majestically, “The slogan of ‘Noninterference’ does not imply that humans should not modify [!] some [!] ecosystems as do other [!] species. Humans have modified the earth and will probably [!] continue to do so. At issue is the nature [!] and extent [!] of such interference [!]” (72).

One does not leave the muck of deep ecology without having mud all over one’s feet. Exactly who is to decide the nature of human “interference” in first nature and the extent to which it can be done? What are “some” of the

ecosystems we can modify, and which ones are not subject to human “interference”? Here again we encounter the key problem that Eco-la-la, including deep ecology, poses for serious, ecologically concerned people: the social bases of our ecological problems and the role of the human species in the evolutionary scheme of things.

Implicit in deep ecology is the notion that a “humanity” exists that accurses the natural world; that individual selfhood must be transformed into a cosmic “Selfhood” that essentially transcends the person and his or her uniqueness. Even nature is not spared a kind of static, prepositional logic that is cultivated by the logical positivists. Nature in deep ecology and David Foreman’s interpretation of it becomes a kind of scenic view, a spectacle to be admired around the campfire (perhaps with some Budweiser beer to keep the boys happy or a Marlboro cigarette to keep them manly) — not an evolutionary development that is cumulative and includes the human species, its conceptual powers of thought, its highly symbolic forms of communication, and graded into second nature, a social and cultural development that has its own history and metabolism with pristine first nature. To see nature as a cumulative unfolding form first into second nature is likely to be condemned as anthropocentric — as though human self-consciousness at its best were not nature rendered self-conscious.

The problems that deep ecology and biocentrism raise have not gone unnoticed in more thoughtful press in England. During a discussion of “biocentric ethics” in *The New Scientist* 69 (1976), for example, Bernard Dixon observed that no “logical line can be drawn” between the conservation of whales, gentians, and flamingoes on the one hand and the extinction of pathogenic microbes like the small pox virus on the other. At which point God’s gift to misanthropy, David Ehrenfeld, cutely observes that the smallpox virus is an “endangered species” in his *The Arrogance of Humanism*, a work that is so selective and tendentious in its use of quotations that it should validly be renamed “*The Arrogance of Ignorance*.” One wonders what to do about the AIDS virus if a vaccine or therapy should threaten its survival. Further, given the passion for perpetuating the ecosystem of every species, one wonders how smallpox and AIDS virus should be preserved. In test tubes? Laboratory cultures? Or to be truly ecological, in their native habitat, the human body? In which case, idealistic acolytes of deep ecology should be invited to offer their own bloodstreams in the interests of “biocentric equality.” Certainly, if “nature should be permitted to take its course,” as Foreman advises for Ethiopians and Indian peasants, then plagues, famines, suffering, wars, and perhaps even lethal asteroids of the kind that exterminated the great

reptiles of the Mesozoic should not be kept from defacing the purity of first nature by the intervention of second nature. With so much absurdity to unscramble, one can indeed get heady, almost dizzy, with a sense of polemical intoxication.

At root, the eclecticism that turns deep ecology into a goulash of notions and moods is insufferably reformist and surprisingly environmentalist — all its condemnations of “superficial ecology” aside. It has a Dunkin’ Donut for everyone. Are you, perhaps a mild-mannered liberal? Then do not fear: Devall and Sessions give a patronizing nod to “reform legislation,” “coalitions,” “protests,” the “women’s movement” (this earns all of ten lines in their “Minority Tradition and Direct Action” essay), “working in the Christian tradition,” “questioning technology” (a hammering remark if ever there was one), “working in Green politics” (which faction, the Fundis or the Realos?) — in short, everything can be expected in so “cosmic” a philosophy. Anything seems to pass through deep ecology’s Dunkin Donut hole: anarchism at one extreme and eco-fascism at the other. Like the fast-food emporiums that make up our culture, deep ecology is the fast food of quasi-radical environmentalists.

Despite its pretense of radicality, deep ecology is more New Age and Aquarian than the environmentalist movements it denounces under these names. If “to study the self is to forget the self,” to cite a Taoist passage with which Devall and Sessions regale us, then the “all” by which we are presumably “enlightened” is even more invertebrate than Teilhard de Chardin, whose Christian mysticism earns so much scorn from the authors of Deep Ecology. Indeed, the extent to which deep ecology accommodates itself to some of the worst features of the dominant view it professes to reject is seen with extraordinary clarity in one of its most fundamental and repeatedly asserted demands: namely, that the world’s population must be drastically reduced, according to one of its acolytes, to 500 million. If deep ecologists have even the faintest knowledge of the population theorists that Devall and Sessions invoke with admiration — notably Thomas Malthus, William Vogt, and Paul Ehrlich — then they would be obliged to add: by measures that are virtually eco-fascist. This specter clearly looms before us in Devall and Sessions’s sinister remark: “the longer we wait [in population control] the more drastic will be the measures needed” (72).

## The Deep Malthusians

The population issue — which occupies a central place in the crude biologism promoted by Devall and Sessions — has a long and complex pedigree and one that radically challenges deep ecologists' very way of thinking about social problems, not to speak of their way of resolving them. The woefully brief history that Devall and Sessions give us of the population issue on page 46 of their book would be considered embarrassing in its simplemindedness were it not so reactionary in its thrust.

Thomas Malthus (1766–1854) is hailed as a prophet whose warning “that human population growth would exponentially outstrip food production ... was ignored by the rising tide of industrial/technological optimism.” This statement is pure hogwash — what Devall and Sessions call the “rising tide of industrial/technological optimism” was in fact the nineteenth-century radicals who opposed the vicious abuses inflicted by industrial capitalism on the oppressed of the world, often in the name of Malthusianism. Devall and Sessions thereupon extol William Catton, Jr., for applying “the ecological concept of carrying capacity” for an ecosystem (I used this expression years before Catton in my mid-1960s writings on social ecology, albeit for very different purposes than Catton's), and George Perkins Marsh for warning that “modern man's impact on the environment could result in rising species extinction rates” (by no means a novel notion when the passenger pigeon and bison were facing extinction, as everyone knew at the time). Devall and Sessions finally land on all fours: “The environmental crisis,” we are solemnly told, “was further articulated by ecologist William Vogt (*Road to Survival*, 1948), anticipating the work of radical [!] ecologist Paul Ehrlich in the 1960s.”

Devall and Sessions often write with smug assurance on issues that they know virtually nothing about. This is most notably the case in the so-called “population debate,” a debate that has raged for over two hundred years — and one that involves explosive political and social issues that have pitted the most reactionary elements in English and American society (generally represented by Malthus, Vogt, and Ehrlich) against authentic radicals who have called for basic changes in the structure of society. In fact, the Eco-la-la that Devall and Sessions dump on us in only two paragraphs would require a full-size volume of careful analysis to unravel.

First of all, Thomas Malthus was not a prophet; he was an apologist for the misery that the Industrial Revolution was inflicting on the English peasantry and working classes. His utterly fallacious argument that population increases exponentially while food supplies increase arithmetically was not ignored by England's ruling classes; it was taken to heart and even incorporated into social Darwinism as an explanation for why oppression was a necessary feature of society and for why rich, white imperialists and the privileged were the "fittest" who were equipped to "survive" — needless to say, at the expense of the impoverished many. Written and directed in great part as an attack upon the liberatory vision of William Godwin, Malthus's mean-spirited *Essay on the Principle of Population* tried to demonstrate that hunger, poverty, disease, and premature death are inevitable precisely because population and food supply increase at different rates. Hence war, famines, and plagues (Malthus later added "moral restraint") were necessary to keep population down — needless to say, among the "lower orders of society," whom he singled out as the chief offenders of his inexorable population "laws." (See Chapter 5 of his *Essay*, which for all its "concern" over the misery of the "lower classes" inveighs against the Poor Laws and argues that the "pressures of distress on this part of the community is an evil so deeply seated that no human ingenuity can reach it.") Malthus, in effect, became the ideologue par excellence for the land-grabbing English nobility, in its effort to dispossess the peasantry of their traditional common lands, and for English capitalists, in their efforts to work children, women, and men to death in the newly emerging "industrial/technological" factory system.

Malthusianism contributed in great part to that meanness of spirit that Charles Dickens captured in his famous novels *Oliver Twist* and *Hard Times*. The doctrine, its author, and its overstuffed wealthy beneficiaries were bitterly fought by the great English anarchist William Godwin, the pioneering socialist Robert Owen, and the emerging Chartist movement of the English workers in the early nineteenth century. When the "rising tide of industrial /technological optimism" proved that Malthus was sucking his ideas out of this thumb and his mutton — indeed, when improved economic conditions revealed that population growth tends to diminish with improvements in the quality of life and the status of women — Malthusianism was naively picked up by Charles Darwin to explain his theory of natural selection. It now became the bedrock theory for the new social Darwinism, so very much in vogue in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that saw society as a "jungle" in which only the fit (usually the rich and white) could survive at the expense of the "unfit" (usually the poor and people of color). Malthus, in effect, had

provided an ideology that justified class domination, racism, the degradation of women, and ultimately the empire-building of English imperialism, later to phase into German fascism, with its use of industrial techniques for mass murder.

All of this occurred long after the English ruling classes, overstuffed on a diet of Malthusian pap, deliberately permitted vast numbers of Irish peasants to starve to death in the potato “famines” of the 1840s on the strength of the Malthusian notion that “nature should be permitted to take its course.

Malthusianism was not only to flourish in Hitler’s Third Reich; it was to be revived again in the late 1940s, following the discoveries of antibiotics to control infectious diseases. Riding on the tide of the new Pax Americana after World War II, William F. Vogt and a whole bouquet of neo-Malthusians challenged the use of the new antibiotic discoveries to control disease and prevent death — as usual, mainly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Again, a new population debate erupted, with the Rockefeller interests and large corporate sharks aligning themselves with the neo-Malthusians and caring people of every sort aligning themselves with Third World theorists like Josua de Castro, who wrote damning, highly informed critiques of this new version of misanthropy.

Paul Ehrlich and his rambunctious Zero Population Growth fanatics in the early 1970s literally polluted the environmental movement with demands for a government bureau (no less!) to “control” population, advancing the infamous triage ethic as a standard for aiding or refusing to aid so-called “undeveloped” countries. The extent to which this ethic became a formula for dispensing food to countries that aligned themselves with the United States in the cold war and for refusing aid to those that were nonaligned would make an interesting story by itself. Ehrlich, in turn, began to backtrack on his attempts to peddle a 1970s version of neo-Malthusianism — perhaps until recently, when deep ecology has singled him out for a prophetic place in the pantheon of “radical” ecology. Rumor has it that black students in Ehrlich’s own academic backyard viewed his Population Bomb as basically racist and neatly tailored to American imperialism.

In any case, it is a novelty to learn that Ehrlich is to be regarded as a “radical” and that “antireformists” like Devall and Sessions are splashing around in the cesspool of Malthusianism — as do many people who innocently call themselves deep ecologists. One wonders if they realize how reactionary a role this doctrine has played over the centuries.

In *Food First*, Francis Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins did a superb job in showing how hunger has its origins not in “natural” shortages of food or

population growth but in social and cultural dislocations. (It is notable that Devall and Sessions do not list this excellent book in their bibliography.) The book has to be read to understand the reactionary implications of deep ecology's demographic positions.

What is no less important: demography is a highly ambiguous and ideologically charged social discipline that cannot be reduced to a mere numbers game in biological reproduction. Human beings are not fruit flies (the species of choice that the neo-Malthusians love to cite). Their reproductive behavior is profoundly conditioned by cultural values, standards of living, social traditions, the status of women, religious beliefs, socio-political conflicts, and various socio-political expectations. Smash up a stable precapitalist culture and throw its people off the land into city slums, and due ironically to demoralization, population may soar rather than decline. As Gandhi told the British, imperialism left India's wretched poor and homeless with little more in life than the immediate gratification provided by sex and an understandably numbed sense of personal, much less social, responsibility. Reduce women to mere reproductive factories, and population rates will explode.

Conversely, provide people with decent lives, education, a sense of creative meaning in life, and above all free women from their roles as mere bearers of children — and population growth begins to stabilize and population rates even reverse their direction. Indeed, population growth and attitudes toward population vary from society to society according to the way people live, the ideas they hold, and the socio-economic relationships they establish. Nothing more clearly reveals deep ecology's crude, often reactionary, and certainly superficial ideological framework — all its decentralist, antihierarchical, and "radical" rhetoric aside — than its suffocating biological treatment of the population issue and its inclusion of Malthus, Vogt, and Ehrlich in its firmament of prophets.

The close connection between social factors and demography is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe, improved living conditions reduced rates of population increase, in some cases leading to negative population growth rates. During the interwar period, such declines became so "serious" to countries readying themselves for World War II that women were granted awards for having sizable numbers of children (read: cannon fodder for the military). More recently in Japan, industrialists were so alarmed by the decline in the country's labor force due to the legalization of abortion that they demanded the abrogation of this legislation.

These examples can be generalized into a theory of demography in which

the need for labor often plays a more important role historically in population fluctuations than biological behavior and sexual desire. If women are seen as female fruit flies and men as their mindless partners, guided more by instinct than the quality of life, then Devall and Sessions have an argument — and almost certainly a crude patronizing gender-conditioned outlook that requires careful scrutiny by feminists who profess to be deep ecologists. If people are not fruit flies, then deep ecology reeks of crude biologism that is matched only by its naïve reading of Malthus and company.

Not surprisingly, *Earth First!*, whose editor professes to be an enthusiastic deep ecologist, carried an article entitled “Population and AIDS” that advanced the obscene argument that AIDS is desirable as a means of population control. This was no spoof. It was carefully worked out, fully reasoned in a Paleolithic sort of way, and earnestly argued. Not only will AIDS claim large numbers of lives, asserts the author (who hides behind the pseudonym “Miss Ann Thropy,” a form of black humor that could also pass as an example of macho-male arrogance), but it “may cause a breakdown in technology [read: human food supply] and its export which could also decrease human population” (May 1, 1987). These people feed on human disasters, suffering, and misery, preferably in Third World countries where AIDS is by far a more monstrous problem than elsewhere.

Until we can smoke out “Miss Ann Thropy” (is it David Foreman again?), we have little reason to doubt that this mentality — or lack thereof — is perfectly consistent with the “more drastic ... measures” that Devall and Sessions believe we will have to explore. Nor is it inconsistent with a Malthus and Vogt, possibly even an Ehrlich, that we should make no effort to find a cure for this disease which may do so much to depopulate the world. “Biocentric democracy,” I assume, should call for nothing less than a hands-off policy on the AIDS virus and perhaps equally lethal pathogens that appear in the human species.



## What Is Social Ecology?

Social ecology is neither deep, tall, fat, nor thick. It is social. It does not fall back on incantations, sutras, flow diagrams, or spiritual vagaries. It is avowedly rational. It does not try to regale metaphorical forms of spiritual mechanism and crude biologism with Taoist, Buddhist, Christian, or shamanistic Eco-la-la. It is a coherent form of naturalism that looks to evolution and the biosphere, not to deities in the sky or under the earth for quasi-religious and supernaturalistic explanations of natural and social phenomena.

Philosophically, social ecology stems from a solid organismic tradition in Western philosophy, beginning with Heraclitus, the near-evolutionary dialectic of Aristotle and Hegel, and the superbly critical approach of the famous Frankfurt School — particularly its devastating critique of logical positivism (which surfaces in Naess repeatedly), and the primitivistic mysticism of Heidegger (which pops up all over the place in deep ecology's literature).

Socially, it is revolutionary, not merely radical. It critically unmasks the entire evolution of hierarchy in all its forms, including neo-Malthusian elitism, the eco-brutalism of David Foreman, the antihumanism of David Ehrenfeld and "Miss Ann Thropy," and the latent racism, First World arrogance, and Yuppie nihilism of postmodernistic spiritualism. It is rooted in the profound eco-anarchistic analyses of Peter Kropotkin, the radical economic insights of Karl Marx, the emancipatory promise of the revolutionary Enlightenment as articulated by the great encyclopedist Denis Diderot, the enragés of the French Revolution, the revolutionary feminist ideals of Louise Michel and Emma Goldman, the communitarian visions of Paul Goodman and E. A. Gutkind, and the various ecorevolutionary manifestos of the early 1960s.

Politically it is Green, and radically Green. It takes its stand with the left-wing tendencies of the German Greens and extraparliamentary street movements of European cities, with the American radical ecofeminist movement that is currently emerging, with the demands for a new politics based on citizens' initiatives, neighborhood assemblies, New England's tradition of town meetings, with unaligned anti-imperialist movements at home and abroad, with the struggle by people of color for complete freedom from domination by privileged whites and from superpowers on both sides of the iron curtain.

Morally, it is avowedly humanistic in the high Renaissance meaning of the word, not the degraded meaning of humanism that has been imparted by Foreman, Ehrenfeld, a salad of academic deep ecologists, and the like. Humanism from its inception has meant a shift in vision from the skies to the earth, from superstition to reason, from deities to people — who are no less products of natural evolution than grizzly bears and whales. Social ecology rejects a “biocentrism” that essentially denies or degrades the uniqueness of human beings, human subjectivity, rationality, aesthetic sensibility, and the ethical potentiality of this extraordinary species. By the same token, it rejects an “anthropocentrism” that confers on the privileged few the right to plunder the world of life, including women, the young, the poor, and the underprivileged. Indeed, it opposes “centrism” of any kind as a new word for hierarchy and domination — be it that of nature by a mystical “man” or the domination of people by an equally mystical “nature.” It firmly denies that nature is a scenic view that mountain men like Foreman survey from a peak in Nevada or a picture window that spoiled Yuppies place in their tacky country homes. To social ecology, nature is natural evolution, not a cosmic arrangement of beings frozen in a moment of eternity to be abjectly revered, adored, and worshiped like the gods and goddesses that priests and priestesses place above us in a realm of supernature that subverts the naturalistic integrity of an authentic ecology. Natural evolution is nature in the very real sense that it is composed of atoms, molecules that have evolved into amino acids, proteins, unicellular organisms, genetic codes, invertebrates and vertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, primates, and human beings — all in a cumulative thrust toward ever greater complexity, ever greater subjectivity, and finally ever-greater mind with a capacity for conceptual thought, symbolic communication of the most sophisticated kinds, and self-consciousness in which natural evolution knows itself purposively and willfully.

This marvel we call “nature” has produced a marvel we call *homo sapiens* — thinking man, and more significantly for the development of society, thinking woman, whose primeval domestic domain provided the arena for the origins of a caring society, human empathy, love, and idealistic commitment. The human species, in effect, is no less a product of natural evolution than blue-green algae. To degrade that species in the name of antihumanism as Miss Ann Thropy has done (using the coarse language of an unknown Earth First! mountain man), to deny the species its uniqueness as thinking beings with an unprecedented gift for conceptual thought, is to deny the rich fecundity of natural evolution itself. To separate human beings and society from nature is to dualize and truncate nature itself, to diminish the meaning and thrust of natural evolution in the

name of a “biocentrism” that spends more time disporting itself with mantras, deities, and supernature than with the realities of the biosphere and the role of society in ecological problems. Accordingly, social ecology does not try to hide its critical and reconstructive thrust in metaphors. It calls “technological/industrial” society capitalism, placing the onus of our ecological problems on the living sources and social relationships that produce them, not on a cutesy “Third Wave” abstraction that buries these sources in technics, a technical mentality, or perhaps the technicians who work on machines. It sees the domination of women not simply as a spiritual problem that can be resolved by rituals, incantations, and shamanesses (important as ritual may be in solidarizing women into a unique community of people) but in the long, highly graded, and subtly nuanced development of hierarchy, which long preceded the development of classes. Nor does it ignore class, ethnic differences, imperialism, and oppression by creating a grab bag called Humanity that is placed in opposition to a mystified Nature, divested of all development.

All of which brings us as social ecologists to an issue that seems to be totally alien to the crude concerns of deep ecology: natural evolution has conferred on human beings the capacity to form a second (or cultural) nature out of first (or primeval) nature. Natural evolution has not only provided humans with ability but also with the necessity to be purposive interveners into first nature, to consciously change first nature by means of a highly institutionalized form of community. It is not alien to natural evolution that over billions of years the human species has emerged, capable of thinking in a sophisticated way. Nor is it alien for that species to develop a highly sophisticated form of symbolic communication or that a new kind of community — institutionalized, guided by thought rather than by instinct alone, and ever changing — has emerged called society.

Taken together, all of these human traits — intellectual, communicative, and social — have not only emerged from natural evolution and are inherently human; they can also be placed at the service of natural evolution to consciously increase biotic diversity, diminish suffering, foster the further evolution of new and ecologically valuable life-forms, and reduce the impact of disastrous accidents or the harsh effects of mere change.

Whether this species, gifted by the creativity of natural evolution, can play the role of a nature rendered self-conscious or cut against the grain of natural evolution by simplifying the biosphere, polluting it, and undermining the cumulative results of organic evolution is above all a social problem. The primary question ecology faces today is whether an ecologically oriented

society can be created out of the present anti-ecological one.

Deep ecology provides is with no approach for responding to, much less acting upon, this key question. It not only rips invaluable ideas like decentralization, a nonhierarchical society, local autonomy, mutual aid, and communalism from the liberatory anarchic tradition of the past where they have acquired a richly nuanced, anti-elitist, and egalitarian content — reinforced by passionate struggles by millions of men and women for freedom. It reduces them to bumper-sticker slogans that can be recycled for use by a macho mountain man like Foreman at one extreme or flaky spiritualists at the other. These bumper-sticker slogans are then relocated in a particularly repulsive context whose contours are defined by Malthusian elitism, antihumanist misanthropy, and a seemingly benign “biocentrism” that dissolves humanity with all its unique natural traits for conceptual thought and self-consciousness into a “biocentric democracy” that is more properly the product of human consciousness than a natural reality. Carried to its logical absurdity, this “biocentric democracy” — one might also speak of a tree’s morality or a leopard’s social contract with its prey — can no more deny the right of pathogenic viruses to be placed in an Endangered Species list (and who places them there in the first place?) than it can deny the same status to whales. The social roots of the ecological crisis are layered over with a hybridized, often self-contradictory spirituality in which the human self, writ large, is projected into the environment or into the sky as a reified deity or deities — a piece of anthropocentrism if ever there was one, like the shamans dressed in reindeer skins and horns — and abjectly revered as “nature.” Or as Arne Naess, the grand pontiff of this mess, puts it: “The basic principles within the deep ecology movement are grounded in religion or philosophy” (225) — as though the two words can be flippantly used interchangeably. Selfhood is dissolved, in turn, into a cosmic “Self” precisely at a time when deindividuation and passivity are being cultivated by the mass media, corporations, and the State to an appalling extent. Finally, deep ecology, with its concern for the manipulation of nature, exhibits very little concern for the manipulation of human beings by one another, except perhaps when it comes to the drastic measures that may be “needed” for “population control.”

Unless there is a resolute attempt to fully anchor ecological dislocation in social dislocations, to challenge the vested corporate and political interests known as capitalist society — not some vague “industrial/technological” society that even Dwight D. Eisenhower attacked with a more acerbic term — to analyze, explore and attack hierarchy as a reality, not only as a sensibility, to recognize the material needs of the poor and of Third World people, to

function politically, not simply as a religious cult, to give the human species and mind their due in natural evolution, not simply to regard them as cancers in the biosphere, to examine economies as well as souls and freedom as well as immerse ourselves in introspective or scholastic arguments about the rights of pathogenic viruses — unless in short North American Greens and the ecology movement shift their focus toward a social ecology and let deep ecology sink into the pit it has created, the ecology movement will become another ugly wart on the skin of society.

What we must do today is return to nature, conceived in all its fecundity, richness of potentialities, and subjectivity — not to supernature with its shamans, priests, priestesses, and fanciful deities that are merely anthropomorphic extensions and distortions of the human as all-embracing divinities. And what we must enchant is not only an abstract nature that often reflects our own systems of power, hierarchy, and domination, but rather human beings, the human mind, and the human spirit that has taken such a beating these days from every source, particularly deep ecology.

Deep ecology, with its Malthusian thrust, its various centricities, its mystifying Eco-la-la, and its disorienting eclecticism degrades this enterprise into a crude biologism that deflects us from the social problems that underpin the ecological ones and the project of social reconstruction that alone can spare the biosphere from virtual destruction.

We must finally take a stand on these issues — free of all Eco-la-la — or acknowledge that the academy has made another conquest: namely that of the ecology movement itself.

June 25, 1987

Burlington, Vermont

**Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier**

**Ecofascism: Lessons from the  
German Experience**

**1996**

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## Introduction

For most compassionate and humane people today, the ecological crisis is a source of major concern. Not only do many ecological activists struggle to eliminate toxic wastes, to preserve tropical rainforests and old-growth redwoods, and to roll back the destruction of the biosphere, but many ordinary people in all walks of life are intensely concerned about the nature of the planet that their children will grow up to inhabit. In Europe as in the United States, most ecological activists think of themselves as socially progressive. That is, they also support demands of oppressed peoples for social justice and believe that the needs of human beings living in poverty, illness, warfare, and famine also require our most serious attention.

For many such people, it may come as a surprise to learn that the history of ecological politics has not always been inherently and necessarily progressive and benign. In fact, ecological ideas have a history of being distorted and placed in the service of highly regressive ends — even of fascism itself. As Peter Staudenmaier shows in the first essay in this pamphlet, important tendencies in German “ecologism,” which has long roots in nineteenth-century nature mysticism, fed into the rise of Nazism in the twentieth century. During the Third Reich, Staudenmaier goes on to show, Nazi “ecologists” even made organic farming, vegetarianism, nature worship, and related themes into key elements not only in their ideology but in their governmental policies. Moreover, Nazi “ecological” ideology was used to justify the destruction of European Jewry. Yet some of the themes that Nazi ideologists articulated bear an uncomfortably close resemblance to themes familiar to ecologically concerned people today.

As social ecologists, it is not our intention to deprecate the all-important efforts that environmentalists and ecologists are making to rescue the biosphere from destruction. Quite to the contrary: It is our deepest concern to preserve the integrity of serious ecological movements from ugly reactionary tendencies that seek to exploit the widespread popular concern about ecological problems for regressive agendas. But we find that the “ecological scene” of our time — with its growing mysticism and antihumanism — poses serious problems about the direction in which the ecology movement will go.

In most Western nations in the late twentieth century, expressions of racism and anti-immigrant sentiments are not only increasingly voiced but

increasingly tolerated. Equally disconcertingly, fascist ideologists and political groups are experiencing a resurgence as well. Updating their ideology and speaking the new language of ecology, these movements are once again invoking ecological themes to serve social reaction. In ways that sometimes approximate beliefs of progressive-minded ecologists, these reactionary and outright fascist ecologists emphasize the supremacy of the “Earth” over people; evoke “feelings” and intuition at the expense of reason; and uphold a crude sociobiologistic and even Malthusian biologism. Tenets of “New Age” eco-ideology that seem benign to most people in England and the United States — specifically, its mystical and antirational strains — are being intertwined with ecofascism in Germany today. Janet Biehl’s essay explores this hijacking of ecology for racist, nationalistic, and fascist ends.

Taken together, these essays examine aspects of German fascism, past and present, in order to draw lessons from them for ecology movements both in Germany and elsewhere. Despite its singularities, the German experience offers a clear warning against the misuse of ecology, in a world that seems ever more willing to tolerate movements and ideologies once regarded as despicable and obsolete. Political ecology thinkers have yet to fully examine the political implications of these ideas in the English-speaking world as well as in Germany.

What prevents ecological politics from yielding reaction or fascism with an ecological patina is an ecology movement that maintains a broad social emphasis, one that places the ecological crisis in a social context. As social ecologists, we see the roots of the present ecological crisis in an irrational society — not in the biological makeup of human beings, nor in a particular religion, nor in reason, science, or technology. On the contrary, we uphold the importance of reason, science, and technology in creating both a progressive ecological movement and an ecological society. It is a specific set of social relations — above all, the competitive market economy — that is presently destroying the biosphere. Mysticism and biologism, at the very least, deflect public attention away from such *social* causes. In presenting these essays, we are trying to preserve the all-important progressive and emancipatory implications of ecological politics. More than ever, an ecological commitment requires people today to avoid repeating the errors of the past, lest the ecology movement become absorbed in the mystical and antihumanistic trends that abound today.

**J.B.**

**P.S.**



# **Fascist Ecology: The “Green Wing” of the Nazi Party and its Historical Antecedents**

*by Peter Staudenmaier*

“We recognize that separating humanity from nature, from the whole of life, leads to humankind’s own destruction and to the death of nations. Only through a re-integration of humanity into the whole of nature can our people be made stronger. That is the fundamental point of the biological tasks of our age. Humankind alone is no longer the focus of thought, but rather life as a whole ... This striving toward connectedness with the totality of life, with nature itself, a nature into which we are born, this is the deepest meaning and the true essence of National Socialist thought.” [1]

In our zeal to condemn the status quo, radicals often carelessly toss about epithets like “fascist” and “ecofascist,” thus contributing to a sort of conceptual inflation that in no way furthers effective social critique. In such a situation, it is easy to overlook the fact that there are still virulent strains of fascism in our political culture which, however marginal, demand our attention. One of the least recognized or understood of these strains is the phenomenon one might call “actually existing ecofascism,” that is, the preoccupation of authentically fascist movements with environmentalist concerns. In order to grasp the peculiar intensity and endurance of this affiliation, we would do well to examine more closely its most notorious historical incarnation, the so-called “green wing” of German National Socialism.

Despite an extensive documentary record, the subject remains an elusive one, underappreciated by professional historians and environmental activists alike. In English-speaking countries as well as in Germany itself, the very existence of a “green wing” in the Nazi movement, much less its inspiration, goals, and consequences, has yet to be adequately researched and analyzed. Most of the handful of available interpretations succumb to either an alarming intellectual affinity with their subject.” [2] or a naive refusal to examine the full extent of the “ideological overlap between nature conservation and National Socialism.” [3] This article presents a brief and necessarily schematic overview of the ecological components of Nazism, emphasizing both their central role in

Nazi ideology and their practical implementation during the Third Reich. A preliminary survey of nineteenth and twentieth century precursors to classical ecofascism should serve to illuminate the conceptual underpinnings common to all forms of reactionary ecology.

Two initial clarifications are in order. First, the terms “environmental” and “ecological” are here used more or less interchangeably to denote ideas, attitudes, and practices commonly associated with the contemporary environmental movement. This is not an anachronism; it simply indicates an interpretive approach which highlights connections to present-day concerns. Second, this approach is not meant to endorse the historiographically discredited notion that pre-1933 historical data can or should be read as “leading inexorably” to the Nazi calamity. Rather, our concern here is with discerning ideological continuities and tracing political genealogies, in an attempt to understand the past in light of our current situation — to make history relevant to the present social and ecological crisis.

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[1] Ernst Lehmann, *Biologischer Wille. Wege und Ziele biologischer Arbeit im neuen Reich*, München, 1934, pp. 10–11. Lehmann was a professor of botany who characterized National Socialism as “politically applied biology.”

[2] Anna Bramwell, author of the only book-length study on the subject, is exemplary in this respect. See her *Blood and Soil: Walther Darré and Hitler's 'Green Party'*, Bourne End, 1985, and *Ecology in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: A History*, New Haven, 1989.

[3] See Raymond H. Dominick, *The Environmental Movement in Germany: Prophets and Pioneers, 1871–1971*, Bloomington, 1992, especially part three, “The Völkisch Temptation.”

## The Roots of the Blood and Soil Mystique

Germany is not only the birthplace of the science of ecology and the site of Green politics' rise to prominence; it has also been home to a peculiar synthesis of naturalism and nationalism forged under the influence of the Romantic tradition's anti-Enlightenment irrationalism. Two nineteenth century figures exemplify this ominous conjunction: Ernst Moritz Arndt and Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl.

While best known in Germany for his fanatical nationalism, Arndt was also dedicated to the cause of the peasantry, which lead him to a concern for the welfare of the land itself. Historians of German environmentalism mention him as the earliest example of 'ecological' thinking in the modern sense. <sup>[4]</sup> His remarkable 1815 article *On the Care and Conservation of Forests*, written at the dawn of industrialization in Central Europe, rails against shortsighted exploitation of woodlands and soil, condemning deforestation and its economic causes. At times he wrote in terms strikingly similar to those of contemporary biocentrism: "When one sees nature in a necessary connectedness and interrelationship, then all things are equally important — shrub, worm, plant, human, stone, nothing first or last, but all one single unity." <sup>[5]</sup>

Arndt's environmentalism, however, was inextricably bound up with virulently xenophobic nationalism. His eloquent and prescient appeals for ecological sensitivity were couched always in terms of the well-being of the *German* soil and the *German* people, and his repeated lunatic polemics against miscegenation, demands for teutonic racial purity, and epithets against the French, Slavs, and Jews marked every aspect of his thought. At the very outset of the nineteenth century the deadly connection between love of land and militant racist nationalism was firmly set in place.

Riehl, a student of Arndt, further developed this sinister tradition. In some respects his 'green' streak went significantly deeper than Arndt's; presaging certain tendencies in recent environmental activism, his 1853 essay *Field and Forest* ended with a call to fight for "the rights of wilderness." But even here nationalist pathos set the tone: "We must save the forest, not only so that our ovens do not become cold in winter, but also so that the pulse of life of the people continues to beat warm and joyfully, so that Germany remains German." <sup>[6]</sup> Riehl was an implacable opponent of the rise of industrialism and

urbanization; his overtly antisemitic glorification of rural peasant values and undifferentiated condemnation of modernity established him as the “founder of agrarian romanticism and anti-urbanism.” [7]

These latter two fixations matured in the second half of the nineteenth century in the context of the *völkisch* movement, a powerful cultural disposition and social tendency which united ethnocentric populism with nature mysticism. At the heart of the *völkisch* temptation was a pathological response to modernity. In the face of the very real dislocations brought on by the triumph of industrial capitalism and national unification, *völkisch* thinkers preached a return to the land, to the simplicity and wholeness of a life attuned to nature’s purity. The mystical effusiveness of this perverted utopianism was matched by its political vulgarity. While “the Volkish movement aspired to reconstruct the society that was sanctioned by history, rooted in nature, and in communion with the cosmic life spirit,” [8] it pointedly refused to locate the sources of alienation, rootlessness and environmental destruction in social structures, laying the blame instead to rationalism, cosmopolitanism, and urban civilization. The stand-in for all of these was the age-old object of peasant hatred and middle-class resentment: the Jews. “The Germans were in search of a mysterious wholeness that would restore them to primeval happiness, destroying the hostile milieu of urban industrial civilization that the Jewish conspiracy had foisted on them.” [9]

Reformulating traditional German antisemitism into nature-friendly terms, the *völkisch* movement carried a volatile amalgam of nineteenth century cultural prejudices, Romantic obsessions with purity, and anti-Enlightenment sentiment into twentieth century political discourse. The emergence of modern ecology forged the final link in the fateful chain which bound together aggressive nationalism, mystically charged racism, and environmentalist predilections. In 1867 the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel coined the term ‘ecology’ and began to establish it as a scientific discipline dedicated to studying the interactions between organism and environment. Haeckel was also the chief popularizer of Darwin and evolutionary theory for the German-speaking world, and developed a peculiar sort of social darwinist philosophy he called ‘monism.’ The German Monist League he founded combined scientifically based ecological holism with *völkisch* social views. Haeckel believed in nordic racial superiority, strenuously opposed race mixing and enthusiastically supported racial eugenics. His fervent nationalism became fanatical with the onset of World War I, and he fulminated in antisemitic tones against the post-war Council Republic in Bavaria.

In this way “Haeckel contributed to that special variety of German thought which served as the seed bed for National Socialism. He became one of Germany’s major ideologists for racism, nationalism and imperialism.” [10] Near the end of his life he joined the Thule Society, “a secret, radically right-wing organization which played a key role in the establishment of the Nazi movement.” [11] But more than merely personal continuities are at stake here. The pioneer of scientific ecology, along with his disciples Willibald Hentschel, Wilhelm Bölsche and Bruno Wille, profoundly shaped the thinking of subsequent generations of environmentalists by embedding concern for the natural world in a tightly woven web of regressive social themes. From its very beginnings, then, ecology was bound up in an intensely reactionary political framework.

The specific contours of this early marriage of ecology and authoritarian social views are highly instructive. At the center of this ideological complex is the direct, unmediated application of biological categories to the social realm. Haeckel held that “civilization and the life of nations are governed by the same laws as prevail throughout nature and organic life.” [12] This notion of ‘natural laws’ or ‘natural order’ has long been a mainstay of reactionary environmental thought. Its concomitant is anti-humanism:

Thus, for the Monists, perhaps the most pernicious feature of European bourgeois civilization was the inflated importance which it attached to the idea of man in general, to his existence and to his talents, and to the belief that through his unique rational faculties man could essentially recreate the world and bring about a universally more harmonious and ethically just social order. [Humankind was] an insignificant creature when viewed as part of and measured against the vastness of the cosmos and the overwhelming forces of nature. [13]

Other Monists extended this anti-humanist emphasis and mixed it with the traditional *völkisch* motifs of indiscriminate anti-industrialism and anti-urbanism as well as the newly emerging pseudo-scientific racism. The linchpin, once again, was the conflation of biological and social categories. The biologist Raoul Francé, founding member of the Monist League, elaborated so-called *Lebensgesetze*, ‘laws of life’ through which the natural order determines the social order. He opposed racial mixing, for example, as “unnatural.” Francé is acclaimed by contemporary ecofascists as a “pioneer of the ecology movement.” [14]

Francé's colleague Ludwig Woltmann, another student of Haeckel, insisted on a biological interpretation for all societal phenomena, from cultural attitudes to economic arrangements. He stressed the supposed connection between environmental purity and 'racial' purity: "Woltmann took a negative attitude toward modern industrialism. He claimed that the change from an agrarian to an industrial society had hastened the decline of the race. In contrast to nature, which engendered the harmonic forms of Germanism, there were the big cities, diabolical and inorganic, destroying the virtues of the race." [15]

Thus by the early years of the twentieth century a certain type of 'ecological' argumentation, saturated with right-wing political content, had attained a measure of respectability within the political culture of Germany. During the turbulent period surrounding World War I, the mixture of ethnocentric fanaticism, regressive rejection of modernity and genuine environmental concern proved to be a very potent potion indeed.

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[4] For example, Dominick, *The Environmental Movement in Germany*, , p. 22; and Jost Hermand, *Grüne Utopien in Deutschland: Zur Geschichte des ökologischen Bewußtseins*, Frankfurt, 1991, pp. 44–45.

[5] Quoted in Rudolf Krügel, *Der Begriff des Volksgeistes in Ernst Moritz Arndts Geschichtsanschauung*, Langensalza, 1914, p. 18.

[6] Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Feld und Wald*, Stuttgart, 1857, p. 52.

[7] Klaus Bergmann, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft*, Meisenheim, 1970, p. 38. There is no satisfactory English counterpart to "Großstadtfeindschaft," a term which signifies hostility to the cosmopolitanism, internationalism, and cultural tolerance of cities as such. This 'anti-urbanism' is the precise opposite of the careful critique of urbanization worked out by Murray Bookchin in *Urbanization Without Cities*, Montréal, 1992, and *The Limits of the City*, Montréal, 1986.

[8] George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, New York, 1964, p. 29.

[9] Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933–1945*, New York, 1975, pp. 61–62.

[10] Daniel Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism: Social Darwinism in Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League*, New York, 1971, p. xvii.

[11] *ibid.*, p. 30. Gasman's thesis about the politics of Monism is hardly uncontroversial; the book's central argument, however, is sound.

[12] Quoted in Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism*, p. 34.

[13] *ibid.*, p. 33.

[14] See the foreword to the 1982 reprint of his 1923 book *Die Entdeckung der Heimat*, published by the far-right MUT Verlag.

[15] Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, p. 101.

## The Youth Movement and the Weimar Era

The chief vehicle for carrying this ideological constellation to prominence was the youth movement, an amorphous phenomenon which played a decisive but highly ambivalent role in shaping German popular culture during the first three tumultuous decades of this century. Also known as the *Wandervögel* (which translates roughly as ‘wandering free spirits’), the youth movement was a hodge-podge of countercultural elements, blending neo-Romanticism, Eastern philosophies, nature mysticism, hostility to reason, and a strong communal impulse in a confused but no less ardent search for authentic, non-alienated social relations. Their back-to-the-land emphasis spurred a passionate sensitivity to the natural world and the damage it suffered. They have been aptly characterized as ‘right-wing hippies,’ for although some sectors of the movement gravitated toward various forms of emancipatory politics (though usually shedding their environmentalist trappings in the process), most of the *Wandervögel* were eventually absorbed by the Nazis. This shift from nature worship to Führer worship is worth examining.

The various strands of the youth movement shared a common self-conception: they were a purportedly ‘non-political’ response to a deep cultural crisis, stressing the primacy of direct emotional experience over social critique and action. They pushed the contradictions of their time to the breaking point, but were unable or unwilling to take the final step toward organized, focused social rebellion, “convinced that the changes they wanted to effect in society could not be brought about by political means, but only by the improvement of the individual.”<sup>[16]</sup> This proved to be a fatal error. “Broadly speaking, two ways of revolt were open to them: they could have pursued their radical critique of society, which in due course would have brought them into the camp of social revolution. [But] the *Wandervögel* chose the other form of protest against society — romanticism.”<sup>[17]</sup>

This posture lent itself all too readily to a very different kind of political mobilization: the ‘unpolitical’ zealotry of fascism. The youth movement did not simply fail in its chosen form of protest, it was actively realigned when its members went over to the Nazis by the thousands. Its countercultural energies and its dreams of harmony with nature bore the bitterest fruit. This is, perhaps, the unavoidable trajectory of any movement which acknowledges and opposes

social and ecological problems but does not recognize their systemic roots or actively resist the political and economic structures which generate them. Eschewing societal transformation in favor of personal change, an ostensibly apolitical disaffection can, in times of crisis, yield barbaric results.

The attraction such perspectives exercised on idealistic youth is clear: the enormity of the crisis seemed to enjoin a total rejection of its apparent causes. It is in the specific form of this rejection that the danger lies. Here the work of several more theoretical minds from the period is instructive. The philosopher Ludwig Klages profoundly influenced the youth movement and particularly shaped their ecological consciousness. He authored a tremendously important essay titled “Man and Earth” for the legendary Meissner gathering of the *Wandervögel* in 1913. <sup>[18]</sup> An extraordinarily poignant text and the best known of all Klages’ work, it is not only “one of the very greatest manifestoes of the radical ecopacifist movement in Germany,” <sup>[19]</sup> but also a classic example of the seductive terminology of reactionary ecology.

“Man and Earth” anticipated just about all of the themes of the contemporary ecology movement. It decried the accelerating extinction of species, disturbance of global ecosystemic balance, deforestation, destruction of aboriginal peoples and of wild habitats, urban sprawl, and the increasing alienation of people from nature. In emphatic terms it disparaged Christianity, capitalism, economic utilitarianism, hyperconsumption and the ideology of ‘progress.’ It even condemned the environmental destructiveness of rampant tourism and the slaughter of whales, and displayed a clear recognition of the planet as an ecological totality. All of this in 1913 !

It may come as a surprise, then, to learn that Klages was throughout his life politically archconservative and a venomous antisemite. One historian labels him a “Volkish fanatic” and another considers him simply “an intellectual pacemaker for the Third Reich” who “paved the way for fascist philosophy in many important respects.” <sup>[20]</sup> In “Man and Earth” a genuine outrage at the devastation of the natural environment is coupled with a political subtext of cultural despair. <sup>[21]</sup> Klages’ diagnosis of the ills of modern society, for all its declamations about capitalism, returns always to a single culprit: “Geist.” His idiosyncratic use of this term, which means mind or intellect, was meant to denounce not only hyperrationalism or instrumental reason, but rational thought itself. Such a wholesale indictment of reason cannot help but have savage political implications. It forecloses any chance of rationally reconstructing society’s relationship with nature and justifies the most brutal authoritarianism. But the lessons of Klages’ life and work have been hard for



ecologists to learn. In 1980, “Man and Earth” was republished as an esteemed and seminal treatise to accompany the birth of the German Greens.

Another philosopher and stern critic of Enlightenment who helped bridge fascism and environmentalism was Martin Heidegger. A much more renowned thinker than Klages, Heidegger preached “authentic Being” and harshly criticized modern technology, and is therefore often celebrated as a precursor of ecological thinking. On the basis of his critique of technology and rejection of humanism, contemporary deep ecologists have elevated Heidegger to their pantheon of eco-heroes:

Heidegger’s critique of anthropocentric humanism, his call for humanity to learn to “let things be,” his notion that humanity is involved in a “play” or “dance” with earth, sky, and gods, his meditation on the possibility of an authentic mode of “dwelling” on the earth, his complaint that industrial technology is laying waste to the earth, his emphasis on the importance of local place and “homeland,” his claim that humanity should guard and preserve things, instead of dominating them — all these aspects of Heidegger’s thought help to support the claim that he is a major deep ecological theorist. <sup>[22]</sup>

Such effusions are, at best, dangerously naive. They suggest a style of thought utterly oblivious to the history of fascist appropriations of *all* the elements the quoted passage praises in Heidegger. (To his credit, the author of the above lines, a major deep ecological theorist in his own right, has since changed his position and eloquently urged his colleagues to do the same.) <sup>[23]</sup> As for the philosopher of Being himself, he was — unlike Klages, who lived in Switzerland after 1915 — an active member of the Nazi party and for a time enthusiastically, even adoringly supported the *Führer*. His mystical panegyrics to *Heimat* (homeland) were complemented by a deep antisemitism, and his metaphysically phrased broadsides against technology and modernity converged neatly with populist demagoguery. Although he lived and taught for thirty years after the fall of the Third Reich, Heidegger never once publicly regretted, much less renounced, his involvement with National Socialism, nor even perfunctorily condemned its crimes. His work, whatever its philosophical merits, stands today as a signal admonition about the political uses of anti-humanism in ecological garb.

In addition to the youth movement and protofascist philosophies, there were, of course, practical efforts at protecting natural habitats during the Weimar period. Many of these projects were profoundly implicated in the

ideology which culminated in the victory of 'Blood and Soil.' A 1923 recruitment pitch for a woodlands preservation outfit gives a sense of the environmental rhetoric of the time:

"In every German breast the German forest quivers with its caverns and ravines, crags and boulders, waters and winds, legends and fairy tales, with its songs and its melodies, and awakens a powerful yearning and a longing for home; in all German souls the German forest lives and weaves with its depth and breadth, its stillness and strength, its might and dignity, its riches and its beauty — it is the source of German inwardness, of the German soul, of German freedom. Therefore protect and care for the German forest for the sake of the elders and the youth, and join the new German "League for the Protection and Consecration of the German Forest." [24]

The mantra-like repetition of the word "German" and the mystical depiction of the sacred forest fuse together, once again, nationalism and naturalism. This intertwinement took on a grisly significance with the collapse of the Weimar republic. For alongside such relatively innocuous conservation groups, another organization was growing which offered these ideas a hospitable home: the National Socialist German Workers Party, known by its acronym NSDAP. Drawing on the heritage of Arndt, Riehl, Haeckel, and others (all of whom were honored between 1933 and 1945 as forebears of triumphant National Socialism), the Nazi movement's incorporation of environmentalist themes was a crucial factor in its rise to popularity and state power.

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[16] Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement*, New York, 1962, p.41.

[17] *ibid.*, p. 6. For a concise portrait of the youth movement which draws similar conclusions, see John De Graaf, "The Wandervogel," *CoEvolution Quarterly*, Fall 1977, pp. 14–21.

[18] Reprinted in Ludwig Klages, *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 3, Bonn, 1974, pp. 614–630. No English translation is available.

[19] Ulrich Linse, *Ökopax und Anarchie. Eine Geschichte der ökologischen Bewegungen in Deutschland*, München, 1986, p. 60.

[20] Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, p. 211, and Laqueur, *Young Germany*, p. 34.

[21] See Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, Berkeley, 1963.

[22] Michael Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics and Art*, Indianapolis, 1990, pp. 242–243.

[23] See Michael Zimmerman, "Rethinking the Heidegger — Deep Ecology Relationship", *Environmental Ethics* vol. 15, no. 3 (Fall 1993), pp. 195–224.

[24] Reproduced in Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, *Auf der Suche nach Arkadien*, München, 1990, p. 147.

## Nature in National Socialist Ideology

The reactionary ecological ideas whose outlines are sketched above exerted a powerful and lasting influence on many of the central figures in the NSDAP. Weimar culture, after all, was fairly awash in such theories, but the Nazis gave them a peculiar inflection. The National Socialist “religion of nature,” as one historian has described it, was a volatile admixture of primeval teutonic nature mysticism, pseudo-scientific ecology, irrationalist anti-humanism, and a mythology of racial salvation through a return to the land. Its predominant themes were ‘natural order,’ organicist holism and denigration of humanity: “Throughout the writings, not only of Hitler, but of most Nazi ideologues, one can discern a fundamental deprecation of humans *vis-à-vis* nature, and, as a logical corollary to this, an attack upon human efforts to master nature.” [25] Quoting a Nazi educator, the same source continues: “anthropocentric views in general had to be rejected. They would be valid only ‘if it is assumed that nature has been created only for man. We decisively reject this attitude. According to our conception of nature, man is a link in the living chain of nature just as any other organism’.” [26]

Such arguments have a chilling currency within contemporary ecological discourse: the key to social-ecological harmony is ascertaining “the eternal laws of nature’s processes” (Hitler) and organizing society to correspond to them. The *Führer* was particularly fond of stressing the “helplessness of humankind in the face of nature’s everlasting law.” [27] Echoing Haeckel and the Monists, *Mein Kampf* announces: “When people attempt to rebel against the iron logic of nature, they come into conflict with the very same principles to which they owe their existence as human beings. Their actions against nature must lead to their own downfall.” [28]

The authoritarian implications of this view of humanity and nature become even clearer in the context of the Nazis’ emphasis on holism and organicism. In 1934 the director of the Reich Agency for Nature Protection, Walter Schoenichen, established the following objectives for biology curricula: “Very early, the youth must develop an understanding of the civic importance of the ‘organism’, i.e. the co-ordination of all parts and organs for the benefit of the one and superior task of life.” [29] This (by now familiar) unmediated adaptation of biological concepts to social phenomena served to justify not

only the totalitarian social order of the Third Reich but also the expansionist politics of *Lebensraum* (the plan of conquering 'living space' in Eastern Europe for the German people). It also provided the link between environmental purity and racial purity:

Two central themes of biology education follow [according to the Nazis] from the holistic perspective: nature protection and eugenics. If one views nature as a unified whole, students will automatically develop a sense for ecology and environmental conservation. At the same time, the nature protection concept will direct attention to the urbanized and 'overcivilized' modern human race. [30]

In many varieties of the National Socialist world view ecological themes were linked with traditional agrarian romanticism and hostility to urban civilization, all revolving around the idea of rootedness in nature. This conceptual constellation, especially the search for a lost connection to nature, was most pronounced among the neo-pagan elements in the Nazi leadership, above all Heinrich Himmler, Alfred Rosenberg, and Walther Darré. Rosenberg wrote in his colossal *The Myth of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*: "Today we see the steady stream from the countryside to the city, deadly for the *Volk*. The cities swell ever larger, unnerving the *Volk* and destroying the threads which bind humanity to nature; they attract adventurers and profiteers of all colors, thereby fostering racial chaos." [31]

Such musings, it must be stressed, were not mere rhetoric; they reflected firmly held beliefs and, indeed, practices at the very top of the Nazi hierarchy which are today conventionally associated with ecological attitudes. Hitler and Himmler were both strict vegetarians and animal lovers, attracted to nature mysticism and homeopathic cures, and staunchly opposed to vivisection and cruelty to animals. Himmler even established experimental organic farms to grow herbs for SS medicinal purposes. And Hitler, at times, could sound like a veritable Green utopian, discussing authoritatively and in detail various renewable energy sources (including environmentally appropriate hydropower and producing natural gas from sludge) as alternatives to coal, and declaring "water, winds and tides" as the energy path of the future. [32]

Even in the midst of war, Nazi leaders maintained their commitment to ecological ideals which were, for them, an essential element of racial rejuvenation. In December 1942, Himmler released a decree "On the Treatment of the Land in the Eastern Territories," referring to the newly annexed portions of Poland. It read in part:

The peasant of our racial stock has always carefully endeavored to increase the natural powers of the soil, plants, and animals, and to preserve the balance of the whole of nature. For him, respect for divine creation is the measure of all culture. If, therefore, the new *Lebensräume* (living spaces) are to become a homeland for our settlers, the planned arrangement of the landscape to keep it close to nature is a decisive prerequisite. It is one of the bases for fortifying the German *Volk*.<sup>[33]</sup>

This passage recapitulates almost all of the tropes comprised by classical ecofascist ideology: *Lebensraum*, *Heimat*, the agrarian mystique, the health of the *Volk*, closeness to and respect for nature (explicitly constructed as the standard against which society is to be judged), maintaining nature's precarious balance, and the earthy powers of the soil and its creatures. Such motifs were anything but personal idiosyncracies on the part of Hitler, Himmler, or Rosenberg; even Göring — who was, along with Goebbels, the member of the Nazi inner circle least hospitable to ecological ideas — appeared at times to be a committed conservationist.<sup>[34]</sup> These sympathies were also hardly restricted to the upper echelons of the party. A study of the membership rolls of several mainstream Weimar era *Naturschutz* (nature protection) organizations revealed that by 1939, fully 60 percent of these conservationists had joined the NSDAP (compared to about 10 percent of adult men and 25 percent of teachers and lawyers).<sup>[35]</sup> Clearly the affinities between environmentalism and National Socialism ran deep.

At the level of ideology, then, ecological themes played a vital role in German fascism. It would be a grave mistake, however, to treat these elements as mere propaganda, cleverly deployed to mask Nazism's true character as a technocratic-industrialist juggernaut. The definitive history of German anti-urbanism and agrarian romanticism argues incisively against this view:

Nothing could be more wrong than to suppose that most of the leading National Socialist ideologues had cynically feigned an agrarian romanticism and hostility to urban culture, without any inner conviction and for merely electoral and propaganda purposes, in order to hoodwink the public [...] In reality, the majority of the leading National Socialist ideologists were without any doubt more or less inclined to agrarian romanticism and anti-urbanism and convinced of the need for a relative re-agrarianization.<sup>[36]</sup>

The question remains, however: To what extent did the Nazis actually

implement environmental policies during the twelve-year Reich? There is strong evidence that the 'ecological' tendency in the party, though largely ignored today, had considerable success for most of the party's reign. This "green wing" of the NSDAP was represented above all by Walther Darré, Fritz Todt, Alwin Seifert and Rudolf Hess, the four figures who primarily shaped fascist ecology in practice.

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[25] Robert Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature*, London, 1985, p. 40.

[26] *ibid.*, pp. 42–43. The internal quote is taken from George Mosse, *Nazi Culture*, New York, 1965, p. 87.

[27] Hitler, in Henry Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1942*, Stuttgart, 1963, p. 151.

[28] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, München, 1935, p. 314.

[29] Quoted in Gert Gröning and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, "Politics, planning and the protection of nature: political abuse of early ecological ideas in Germany, 1933–1945", *Planning Perspectives* 2 (1987), p. 129.

[30] Anne Bäumer, *NS-Biologie*, Stuttgart, 1990, p. 198.

[31] Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*, München, 1938, p. 550. Rosenberg was, in the early years at least, the chief ideologist of the Nazi movement.

[32] Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche*, pp. 139–140.

[33] Quoted in Heinz Haushofer, *Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft und Agrarpolitik im deutschen Sprachgebiet*, Band II, München, 1958, p. 266.

[34] See Dominick, *The Environmental Movement in Germany*, p. 107.

[35] *ibid.*, p. 113.

[36] Bergmann, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft*, p. 334. Ernst Nolte makes a similar argument in *Three Faces of Fascism*, New York, 1966, pp. 407–408, though the point gets lost somewhat in the translation. See also Norbert Frei, *National Socialist Rule in Germany*, Oxford, 1993, p. 56: "The change in direction towards the 'soil' had not been an electoral tactic. It was one of the basic ideological elements of National Socialism ..."

## Blood and Soil as Official Doctrine

“The unity of blood and soil must be restored,” proclaimed Richard Walther Darré in 1930. <sup>[37]</sup> This infamous phrase denoted a quasi-mystical connection between ‘blood’ (the race or *Volk*) and ‘soil’ (the land and the natural environment) specific to Germanic peoples and absent, for example, among Celts and Slavs. For the enthusiasts of *Blut und Boden*, the Jews especially were a rootless, wandering people, incapable of any true relationship with the land. German blood, in other words, engendered an exclusive claim to the sacred German soil. While the term “blood and soil” had been circulating in *völkisch* circles since at least the Wilhelmine era, it was Darré who first popularized it as a slogan and then enshrined it as a guiding principle of Nazi thought. Harking back to Arndt and Riehl, he envisioned a thoroughgoing ruralization of Germany and Europe, predicated on a revitalized yeoman peasantry, in order to ensure racial health and ecological sustainability.

Darré was one of the party’s chief “race theorists” and was also instrumental in galvanizing peasant support for the Nazis during the critical period of the early 1930s. From 1933 until 1942 he held the posts of Reich Peasant Leader and Minister of Agriculture. This was no minor fiefdom; the agriculture ministry had the fourth largest budget of all the myriad Nazi ministries even well into the war. <sup>[38]</sup> From this position Darré was able to lend vital support to various ecologically oriented initiatives. He played an essential part in unifying the nebulous proto-environmentalist tendencies in National Socialism:

It was Darré who gave the ill-defined anti-civilization, anti-liberal, anti-modern and latent anti-urban sentiments of the Nazi elite a foundation in the agrarian mystique. And it seems as if Darré had an immense influence on the ideology of National Socialism, as if he was able to articulate significantly more clearly than before the values system of an agrarian society contained in Nazi ideology and — above all — to legitimate this agrarian model and give Nazi policy a goal that was clearly oriented toward a far-reaching re-agrarianization. <sup>[39]</sup>

This goal was not only quite consonant with imperialist expansion in the name of *Lebensraum*, it was in fact one of its primary justifications, even

motivations. In language replete with the biologicistic metaphors of organicism, Darré declared: “The concept of Blood and Soil gives us the moral right to take back as much land in the East as is necessary to establish a harmony between the body of our *Volk* and the geopolitical space.” [40]

Aside from providing green camouflage for the colonization of Eastern Europe, Darré worked to install environmentally sensitive principles as the very basis of the Third Reich’s agricultural policy. Even in its most productivist phases, these precepts remained emblematic of Nazi doctrine. When the “Battle for Production” (a scheme to boost the productivity of the agricultural sector) was proclaimed at the second Reich Farmers Congress in 1934, the very first point in the program read “Keep the soil healthy !” But Darré’s most important innovation was the introduction on a large scale of organic farming methods, significantly labeled “*lebensgesetzliche Landbauweise*,” or farming according to the laws of life. The term points up yet again the natural order ideology which underlies so much reactionary ecological thought. The impetus for these unprecedented measures came from Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy and its techniques of biodynamic cultivation. [41]

The campaign to institutionalize organic farming encompassed tens of thousands of smallholdings and estates across Germany. It met with considerable resistance from other members of the Nazi hierarchy, above all Backe and Göring. But Darré, with the help of Hess and others, was able to sustain the policy until his forced resignation in 1942 (an event which had little to do with his environmentalist leanings). And these efforts in no sense represented merely Darré’s personal predilections; as the standard history of German agricultural policy points out, Hitler and Himmler “were in complete sympathy with these ideas.” [42] Still, it was largely Darré’s influence in the Nazi apparatus which yielded, in practice, a level of government support for ecologically sound farming methods and land use planning unmatched by any state before or since.

For these reasons Darré has sometimes been regarded as a forerunner of the contemporary Green movement. His biographer, in fact, once referred to him as the “father of the Greens.” [43] Her book *Blood and Soil*, undoubtedly the best single source on Darré in either German or English, consistently downplays the virulently fascist elements in his thinking, portraying him instead as a misguided agrarian radical. This grave error in judgement indicates the powerfully disorienting pull of an ‘ecological’ aura. Darré’s published writings alone, dating back to the early twenties, are enough to indict him as a rabidly racist and jingoist ideologue particularly prone to a vulgar and hateful



antisemitism (he spoke of Jews, revealingly, as “weeds”). His decade-long tenure as a loyal servant and, moreover, architect of the Nazi state demonstrates his dedication to Hitler’s deranged cause. One account even claims that it was Darré who convinced Hitler and Himmler of the necessity of exterminating the Jews and Slavs. <sup>[44]</sup> The ecological aspects of his thought cannot, in sum, be separated from their thoroughly Nazi framework. Far from embodying the ‘redeeming’ facets of National Socialism, Darré represents the baleful specter of ecofascism in power.

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<sup>[37]</sup> R. Walther Darré, *Um Blut und Boden: Reden und Aufsätze*, München, 1939, p. 28. The quote is from a 1930 speech entitled “Blood and Soil as the Foundations of Life of the Nordic Race.”

<sup>[38]</sup> Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, p. 203. See also Frei, *National Socialist Rule in Germany*, p. 57, which stresses that Darré’s total control over agricultural policy constituted a uniquely powerful position within the Nazi system.

<sup>[39]</sup> Bergmann, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft*, p. 312.

<sup>[40]</sup> *ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>[41]</sup> See Haushofer, *Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft*, pp. 269–271, and Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, pp. 200–206, for the formative influence of Steinerite ideas on Darré.

<sup>[42]</sup> Haushofer, *Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft*, p. 271.

<sup>[43]</sup> Anna Bramwell, “Darré. Was This Man ‘Father of the Greens’?” *History Today*, September 1984, vol. 34, pp. 7–13. This repugnant article is one long series of distortions designed to paint Darré as an anti-Hitler hero — an effort as preposterous as it is loathsome.

<sup>[44]</sup> Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *Hess: A Biography*, London, 1971, p. 34.

## Implementing the Ecofascist Program

It is frequently pointed out that the agrarian and romantic moments in Nazi ideology and policy were in constant tension with, if not in flat contradiction to, the technocratic-industrialist thrust of the Third Reich's rapid modernization. What is not often remarked is that even these modernizing tendencies had a significant ecological component. The two men principally responsible for sustaining this environmentalist commitment in the midst of intensive industrialization were *Reichsminister* Fritz Todt and his aide, the high-level planner and engineer Alwin Seifert.

Todt was "one of the most influential National Socialists," [45] directly responsible for questions of technological and industrial policy. At his death in 1942 he headed three different cabinet-level ministries in addition to the enormous quasi-official *Organisation Todt*, and had "gathered the major technical tasks of the Reich into his own hands." [46] According to his successor, Albert Speer, Todt "loved nature" and "repeatedly had serious run-ins with Bormann, protesting against his despoiling the landscape around Obersalzberg." [47] Another source calls him simply "an ecologist." [48] This reputation is based chiefly on Todt's efforts to make Autobahn construction — one of the largest building enterprises undertaken in this century — as environmentally sensitive as possible.

The pre-eminent historian of German engineering describes this commitment thus: "Todt demanded of the completed work of technology a harmony with nature and with the landscape, thereby fulfilling modern ecological principles of engineering as well as the 'organological' principles of his own era along with their roots in *völkisch* ideology." [49] The ecological aspects of this approach to construction went well beyond an emphasis on harmonious adaptation to the natural surroundings for aesthetic reasons; Todt also established strict criteria for respecting wetlands, forests and ecologically sensitive areas. But just as with Arndt, Riehl and Darré, these environmentalist concerns were inseparably bound to a *völkisch*-nationalist outlook. Todt himself expressed this connection succinctly: "The fulfillment of mere transportation purposes is not the final aim of German highway construction. The German highway must be an expression of its surrounding landscape and an expression of the German essence." [50]

Todt's chief advisor and collaborator on environmental issues was his lieutenant Alwin Seifert, whom Todt reportedly once called a "fanatical ecologist." [51] Seifert bore the official title of Reich Advocate for the Landscape, but his nickname within the party was "Mr. Mother Earth." The appellation was deserved; Seifert dreamed of a "total conversion from technology to nature," [52] and would often wax lyrical about the wonders of German nature and the tragedy of "humankind's" carelessness. As early as 1934 he wrote to Hess demanding attention to water issues and invoking "work methods that are more attuned to nature." [53] In discharging his official duties Seifert stressed the importance of wilderness and energetically opposed monoculture, wetlands drainage and chemicalized agriculture. He criticized Darré as too moderate, and "called for an agricultural revolution towards 'a more peasant-like, natural, simple' method of farming, 'independent of capital'." [54]

With the Third Reich's technological policy entrusted to figures such as these, even the Nazis' massive industrial build-up took on a distinctively green hue. The prominence of nature in the party's philosophical background helped ensure that more radical initiatives often received a sympathetic hearing in the highest offices of the Nazi state. In the mid-thirties Todt and Seifert vigorously pushed for an all-encompassing Reich Law for the Protection of Mother Earth "in order to stem the steady loss of this irreplaceable basis of all life." [55] Seifert reports that all of the ministries were prepared to co-operate save one; only the minister of the economy opposed the bill because of its impact on mining.

But even near-misses such as these would have been unthinkable without the support of Reich Chancellor Rudolf Hess, who provided the "green wing" of the NSDAP a secure anchor at the very top of the party hierarchy. It would be difficult to overestimate Hess's power and centrality in the complex governmental machinery of the National Socialist regime. He joined the party in 1920 as member #16, and for two decades was Hitler's devoted personal deputy. He has been described as "Hitler's closest confidant," [56] and the *Führer* himself referred to Hess as his "closest advisor." [57] Hess was not only the highest party leader and second in line (after Göring) to succeed Hitler; in addition, all legislation and every decree had to pass through his office before becoming law.

An inveterate nature lover as well as a devout Steinerite, Hess insisted on a strictly biodynamic diet — not even Hitler's rigorous vegetarian standards were good enough for him — and accepted only homeopathic medicines. It was Hess who introduced Darré to Hitler, thus securing the "green wing" its first power

base. He was an even more tenacious proponent of organic farming than Darré, and pushed the latter to take more demonstrative steps in support of the *lebensgesetzliche Landbauweise*.<sup>[58]</sup> His office was also directly responsible for land use planning across the Reich, employing a number of specialists who shared Seifert's ecological approach.<sup>[59]</sup>

With Hess's enthusiastic backing, the "green wing" was able to achieve its most notable successes. As early as March 1933, a wide array of environmentalist legislation was approved and implemented at national, regional and local levels. These measures, which included reforestation programs, bills protecting animal and plant species, and preservationist decrees blocking industrial development, undoubtedly "ranked among the most progressive in the world at that time."<sup>[60]</sup> Planning ordinances were designed for the protection of wildlife habitat and at the same time demanded respect for the sacred German forest. The Nazi state also created the first nature preserves in Europe.

Along with Darré's efforts toward re-agrarianization and support for organic agriculture, as well as Todt and Seifert's attempts to institutionalize an environmentally sensitive land use planning and industrial policy, the major accomplishment of the Nazi ecologists was the *Reichsnaturschutzgesetz* of 1935. This completely unprecedented "nature protection law" not only established guidelines for safeguarding flora, fauna, and "natural monuments" across the Reich; it also restricted commercial access to remaining tracts of wilderness. In addition, the comprehensive ordinance "required all national, state and local officials to consult with Naturschutz authorities in a timely manner before undertaking any measures that would produce fundamental alterations in the countryside."<sup>[61]</sup>

Although the legislation's effectiveness was questionable, traditional German environmentalists were overjoyed at its passage. Walter Schoenichen declared it the "definitive fulfillment of the *völkisch*-romantic longings,"<sup>[62]</sup> and Hans Klose, Schoenichen's successor as head of the Reich Agency for Nature Protection, described Nazi environmental policy as the "high point of nature protection" in Germany. Perhaps the greatest success of these measures was in facilitating the "intellectual realignment of German Naturschutz" and the integration of mainstream environmentalism into the Nazi enterprise.<sup>[63]</sup>

While the achievements of the "green wing" were daunting, they should not be exaggerated. Ecological initiatives were, of course, hardly universally popular within the party. Goebbels, Bormann, and Heydrich, for example, were implacably opposed to them, and considered Darré, Hess and their fellows

undependable dreamers, eccentrics, or simply security risks. This latter suspicion seemed to be confirmed by Hess's famed flight to Britain in 1941; after that point, the environmentalist tendency was for the most part suppressed. Todt was killed in a plane crash in February 1942, and shortly thereafter Darré was stripped of all his posts. For the final three years of the Nazi conflagration the "green wing" played no active role. Their work, however, had long since left an indelible stain.

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[45] Franz Neumann, *Behemoth. The Structure and Practice of National Socialism 1933–1944*, New York, 1944, p. 378.

[46] Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, New York, 1970, p. 263.

[47] *ibid.*, p. 261.

[48] Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, p. 197.

[49] Karl-Heinz Ludwig, *Technik und Ingenieure im Dritten Reich*, Düsseldorf, 1974, p. 337.

[50] Quoted in Rolf Peter Sieferle, *Fortschrittsfeinde? Opposition gegen Technik und Industrie von der Romantik bis zur Gegenwart*, München, 1984, p. 220. Todt was just as convinced a Nazi as Darré or Hess; on the extent (and pettiness) of his allegiance to antisemitic policies, see Alan Beyerchen, *Scientists Under Hitler*, New Haven, 1977, pages 66–68 and 289.

[51] Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, p. 173.

[52] Alwin Seifert, *Im Zeitalter des Lebendigen*, Dresden, 1941, p. 13. The book's title is grotesquely inapt considering the date of publication; it means "in the age of the living."

[53] Alwin Seifert, *Ein Leben für die Landschaft*, Düsseldorf, 1962, p. 100.

[54] Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, p. 198. Bramwell cites Darré's papers as the source of the internal quote.

[55] Seifert, *Ein Leben für die Landschaft*, p. 90.

[56] William Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, New York, 1941, p. 19. Shirer also calls Hess Hitler's "protégé" (588) and "the only man in the world he fully trusts" (587), and substantiates Darré's and Todt's standing as well (590).

[57] Quoted in Manvell and Fraenkel, *Hess*, p. 80. In a further remarkable confirmation of the 'green' faction's stature, Hitler once declared that Todt and Hess were "the only two human beings among all those around me to whom I have been truly and inwardly attached" (*Hess*, p. 132).

[58] See Haushofer, *Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft*, p. 270, and Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, p. 201.

[59] *ibid.*, pp. 197–200. Most of Todt's work also ran through Hess's office.

[60] Raymond Dominick, "The Nazis and the Nature Conservationists", *The Historian* vol. XLIX no. 4 (August 1987), p. 534.

[61] *ibid.*, p. 536.

[62] Hermand, *Grüne Utopien in Deutschland*, p. 114.

[63] Dominick, "The Nazis and the Nature Conservationists", p. 529.

## Fascist Ecology in Context

To make this dismaying and discomfoting analysis more palatable, it is tempting to draw precisely the wrong conclusion — namely, that even the most reprehensible political undertakings sometimes produce laudable results. But the real lesson here is just the opposite: Even the most laudable of causes can be perverted and instrumentalized in the service of criminal savagery. The “green wing” of the NSDAP was not a group of innocents, confused and manipulated idealists, or reformers from within; they were conscious promoters and executors of a vile program explicitly dedicated to inhuman racist violence, massive political repression and worldwide military domination. Their ‘ecological’ involvements, far from offsetting these fundamental commitments, deepened and radicalized them. In the end, their configuration of environmental politics was directly and substantially responsible for organized mass murder.

No aspect of the Nazi project can be properly understood without examining its implication in the holocaust. Here, too, ecological arguments played a crucially malevolent role. Not only did the “green wing” refurbish the sanguine antisemitism of traditional reactionary ecology; it catalyzed a whole new outburst of lurid racist fantasies of organic inviolability and political revenge. The confluence of anti-humanist dogma with a fetishization of natural ‘purity’ provided not merely a rationale but an incentive for the Third Reich’s most heinous crimes. Its insidious appeal unleashed murderous energies previously untapped. Finally, the displacement of any social analysis of environmental destruction in favor of mystical ecology served as an integral component in the preparation of the final solution:

To explain the destruction of the countryside and environmental damage, without questioning the German people’s bond to nature, could only be done by not analysing environmental damage in a societal context and by refusing to understand them as an expression of conflicting social interests. Had this been done, it would have led to criticism of National Socialism itself since that was not immune to such forces. One solution was to associate such environmental problems with the destructive influence of other races. National Socialism could then be seen to strive

for the elimination of other races in order to allow the German people's innate understanding and feeling of nature to assert itself, hence securing a harmonic life close to nature for the future. [64]

This is the true legacy of ecofascism in power: "genocide developed into a necessity under the cloak of environment protection." [65]

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The experience of the "green wing" of German fascism is a sobering reminder of the political volatility of ecology. It certainly does not indicate any inherent or inevitable connection between ecological issues and right-wing politics; alongside the reactionary tradition surveyed here, there has always been an equally vital heritage of left-libertarian ecology, in Germany as elsewhere. [66] But certain patterns can be discerned: "While concerns about problems posed by humankind's increasing mastery over nature have increasingly been shared by ever larger groups of people embracing a plethora of ideologies, the most consistent 'pro-natural order' response found political embodiment on the radical right." [67] This is the common thread which unites merely conservative or even supposedly apolitical manifestations of environmentalism with the straightforwardly fascist variety.

The historical record does, to be sure, belie the vacuous claim that "those who want to reform society according to nature are neither left nor right but ecologically minded." [68] Environmental themes can be mobilized from the left or from the right, indeed they *require* an explicit social context if they are to have any political valence whatsoever. "Ecology" alone does not prescribe a politics; it must be interpreted, mediated through some theory of society in order to acquire political meaning. Failure to heed this mediated interrelationship between the social and the ecological is the hallmark of reactionary ecology.

As noted above, this failure most commonly takes the form of a call to "reform society according to nature," that is, to formulate some version of 'natural order' or 'natural law' and submit human needs and actions to it. As a consequence, the underlying social processes and societal structures which constitute and shape people's relations with their environment are left unexamined. Such willful ignorance, in turn, obscures the ways in which all conceptions of nature are themselves socially produced, and leaves power structures unquestioned while simultaneously providing them with apparently 'naturally ordained' status. Thus the substitution of ecomysticism for clear-

sighted social-ecological inquiry has catastrophic political repercussions, as the complexity of the society-nature dialectic is collapsed into a purified Oneness. An ideologically charged ‘natural order’ does not leave room for compromise; its claims are absolute.

For all of these reasons, the slogan advanced by many contemporary Greens, “We are neither right nor left but up front,” is historically naive and politically fatal. The necessary project of creating an emancipatory ecological politics demands an acute awareness and understanding of the legacy of classical ecofascism and its conceptual continuities with present-day environmental discourse. An ‘ecological’ orientation alone, outside of a critical social framework, is dangerously unstable. The record of fascist ecology shows that under the right conditions such an orientation can quickly lead to barbarism.

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[64] Gröning and Wolschke-Bulmahn, “Politics, planning and the protection of nature”, p. 137.

[65] *ibid.*, p. 138.

[66] Linse’s *Ökopax und Anarchie*, among others, offers a detailed consideration of the history of eco-anarchism in Germany.

[67] Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature*, p. 27.

[68] Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, p. 48.



# **‘Ecology’ and the Modernization of Fascism in the German Ultra-right**

*by Janet Biehl*

It is an incontestable fact that the ecology crisis today is real. In a vast number of ways and places, the biosphere of this planet is undergoing a great deal of damage. Parts of the environment have already been rendered uninhabitable through toxic wastes and nuclear power plant disasters, while systemic pollution, ozone holes, global warming, and other disasters are increasingly tearing the fabric on which all life depends. That such damage is wrought overwhelmingly by corporations in a competitive international market economy has never been clearer, while the need to replace the existing society with one such as social ecology advances has never been more urgent. [69]

At a time when worsening economic conditions and strong political disaffection occur along with ecological dislocations, however, nationalist and even fascist ideas are gaining an increasingly high profile in Europe, particularly, but not only, in the Federal Republic of Germany. With social tensions exacerbated, neofascist groups of various kinds are winning electoral representation, even as their loosely linked cohorts commit acts of violence against foreigners. Such groups, both skinhead and ‘intellectual,’ are part of a ‘New’ Right that explicitly draws its ideas from classical fascism. They are updating the old nationalist, mystical, and misanthropic themes of the ‘Old’ Right, writes Jutta Ditzfurth, in a “modernization of fascism.” Among other things, they are using a right-wing interpretation of ecology “as an ideological ‘hinge’ for organizing the extreme-right and neofascist scene.” [70]

Today’s fascists have a distinct ideological legacy from their fascist forebears upon which to draw. Indeed, ‘ecology’ and a mystical reverence for the natural world are hardly new to German nationalism. At the end of the nineteenth century, a cultural revolt against positivism swept much of Europe, as George L. Mosse writes, and in Germany it became infused with both nature-mysticism and racial nationalism. This revolt

became intimately bound up with a belief in nature’s cosmic life force, a dark force whose mysteries could be understood, not through science, but

through the occult. An ideology based upon such premises was fused with the glories of an Aryan past, and in turn, that past received a thoroughly romantic and mystical interpretation. [71]

Culminating in the 1920s, an assortment of occult and pseudo-scientific ideas coalesced around the idea of a German *Volk* into a romantic nationalism, romantic racism, and a mystical nature-worshipping faith. Indeed, as Mosse observes, the German word *Volk*

is a much more comprehensive term than “people,” for to German thinkers ever since the birth of German romanticism in the late eighteenth century “Volk” signified the union of a group of people with a transcendental “essence.” This “essence” might be called “nature” or “cosmos” or “mythos,” but in each instance it was fused to man’s innermost nature, and represented the source of his creativity, his depth of feeling, his individuality, and his unity with other members of the Volk. [72]

The *völkisch* movement of the 1920s regarded modern materialism, urbanism, rationalism, and science as artificial and evil, alien to this ‘essence.’ [73] In a time of bitter social dislocation, it saw Weimar democracy as the product of Western democratic and liberal ideals and, further, as a puppet regime controlled by people who did not represent German ‘essence.’ Many alleged that a Jewish world conspiracy lay behind the discontents of modernism, including materialistic consumerism, soulless industrialism, a homogenized commercial culture, and excessive modern technology, all of which were said to be systematically destroying traditional German values. Only true patriots could save Germans from ruin, thought the extreme right — themselves.

This movement sought to assert a truly Germanic alternative — one as racist as it was nationalist in nature. The popular writings of Paul Lagarde and Julius Langbehn favored an aristocratic social order in which Germans would rule the world. It invoked a nature-romanticism in which a closeness to the natural landscape was to give people a heightened sense of aliveness and ‘authenticity.’ It advanced a new cosmic faith, embodied in ‘Aryan’ blood, that was to be grasped through intuition rather than science in a plethora of occult and esoteric spiritualistic faiths that abounded in Germany in the 1920s. Mystical belief-systems like Theosophy, Anthroposophy, and Ariosophy (a mystical Aryanism) abounded and were rife with Germanic nationalist

components, such that they could be used to mystify an ‘ecological’ nationalism.

However inadvertently, the romantic nationalists of the *völkisch* movement became an important source for National Socialist ideology, which ironically drew on its antimodern sentiments even as it built a technologically modern and virulently nationalistic and genocidal totalitarian state. Demagogically appealing to a very real sense of alienation, the Nazis stage-managed indoctrination extravaganzas that promised ‘authenticity’ in a mystical, romantic nationalism that was ‘closer to nature,’ even as they engaged in mass murder. Stressing the need to return to simpler, healthier, and more ‘natural’ lifeways, they advanced the idea and practice of a ‘Nordic peasantry’ tied organically to the soil — even as they constructed a society that was industrially more modernized and rationalized than any German society had seen to that time.

The so-called ‘New’ Right today appeals to themes reminiscent of the *völkisch* movement in pre-Nazi Germany. It, too, presents itself as offering an ‘ecological’ alternative to modern society. In the view of the ‘New’ Right today, the destruction of the environment and the repression of nationalities have a common root in ‘Semitic’ monotheism and universalism. In its later form, Christianity, and in its subsequent secularized forms, liberalism and Marxism, this dualistic, homogenizing universalism is alleged to have brought on both the ecological crisis and the suppression of national identity. Just as Judeo-Christian universalism was destructive of authentic cultures when Christian missionaries went out into the world, so too is modernity eliminating ethnic and national cultures. Moreover, through the unbridled technology to which it gave rise, this modern universalism is said to have perpetrated not only the destruction of nature but an annihilation of the spirit; the destruction of nature, it is said, is life-threatening in the spiritual sense as well as the physical, since when people deny pristine nature, their access to their ‘authentic’ self is blocked.

The dualistic yet universalistic ‘Semitic’ legacy is borne today most egregiously, in ‘New’ Right ideology, by the United States, in whose ‘mongrel’ culture — egalitarian democracy — all cultures and races are mixed together, forming a crass, soulless society. American cultural imperialism is genocidal of other cultures around the world, and its technological imperialism is destroying the global environment. The fascist quest for ‘national identity’ and ecological salvation seeks to counter ‘Western civilization’ — that is, the United States, as opposed to ‘European civilization’ — by advancing a notion of ‘ethnopluralism’ that seeks for all cultures to have sovereignty over themselves

and their environment. Europe should become, instead of a modernized monoculture, a 'Europe of fatherlands,' with autonomy for all its peoples. Just as Turks should live in Turkey and Senegalese in Senegal, Germans should have Germany for themselves, 'New' Right ideologues argue.

Ecology can easily be perverted to justify this 'ethnopluralism' — that is, nationalism. Conceptions of one's region as one's 'homeland,' or *Heimat*, can be perverted into a nationalistic regionalism when a region's traditions and language are mystically tied to an 'ancestral' landscape. (The word *Heimat* connotes as well a turn toward the past, an anti-urban mood, a familiar community, and proximity to nature. For several decades the concept was looked upon with disfavor because the Nazis had used it, but intellectuals rediscovered it in the 1970s, after further decades of capitalist industrialization.) For a people seeking to assert themselves against an outside intruder, an 'ecologized' *Heimat* in which they are biologically embedded can become a useful tool not only against imperialism but against immigration, foreigners, and 'overpopulation.' Elaborate justifications for opposing Third World immigration are disguised as diversity, drawing on 'ecological' arguments against 'overpopulation.' Today it is not only fascists who invoke *Heimat*; in September 1989, for example, the head of the respectable League for the Protection of the Environment and Nature (Bund für Umwelt- und Naturschutz, or BUND), environmentalist Hubert Weinzierl, remarked that

only when humanity's main concern, the diminution of the stream of overpopulation, has been accomplished, will there be any meaning or any prospect of building an environment that is capable of improvement, of configuring the landscape of our civilization in such a way that it remains worthy of being called *Heimat*.<sup>[74]</sup>

An ecology that is mystical, in turn, may become a justification for a nationalism that is mystical. In the New Age milieu of today, with its affinities for ecology, the ultra-right may well find the mystical component it needs to make a truly updated, modernized authoritarian nationalism. As in Germany between the two world wars, antirational cults of the New Age — primitivistic, esoteric — abound in both the Federal Republic and the Anglo-American world. Such antirationalism and mysticism are appealed to by the 'New' Right; as anarchist publisher Wolfgang Haug observes, "The New Right, in effect, wants above all to redefine social norms so that rational doubt is regarded as decadent and eliminated, and new 'natural' norms are established."<sup>[75]</sup>

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[69] On social ecology, see the many writings of Murray Bookchin, particularly *Remaking Society* (Boston: South End Press, 1989) and *Urbanization Without Cities* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992).

[70] Jutta Ditzfurth, *Feuer in die Herzen: Plädoyer für eine Ökologische Linke Opposition* (Hamburg: Carlsen Verlag, 1992), part three, especially pp. 158, 172. Ditzfurth was formerly a leading spokesperson for the leftists in the German Greens. Now that the Greens have lost their radicalism, she is currently involved in organizing the Ecological Left (Ökologische Linke) in Frankfurt.

[71] George L. Mosse, "The Mystical Origins of National Socialism," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Jan. 1961), p. 81. See also Jeffrey A. Goldstein, "On Racism and Anti-Semitism in Occultism and Nazism," *Yad Vashem Studies* 13, Livia Rothkirchen, ed. (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), pp. 53–72.

[72] George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, Universal Library, 1964), p. 4.

[73] On the *völkisch* movement, see Mosse, *Crisis*; Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961); and Walter Z. Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 1962).

[74] Quoted in Ditzfurth, *Feuer*, p. 170.

[75] Wolfgang Haug, "Pogromen beginnen im Kopf," *Schwarzer Faden: Vierteljahresschrift für Lust und Freiheit* [Grafenau]; translated as "Pogroms Begin in the Mind" in *Green Perspectives*, no. 26 (May 1992).

## Neofascist ‘Ecology’

Ecology is warped for mystical-nationalist ends by a whole series of neofascist groups and parties. Indeed, so multifarious are the ecofascist parties that have arisen, and so much do their memberships overlap, that they form what antifascist researcher Volkmar Wölk calls an “ecofascist network.” [76] Their programmatic literature often combines ecology and nationalism in ways that are designed to appeal to people who do not consider themselves fascists, while at the same time they ideologically support neo-Nazi street-fighting skinheads who commit acts of violence against foreigners.

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[76] Volkmar Wölk, “Neue Trends im ökofaschistischen Netzwerk: Am Beispiel der Anthroposophen, dem Weltbund zum Schutz des Lebens und der ÖDP,” in *In bester Gesellschaft: Antifa-Recherche zwischen Konservatismus und Neo-faschismus*, Raimund Hethey and Peter Kratz, eds. (Göttingen: Verlag die Werkstatt, 1991). Wölk is a spokesperson for the VVN/Bund of Antifascists and has published widely on ‘neofascism.’

## National Revolutionaries <sup>[77]</sup>

The National Revolutionaries (NRs) manipulatively mix themes of left and right in their uses of nationalism and ecology, in an attempt to cross ideological lines. They draw on an old tenet of right-wing dissent in Germany — the belief that a ‘Third Way’ between capitalism and socialism is necessary and that Germany is predestined to lead humankind toward it. <sup>[78]</sup> The NRs’ ‘Third Way’ is based on nationalism, a socialism “of the specific national way” <sup>[79]</sup> — in short, a ‘national socialism.’ A wing of the NRs today, called the Solidaristen, identifies itself with the Strasser brothers, two 1920s Nazi Party members who took the ‘Socialism’ in ‘National Socialism’ seriously and represented the ‘left’ anticapitalist wing of the Nazis. Today, the Solidaristen and other NRs regard Otto Strasser in particular as the ‘Trotsky of National Socialism’ because of his 1920s intraparty power struggle with Hitler; Hitler’s ejection of this fascist in 1930 was, for them, a betrayal of National Socialism.

Today’s leading NR ideologist, Henning Eichberg, calls for the assertion of “national identity” and a “liberation nationalism.” Seeking to appeal to left and right, NR publications have supported national liberation movements from across the traditional political spectrum, including the Irish, Basques, Ukrainians, and Afghans, as well as Sandinistas. <sup>[80]</sup> They regarded divided Germany as an occupied country, “the result of the imperialist politics of the occupation forces,” and they sought to “liberate” it — including Austria. Now that Germany has been freed from this “occupation,” the National Revolutionaries are free to concentrate on “reunifying” with Austria.

Eichberg regards Judeo-Christianity as the ultimate root of all present evils, since it is overly intellectual and alienates humanity both from itself and from the divine; it neglects the emotions and the body. Tied in as it is with the logic of productivism, Christianity, Eichberg writes, is the “religion of growth” that must be fought at all costs. To help cultivate ‘national identity,’ he proposes instead a new religion that mixes together neopagan Germanic, Celtic, and Indian religions with old *völkisch*-nationalistic ideas. It is to be based on “the sensuality-physicality of dance and ritual, ceremony and taboo, meditation, prayer, and ecstasy. In essence, [this religion] constitutes itself as a form of praxis” against the “religion of growth” since its “sensuous counter-experiences” can restore humanity to closer contact with nature. Sounding like

many New Agers in the United States, Eichberg calls for a return to pristine nature, to the alleged primordial sources of people's lives, psyches, and authentic cultures, and for people to heal themselves within as part of healing the ecological crisis, overcoming their own alienation, and rediscovering themselves.<sup>[81]</sup>

National Revolutionaries exploit ecological themes not only to construct primitivistic New Age religions but for political activity as well. During the 1970s they organized around opposition to nuclear energy at about the same time as the citizens' initiative movement did. "With their ecological and antinuclear enthusiasm," observes Walter Laqueur,

their cultural anti-Americanism and their support for movements of national liberation in many parts of the world, the "national revolutionaries" tried, in fact, to outflank their left-wing contemporaries. Some regarded Sinn Fein as a model for the German national revolutionaries, others suggested "political Balkanization" in Germany and Europe as a solution to all outstanding questions.<sup>[82]</sup>

Other National Revolutionaries took a different political approach: at the end of the 1970s, they joined the newly emerging Greens, where some of their number succeeded in holding office for a time. In October 1980, the Alternative List of West Berlin, for one, decided they could not work with National Revolutionaries, whom they considered even more dangerous than overt neo-Nazis because they hid their true intentions behind a veil of grassroots democratic and ecological programs. They were mostly driven out of the Greens, at least as far as observers seem aware today.<sup>[83]</sup>

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<sup>[77]</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, quotations in this section are from the National Revolutionaries' documents *Gegen Fremdherrschaft und Kapital and Grundsätze unseres Wollens — Die fünffache Revolution* (n.d.), as cited in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, pp. 228–30.

<sup>[78]</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Germany Today: A Personal Report* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), p. 152. Also on Strasserite ideology, see Mosse, *Crisis*, pp. 286–90.

<sup>[79]</sup> See Hans-Georg Betz, "On the German Question: Left, Right, and the Politics of National Identity," *Radical America*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1987), pp. 30–48.

<sup>[80]</sup> See Betz, "On the German Question."

<sup>[81]</sup> Henning Eichberg, "Produktivistische Mythen: Etwas über die Religion in der Industriekultur," in *Zurück zur Natur-Religion?* Holger Schleip, ed. (Freiburg: Hermann Bauer Verlag, 1986). Editor Schleip is, ironically, a member both of the Greens and of the *völkisch*-racist sect Deutsche Unitarier; the publisher, Hermann Bauer Verlag, is the largest New Age publisher in Germany. The content of Eichberg's article is summarized in Wölk, "Neue Trends," p. 126.

<sup>[82]</sup> Laqueur, *Germany Today*, p. 153. Laqueur cites Henning Eichberg, "Balkanisierung für jedermann," in the National Revolutionaries' periodical *Wir Selbst*, "a journal for national identity and international



solidarity” (May-June 1983). The German right has been interested in the IRA since the 1920s; the title of this journal, *Wir Selbst* (“we ourselves”), is a translation of *Sinn Fein*.

[<sup>83</sup>] See Betz, “On the German Question,” pp. 45–46; and Wölk, “Neue Trends,” p. 123.

## **The Freedom German Workers Party <sup>[84]</sup>**

Like the National Revolutionaries, the Freedom German Workers Party (Freiheitliche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or FAP) calls for a ‘national socialism,’ albeit one based on “a sense of community instead of class struggle.” The FAP seeks no rapprochement with leftists; it openly and militantly proclaims its support for Nazi ideas, celebrates race and nation, and is pro-Hitler rather than Strasserite. It praises German soldiers, whose “achievements” in two world wars will “still be admired in a thousand years.” The FAP is largely controlled by The Movement (Die Bewegung), which seeks to reestablish the NSDAP (the Nazi Party) in the Federal Republic and unite all fascist groups under its aegis. <sup>[85]</sup>

The FAP recruits from among skinheads and soccer fans, and its activities include acts of violence, arson, and racial attacks on foreigners. It advances the crudest ‘Germany for Germans — foreigners out’ slogans. <sup>[86]</sup> When it engages in electoral activity, its programmatic demands have included “German jobs for German workers,” “repatriation for foreigners,” “no franchise for foreigners,” and an end to the “crazy enthusiasm for integration.” <sup>[87]</sup> Germans today must not ruin the “legacy of our fathers,” the “cultural landscape”; Alsace-Lorraine, the South Tyrol, and Austria should all be returned to Germany.

FAP Nazis especially loathe “humanistically oriented cosmopolitanism.” Marxism, liberalism, and Christianity “have torn humanity from its connectedness to the natural cycles of our earth.” No “technical environmentalism” will succeed against the “increasingly obvious ecological catastrophe,” they believe. Rather, the “disrupted relations between humanity and the rest of nature” require an “ecological revolution” and a “radical revolution in consciousness” that will “lead humanity to a reintegration with the structure of planetary life.” We need a new ethics, they maintain, one in which “humanity, animals and nature are regarded as a unity. Animals are not things” but are “life-forms that feel joy and pain and need our protection.” Not surprisingly, the FAP regards abortion as a “crime against the laws of a healthy nature and against God.”

In a blatant self-contradiction, their concrete environmental demands are in fact friendly to capitalism: They want “continued economic growth,” yet less profit-seeking. “Ecological necessities ... must be brought into accordance with

a functioning economy,” they believe, while “the cyclical system of nature should ... be incorporated into the economic realm.”

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[84] Unless otherwise indicated, quotations in this section are from the FAP’s Action Program (15 Aug. 1990); the FAP charter (15 Aug. 1989); “Basic Principles and Goals of the FAP — Electoral Program for Rhineland-Westphalia” (n.d.); and “Overview of Members of the Party Executive Committee for the Provincial Associations” (15 Aug. 1990), all as cited in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 229ff. [Since early 1993, when this article was originally written, the FAP has been banned in the Federal Republic.]

[85] See Christopher T. Husbands, “Militant Neo-Nazism in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1960s,” in *Neo-Fascism in Europe*, Luciano Cheles, Ronnie Ferguson, and Michalina Vaughan, eds. (Essex: Longman Group, UK Limited, 1991).

[86] See Husbands, “Militant Neo-Nazism.”

[87] Husbands, “Militant Neo-Nazism,” p. 96.

## The Republicans <sup>[88]</sup>

The Republicans, a political party founded by former Waffen-SS member Franz Schönhuber in 1983, have made numerous disavowals of any association with the Nazis — they present themselves as nothing more than a “community of German patriots.” Yet this does not stop them from taking explicitly anti-immigrant stances, especially against Turks, or from exploiting discontents about the influx of foreigners generally, or from maintaining that Germany should be “for Germans.” The presence of a “tidal wave” of asylum-seekers in the Federal Republic, they believe, causes “the importation of criminals,” “social tensions,” and “financial burdens.”

The Republicans call for the “preservation of the existence of the German *Volk*, its health and its ecological living-space [*Lebensraum*] as a priority for domestic policy. This goal,” they add, “will also foster environmental protection.” Indeed, ecological dislocations are endangering Germans’ “health” — and by ‘health’ they mean the ‘genetic health’ of the German people. Such ‘health’ has “a higher value than short-term profits and striving for a standard of living.” Protecting and maintaining a “healthy environment” not only assures the “security of the means of life of our people” but is “a patriotic duty.” The Republicans are stringently antiabortion for German women, yet for the Third World, “meaningful family planning” is necessary to end the “population explosion” and its consequent threat to the environment; without it there will be “natural catastrophe and starvation.”

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<sup>[88]</sup> Quotations in this section are from the basic program of the Republicans, adopted at their first federal congress (26 Nov. 1983) in Munich; the 1987 program of the Republicans; “Ja zu Europa — Nein zu dieser EG — Deutsche Interessen haben Vorrang,” the Dinkelsbühl Declaration of the Republicans for the European elections of 1979; and the 1990 party program of the Republicans, all as cited in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 228ff.

## The National Democratic Party <sup>[89]</sup>

The National Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, or NPD), founded in 1964 mainly by people who had been active Nazis before 1945, rose to prominence during the 1960s. This aggressively nationalist party long called for German reunification, while its programmatic literature complains that “two wars within one generation ... have eaten away at the substantive health of the German people.” (It does not mention what those wars did to the Jews, as Ditfurth dryly notes.) The NPD laments the destruction of the environment, which “has disadvantageous effects on the *Volk*-health.” Germans should not be exposed to “chemical dyes” and should be protected from “congenital illness,” while people with AIDS should be required to “register.” The “preservation” of the “German people” requires that German women prolifically give birth, and therefore the NPD is against the “devaluation and destruction of the family.” Since abortion threatens “the biological existence of our people,” women who have abortions should be punished. The party calls for maternal and housekeeping training for “feminine youth.”

In 1973, the NPD drew up an “Ecological Manifesto” that invoked “the laws of nature” to justify a hierarchically structured, “organic” order that would govern social relationships. <sup>[90]</sup> It inveighs against “the environment polluted and poisoned by a humanity that lives increasingly isolated in a degraded mass,” which “is only the most noticeable symptom of the ruined equilibrium of humanity and nature.” In the years since then, the NPD’s rhetoric has become increasingly New Age oriented; it now calls for “reachieving ... an environmental consciousness, so necessary for life.” Achieving this consciousness, the 1988 NPD program states, “first requires an inner revolution in human thought. It is not the unlimited accumulation of material goods or boundless consumption that gives meaning to human life and happiness, but the experience of nature, concern for cultural values, and social security in the family and *Volk*.” Indeed, “*Volk*-consciousness and environmental consciousness are inseparable,” since “millions of strangers” threaten “our *Volk* in its existence.”

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<sup>[89]</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, quotations in this section are from the NPD’s 1973 Düsseldorf program; the 1988 *Wurfsendung* of the NPD; and the NPD newspaper *Deutsche Stimme* 4–5 (1992), all as cited in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 228ff. On the NPD generally, see David Childs, “The Far Right in Germany Since 1945,”

in *Neo-Fascism in Europe*, Cheles, Ferguson, and Vaughan, eds.

[90] Betz, "On the German Question," p. 35.

## **The German People's Union** <sup>[91]</sup>

The German People's Union (Deutsche Volksunion, or DVU) was founded by Dr. Gerhard Frey (born in 1933), a longtime ultra-right activist and publisher. Still its leading figure, Frey has been fixated for decades on the Second World War in DVU publications, casting doubts on the concentration camps as they are normally depicted and generally denying German guilt; his publications offer Nazi memorabilia for sale. The DVU proclaims that "Germany should remain German" and calls for "priority in German housing for Germans" and "national identity and self-determination." For the DVU, environmental protection means passing "stringent laws against polluters," "strict examination of imported foodstuffs," and imposing restrictions on animal experimentation and on "the torture of animals." Protecting life means "an end to abortion abuse."

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<sup>[91]</sup> Quotations in this section are from a DVU leaflet (c. 1990) and "Overview of the Members of the Party Executive and the Provincial Associations" (20 Nov. 1989), as cited in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 228ff.

## **Anthroposophy and the World League for the Protection of Life**

Political parties like these have an assortment of ‘Old’ Right — that is, Nazi — connections upon which they may draw in their search for ‘ecological’ modernization. One such connection is the World League for the Protection of Life (Weltbund Schutz des Lebens, or WSL). This group is not without a certain general appeal in the Federal Republic, since its outlook is based on Anthroposophy, a body of occult ideas formulated earlier in this century by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). Steiner, the leading German figure in the nineteenth-century esoteric ‘wisdom’ cult Theosophy, founded the German Theosophical Society; he went on to found his own doctrine, Anthroposophy, and the Anthroposophical Society thereafter. He wrote many books on his occult spiritualistic philosophy.

Anthroposophy holds a particular attraction in the German counterculture today, as it did in the *völkisch* movement of the 1920s. The Waldorf Schools, for example, were founded on Steiner’s educational principles and are respectable in many German and American countercultural circles. (There are more than sixty in the Federal Republic today.) Founded by Steiner in 1920, they provide children with an alternative, reformed education, one that is free from aggression and from pressures to achieve, one that places emphasis on the musical aspects of life and on feelings over understanding. Steiner is also the founder of biodynamic farming, a form of organic agriculture that does without pesticides and tries to foster a more organic relationship between cultivator and soil. Biodynamic agriculturists today produce a line of organic foods under the brand name Demeter and a line of cosmetics under the name Weleda. Many people have been and continue to be innocently attracted to these efforts and to Anthroposophy without any notion of the less savory aspects of Steiner’s work.

Yet not all of Steiner’s beliefs were benignly ecospiritual. For one thing, Anthroposophy classifies humanity into ‘root races’ in an esoteric evolutionary theory.<sup>[92]</sup> Building on a similar doctrine in Theosophy, the root-race theory is integral to Anthroposophy’s cosmology. According to this doctrine, a series of root races of human beings evolved sequentially over the millennia, each superior to the ones that preceded it, each with a higher level of development



of self-consciousness. The first two root races, the Polar and Hyperborean, were ‘astral-etheric’; they are now extinct — the evolutionary process superseded them. The next people to evolve were a bit higher, but they were still half animal, purely instinctive, lacking the capacity for conceptual thought and memory. The fourth root race finally began to be recognizably human; finally came the Atlantans, to which Europeans belong. The European whites, as the most highly developed so far, are at the summit of the hierarchical scale of humanity; they have brought everything that is good to humanity, since they “are the only ones who have developed humanity within themselves.” [93] These various races have been mostly killed off in various catastrophes of one kind or another, after which only certain people — presumably the fittest — survived; “in the case of the inferior kinds of human beings,” wrote Steiner, “... the life body was not sufficiently protected to enable it to withstand the Luciferic influence.” [94] There are numerous subdivisions within these basic root races. Blacks, for example, must live in Africa, we learn, a land of much heat and light; blacks soak up this heat and light, and their brains are specially constructed to process it; their supposed highly instinctual nature results from all this processing.

And since the sun, light, and heat are retained in his epidermis, [the black’s] whole metabolism proceeds as if he were being cooked inside himself by the sun. From this results his instinctive life. Within the black, he is continuously being cooked, and what stokes this fire is his posterior brain. [95]

Once blacks emigrate out of Africa, the balance of light and heat is different, and therefore they will die out — “they are in fact a declining race, they will die out of their own nature, since they are receiving too little light and heat.” [96] Such a theory would justify accelerating the extinction of races since they are presumably going to die off anyway. In the future, wrote Steiner in 1909, certain people who have not reached a “high level of development” will incline toward evil: “The laggard souls will have accumulated in their karma so much error, ugliness, and evil that there will form, for the time being, a special union of evil and aberrant human beings who voluntarily oppose the community of good men.” [97]

Perhaps this root-race theory was what appealed to Rudolf Hess about Anthroposophy, for he became an Anthroposophist. As Ditfurth points out, “The root-race ideology of the Theosophists and the Anthroposophists melded

seamlessly into the National Socialist idea of the purity of the ‘Aryan race.’” [98] Certainly Steiner’s ideas on biodynamic farming influenced some National Socialists. Anthroposophical ideas are eminently usable by ecofascists today, and there is a strong right wing within the Anthroposophists that is closely connected with the ultra-right. Author Günther Bartsch is an Anthroposophist who is also a National Revolutionary of the Solidarist variety; the author of an adulatory 1989 biography of Otto Strasser, he attempts in his publications to synthesize ecological themes based on Steiner’s ideas with Strasser’s political ideas. [99] It should be noted that Anthroposophy is also well funded by huge multinational corporations like Siemens and Bertelsmann. [100]

Among the ultra-right adherents of Anthroposophy today are officials of the World League for the Protection of Life (WSL), a small but influential and very wealthy environmental organization in the Federal Republic. The garden at its educational center is cultivated according to biodynamic methods, and visitors are served organic refreshments. Yet this organization was founded in 1958 by former members of the National Socialist party, and today it links protection of ‘life’ (that is, ‘right-to-life’) themes and the environment with racism and a revival of *völkisch* ideology. The ‘life’ it is most interested in protecting is of course German ‘life’; thus the WSL is rabidly anti-abortion, believing that German women should be devoted to giving birth to ‘Aryan’ babies.

The spiritual leader of the WSL and its key figure for most of its history has been Werner Georg Haverbeck. Born in 1909, Haverbeck became an active Nazi at an early age; it should be recalled that Nazism was largely a youth movement, so that members like Haverbeck are still alive. [101] Haverbeck joined the SA in 1928 and from 1929 to 1932 was a member of the Reich Administration for the National Socialist Student League (Reichsleitung der NSDAP-Studentenschaft) and a leader of the Reich Youth Leadership of the Hitler Youth (Reichjugendführung der Hitlerjugend). He served as a leading official of the Strength Through Joy organization, which controlled recreational activities under the Third Reich; in 1933 Rudolf Hess saw to it that Haverbeck’s passport was stamped “This man is not to be arrested.” He survived the Röhm purge to help organize the Nuremberg Party Congress and join Hess’s staff. It was Hess who converted him to Anthroposophy. During the war he conducted radio propaganda in Denmark and worked in South America; by the end of the war he was an officer. [102]

After the Allies rudely aborted Haverbeck’s many efforts on behalf of the Third Reich, he contented himself for a time working as a pastor for the Anthroposophical Christian community. He founded an educational center

called the Collegium Humanum in 1963, where today ecofascist, esoteric, *völkisch*, Anthroposophist, neopagan, and primitivist groups meet and hold workshops. He co-founded the WSL and served as its president from 1974 to 1982. In 1981, he was a signatory of the notorious Heidelberg Manifesto, a document drawn up by a group of professors to warn the German people of the dangers that immigration posed to them. Its first draft began:

With great concern we observe the subversion of the German people through the influx of many millions of foreigners and their families, the foreignization of our language, our culture, and our nationhood... Already many Germans have become foreigners in their living districts and workplaces, and thus in their own *Heimat*.<sup>[103]</sup>

Routine as this language may sound now, when opposition to immigration in the Federal Republic is much more tolerated and neofascists pander to it relentlessly, the Manifesto had to be toned down at the time (1981) because of the public outcry it raised.

In accordance with Anthroposophical root-race beliefs, Haverbeck is notable for propounding the thesis that the two world wars in this century in fact constituted a thirty years' war waged by foreign aggressors against the German people and their spiritual life. Apparently, German spiritual life stood in the way of "the strivings for world domination by the Anglo-Saxon race," behind which lay "the intensive image of a call to world dominance, like the old Jewish consciousness." Indeed, Haverbeck maintains, the two world wars amounted to a conspiracy against the German people and spiritual life. It is a "historical lie" that the Nazis ran "mass-murder camps," argues Haverbeck, and is actually "enemy propaganda." It was Russia that was the aggressor in the Second World War.<sup>[104]</sup>

In his 1989 book *Rudolf Steiner: Advocate for Germany*, Haverbeck lauds Steiner (who died in 1925) for understanding the existence of this ongoing conspiracy early on.

During the first world war, Rudolf Steiner delivered a multitude of lectures about contemporary history, and he toiled inexhaustibly for the truth about the question of "war guilt." ... Steiner presented his listeners with maps that showed that goals that had been proclaimed back in 1889 were being fulfilled [during World War I]. These maps anticipated the separation of Central Europe that would be ultimately achieved with the loss of East Germany... What was not fully achieved through the

Versailles treaty in 1919 was in fact completed in 1945: the demolition of Germany... The leading forces of both parties to the cold war were united in this common struggle against spiritual Germany. “This war [World War I] was a conspiracy against German spiritual life,” said Steiner. <sup>[105]</sup>

When Haverbeck’s book on Steiner’s nationalism was published, it caused an outcry of protest among outraged countercultural Anthroposophists who send their children to Waldorf Schools, use Demeter products, and are in no way racists or fascists. Yet as researcher Wölk points out, their protests were unwarranted, since Haverbeck was only presenting Steiner as what he actually was — “a crude nationalist whose demonizations were shared by the *völkisch* groups of his day” — to show his usefulness for nationalist and neofascist groups today. <sup>[106]</sup>

This alleged conspiracy against German spiritual life pervades much of the WSL’s current thinking, notes Wölk. WSLers consider the “flood of asylum-seekers,” the destruction of the environment, and the ongoing transformation of the Federal Republic into a multicultural society to be part of the spiritual war against the Germans. They regard the protection of the environment as part of the protection of a people, of its biological “substance” and its national identity. Indeed, WSLers see the battle for a healthy environment as part of the all-encompassing spiritual struggle against the homogenizing forces of modernity and “Western civilization.” Haverbeck’s wife, Ursula Haverbeck-Wetzel, another former WSL president who “for religious reasons refuses to dissociate herself from any human being, including Adolf Hitler,” <sup>[107]</sup> observes:

Whenever a person comes to feel that he belongs to the cultural strain that is deeply rooted in his people which has not only a material existence but a spiritual reality that is superior to the material plane — he has broken out from being a manipulated consumer. He has escaped the mass homogenization of completely manipulated people who are “amusing themselves to death” (as Neil Postman put it), which is the goal of “One World” advocates, intent on power and domination. The person who is faithful to his religious convictions and attentive and caring to his culture and customs, they consider dangerous. <sup>[108]</sup>

Ernst Otto Cohrs, the WSL’s president since 1989, is another devotee of Rudolf Steiner, having been an Anthroposophist since 1961. Today Cohrs’s interests seem to lie in promulgating race theories, and publishing and

distributing anti-Semitic literature. In 1982, an official of the WSL's Bavarian chapter made a public issue of Cohrs's activities inside the WSL. He wrote a letter to a WSL membership assembly saying that it should dissociate itself from Cohrs because, among other things, he was sending anti-Semitic literature to WSL members, running advertisements in ultra-right magazines like *Bauernschaft* (the journal of the notorious Holocaust-denier Thies Christophersen), permitting neofascist periodicals to reprint WSL leaflets, and himself distributing such writings as *There Were No Gas Chambers and The Auschwitz Myth*.<sup>[109]</sup> Many members withdrew from the WSL as a result of this letter; those who remained were overwhelmingly those who shared Cohrs's anti-Semitic ideas and were not disposed to contradict him. Among them was Baldur Springmann, the 'ecofarmer' who was involved in the Greens in the early days, whose book *Partner Erde* (Partner Earth) was published by an ultra-right publisher (Arndt Verlag), and who writes for the 'New' Right publication *Nation Europa*; and Dr. Arnold Neugebohrn, a Republican candidate for the provincial legislature who takes pride in his NSDAP 'gold medal.' Concludes Wölk, "The internal crisis caused by Cohrs's activities in 1981–82 may have diminished the ranks of the WSL, but it also strengthened the WSL's neofascist orientation." Cohrs's current activities are still primarily the dissemination of Holocaust-denial literature.<sup>[110]</sup>

One collective member of the WSL is a Hamburg-based organization known as the Society for Biological Anthropology, Eugenics, and Behavioral Research (Gesellschaft für biologische Anthropologie, Eugenik, und Verhaltensforschung, or GfbAEV), whose head is Jürgen Rieger, a "neo-Nazi in lawyer's robes" (as the newspaper *Die Zeit* called him) who is currently defending two fascist groups that the Federal Republic banned in 1992; one of the GfbAEV's fellows is the leading ideologue of the French Nouvelle Droite, Alain de Benoist. Its periodical is the notorious quarterly journal *Neue Anthropologie*, which maintains, among other things, that there has always been environmental destruction in the history of humanity, that in fact one could even say this was part of human nature were it not for one sole exception:

Only the Germans were different. In pagan times they worshipped groves and trees, and because of their closeness to nature, they had a caring orientation toward nature. Even the love of animals is much more pronounced among the Germanic peoples than it is, for example, among the Romance-language-speaking peoples. It is thus no coincidence that even today the most stalwart environmentalist efforts — private as well as

state — are those conducted by peoples who have a larger proportion of the Nordic race. <sup>[111]</sup>

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[92] The following section on the root-race theory is based on Wölk, “Neue Trends,” pp. 120–21, and Ditfurth, *Feuer*, pp. 217–22. In English, a mild ‘revised’ account appears in Rudolf Steiner, *An Outline of Occult Science* (Spring Valley, N.Y.: Anthroposophical Press, 1972), especially chap. 6.

[93] Rudolf Steiner, lecture (3 March 1923), *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 349, pp. 52–67, cited in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 221.

[94] Steiner, *Outline*, p. 216.

[95] Quoted in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 216.

[96] Quoted in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 216.

[97] Steiner, *Outline*, p. 361.

[98] Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 200.

[99] See Wölk, “Neue Trends,” p. 123.

[100] Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 222.

[101] He is mentioned in passing in Laqueur, *Young Germany*, p. 194n.

[102] Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 224.

[103] Quoted in Betz, “On the German Question,” p. 36.

[104] Werner Georg Haverbeck, *Rudolf Steiner: Anwalt für Deutschland* (Munich, 1989), pp. 143f, 242f, 324, cited in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, pp. 224–26.

[105] Werner Georg Haverbeck, “Das Ringen um Völker- und Geistesfreiheit,” in *Europa* (Feb. 1990), p. 41f, cited in Wölk, “Neue Trends,” pp. 131–32.

[106] Wölk, “Neue Trends,” p. 132.

[107] Letter from the WSL’s provincial executive for Schleswig-Holstein to the WSL presidium (28 July 1981), cited in Wölk, “Neue Trends,” p. 133; also in *Vlothoer Tageblatt* (19 Nov. 1982), cited in Ditfurth *Feuer*, p. 225.

[108] Ursula Haverbeck-Wetzel, “Vom Wirtschaftskrieg zum Geisteskampf,” in *Europa* (Mar. 1990), p. 28, cited in Wölk, “Neue Trends,” p. 132.

[109] Helmut Roehrig, letter (2 Apr. 1982), cited in Wölk, “Neue Trends,” p. 133.

[110] Cited in Wölk, “Neue Trends,” pp. 13–34. On Springmann in the Greens, see, e.g., Werner Hülsberg, *The German Greens: A Social and Political Profile*, trans. Gus Fagan (London and New York: Verso, 1988), pp. 94–95.

[111] *Neue Anthropologie* 3–4 (1988), p. 91, cited in Wölk, “Neue Trends,” p. 131.

## Rudolf Bahro: Völkisch Spirituality

If fascists are using ecological themes to update their racial and nationalist aims, other thinkers are developing an ecological spiritualism along New Age lines that bears no small resemblance to the *völkisch* Germanic spirituality of the 1920s. Indeed, “a great part of the literature about close-to-nature spirituality that the alternative scene is reading is permeated with reactionary, *völkisch*, or even National Socialist content,” writes Ditfurth. “We find neofascist and ultra-right positions not only in the various political and even ecological groups, but also ... in neopagan, esoteric and occult circles.” [112]

Perhaps the most prominent figure in this connection is Rudolf Bahro. Many German ‘new social movement’ circles previously accepted Bahro as a social theorist contributing to a ‘socialism with a human face’ and continue to regard him as part of the independent left; leftist periodicals publish uncritical interviews with him. In the Anglo-American world, too, many ecological radicals still consider Bahro as representing something ‘leftist.’ Yet Bahro no longer considers himself a leftist; indeed, he is a vehement critic of the left [113] and of “comrades without fatherland.” [114] In fact, as antifascist researcher Roger Niefenführ argues, since the mid-1980s Bahro has been contributing to the development of a “spiritual fascism” that has the effect of “rehabilitating National Socialism,” openly calling for reclaiming the “positive” side of the Nazi movement. Not only does Bahro appeal to a mystical Germanist spirituality like the *völkisch* ideologues of the 1920s, he even sees the need for a “Green Adolf” who will lead Germans out of their own “folk-depths” and into ecological “salvation.” [115]

Bahro originally became well known as the author of *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, which he wrote during the 1970s while he was a dissident Marxist and party member in the former East Germany. In 1977, the ruling Communist government sentenced him to prison; in 1979, he was deported. Once arrived in what was then West Germany, Bahro became involved with the nascent German Greens, affirming that “red and green go well together.” [116] In the early 1980s peace movement, he alarmed many by enunciating nationalistic arguments against the deployment of Pershing missiles. [117] He began to speak less in political terms and more in religious terms, asking that “the emphasis [be] shifted from politics and the question of power towards the

cultural level ... to the prophetic level... Our aim has to be the ‘reconstruction of God.’” [118] He became a vocal ‘fundamentalist’ critic of the *realo* wing of the Greens (those who became generally committed to exercising parliamentary power) and ultimately left the party in 1985. In a parting speech in Hamburg, he said there were structural similarities between the Greens and the Nazi movement that the Greens were not taking advantage of but should; then he gave his ‘fundamentalist’ alternative: “the other republic that we want will be an association of communities of life-communities in which God and Goddess are at the center.” [119]

Bahro thereafter moved increasingly toward the New Age esoteric milieu. His major concern remained “the ecological crisis,” whose “deep structures” must be investigated, but he now thinks ecology “has nothing to do with left and right.” [120] Today Bahro is one of the leading spokespeople and theorists of New Age ideas in the Federal Republic. “The most important thing,” he rambles,

is that ... [people] take the path “back” and align themselves with the Great Equilibrium, in the harmony between the human order and the Tao of life. I think the “esoteric”-political theme of “king and queen of the world” is basically the question of how men and women are to comprehend and interact with each other in a spiritually comprehensive way. Whoever does not bring themselves to cooperate with the world government [*Weltregierung*] will get their due. [121]

In 1989, Bahro cofounded a combination educational center and commune near Trier, the Lernwerkstatt (an “ecological academy for one world”), whose purpose is to synthesize spirituality and politics, “to come to a new personal and social orientation.” It presents lectures, cultural events, and weekend workshops on various New Age themes, including deep ecology, ecofeminism, Zen Buddhism, holistic nutrition, Sufism, and the like — as well as German identity. [122] His 1987 book *Logik der Rettung* marked an overt embrace of authoritarian theological concepts that shocked many former admirers. [123]

Bahro also holds a professorship at Humboldt University in Berlin, where he conducts a seminar whose sessions are usually filled to overflowing. At Humboldt, he holds a chair in ‘social ecology,’ and he refers to his ‘science’ by this name, but Bahro’s work is not to be confused with the social ecology conceived and developed by Murray Bookchin. Although the two theorists agree that class contradictions are not the exclusive social contradiction,



Bookchin regards hierarchy as basic, while emphasizing the importance of class interests. Bahro, by contrast, points to “tribal consciousness” as rooted “more deeply than class consciousness,” even in the spiritually “deepest layers” of a people. “The national question is an objective reality,” Bahro says, that is on a much “deeper basis than the class question.” [124]

Moreover, whereas Bookchin’s consistently internationalist social ecology affirms reason and naturalism and repeatedly criticizes ecomysticism and ecotheology, Bahro’s version of ‘social ecology’ is overwhelmingly spiritualistic. Indeed, in late 1990, when Bookchin spoke at the Humboldt seminar at Bahro’s invitation, Bahro told Bookchin that his (Bahro’s) own ‘social ecology’ was actually an attempt to synthesize Bookchin’s social ecology with deep ecology. [125] Politics must be based on spiritualistic values today, in Bahro’s view, because “without a return to the spiritual source,” politics “will not be worthy of that name.” [126] Not only are those who see spirituality and politics as opposites fundamentally wrong, he argues, but our global ecological problems are in fact a material reflection of the inner spiritual “sickness” that separates them. It is a religious “politics of consciousness” — that is, the implanting of spiritualistic ideas — that can arrest the global ecological crisis and prepare people for the new political order. [127]

Bahro’s spiritualistic approach has a distinctly ethno-cultural dimension. He speaks of peoples as if they had unique spiritual ‘essences’ that are indissoluble, that cannot be destroyed over time. [128] He is particularly concerned with the ‘German essence’ (*deutsche Wesenheit*) and its various manifestations on the material plane. [129] In approaching the ecological crisis, the German ‘essence’ demands the incorporation of spiritualism, particularly the mystical tradition initiated by Meister Eckhart, whom “we Germans should read.” [130] Bahro favorably contrasts this “German legacy” [131] with socialism and the Enlightenment.

It appears not to alarm Bahro, as antifascist researcher Peter Kratz points out, that his mystical Germanism closely resembles the mystical Germanism of the *völkisch* movement. [132] Bahro, in fact, consciously associates himself with the *völkisch* movement — he says he wants an “awakening in the *Volk*” [133] — and with the 1920s Conservative Revolution against the Enlightenment generally. [134] Indeed, Bahro is critical of the Greens, among other things, because they did “not attend to this *völkisch* moment.” [135] Kratz warns that this gives Bahro’s approach “the same potential for political catastrophe that the *völkisch* movement had, even though this would please Bahro as little as it would have pleased the originators of the *völkisch* movement.” [136]

‘Essences’ like the ‘German essence’ cannot remain in the spiritual plane; they must be manifested in concrete reality — that is, in politics, history, and society. In Bahro’s prospectus (and in stark contrast to Bookchin’s anarchist libertarian municipalism), these manifestations will not take the form of democratic institutions, since “to say that we will create grassroots democracy now, among these wolves, is nonsense.” [137] Bahro criticizes the “bean-counting voting” process of democracy and prefers a spiritual consensus process for decision making. [138] Although he is currently receiving state support from Saxony for an eco-communal demonstration project (thanks largely to his friend and visiting lecturer at Humboldt, Saxon prime minister Kurt Biedenkopf), Bahro also rejects the state: “Society’s rule of law,” he asserts, “may no longer be based on the state or on any other existing forces that are even less legitimate.” [139]

Despite his antistatist assertions, which may make him appear attractively anti-authoritarian, like many ‘New’ Rightists Bahro expressly believes that the ecological crisis is resolvable only through authoritarian means. He calls for a spiritually based and hierarchically elitist “salvation government” (*Rettungsregierung*) or a “god-state” (*Gottesstaat*) [140] that will be run by a “new political authority at the highest level”: a “prince of the ecological turn.” [141] The “prince,” which apparently may be a collective entity, will constitute a spiritual elite, an oligarchy responsible only to God. As a “voice of the divine,” [142] this guru elite will dictate the law of God and nature, in order to convert the present society to the “order according to nature” [143] that Bahro sees as desirable. People should not “be afraid” of the advent of this “prince,” says Bahro, since “a bit of ‘ecodictatorship’ is needed” to handle our problems today. [144] Besides, “it is a matter of absolute indifference whether [this prince] is a man or a woman,” he assures us, “it is a question of structure. That is the German moment in this Green movement.” [145] But today it is important to develop a broad spiritual consciousness in the general population, for “without a spiritual determination, there will be no new redemptive institutionalization” — that is, no “prince.” [146] It is presumably cheering that “in spite of all bad experiences ... the strongest political-psychological dispositions of our people” make “the Germans more responsive than other peoples to charismatic leadership.” [147]

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[112] Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 190.

[113] See conversation with Rudolf Bahro, “Die deutschen Linken und die nationale Frage oder unsere Öinteressen am Golf,” *Streitschrift* 3 (Nov. 1990), pp. 4–7, quoted in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 210.

[114] Conversation with Rudolf Bahro, *Streitschrift*, quoted in Roger Niefenführ, “New Age: Die

spirituelle Rehabilitierung der Nationalsozialisten durch Rudolf Bahro, Rainer Langhans und J. Kirchoff,” in *In bester Gesellschaft: Antifa-Recherche zwischen Konservatismus und Neo-faschismus*, Raimund Hethey and Peter Kratz, eds. (Göttingen: Verlag die Werkstatt, 1991), pp. 141–54, at 149.

[115] Niedenführ, “New Age,” pp. 141–54, esp. 147–50.

[116] Quoted in Hülsberg, *German Greens*, p. 93.

[117] See the exchange between Bahro and André Gorz in *Telos*, no. 51 (Spring 1982). See also Rudolf Bahro’s *From Red to Green: Interviews with New Left Review*, trans. Gus Fagan and Richard Hurst (London: Verso, 1984), especially part three, wherein Bahro says, “In practice, if we want to build an ecological decentralized Germany, we have to first free German territory” (p. 237).

[118] Bahro, *From Red to Green*, pp. 220–21.

[119] Rudolf Bahro, “Hinein oder hinaus? Wozu steigen wir auf? Rede auf der Bundesdelegiertenkonferenz der Grünen” (Hamburg), *Kommune* 1 (1985), pp. 40–43.

[120] Conversation with Rudolf Bahro, “Die deutschen,” *Streitschrift*, quoted in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 210.

[121] Rudolf Bahro, *Connection* (July-Aug. 1989), quoted in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, pp. 207–08.

[122] Lernwerkstatt, *Rundbrief* 13 (c. 1990); the Lernwerkstatt’s 1991 program.

[123] Rudolf Bahro, *Logik der Rettung: Wer kann die Apokalypse aufhalten? — Ein Versuch über die Grundlagen ökologischer Politik* (Stuttgart and Vienna, 1987). I will refer to this book herein as *The Logic of Salvation*.

[124] Conversation with Rudolf Bahro, “Die deutschen,” *Streitschrift*, quoted in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 210.

[125] The author was present at this debate.

[126] Rudolf Bahro, “Rette sich, wer kann,” an interview with Rudolf Bahro, *Connection*, vol. 5, no. 8 (1989), pp. 18–19, cited in Niedenführ, “New Age,” p. 148.

[127] “Die Logik der Selbstausrottung,” an interview with Rudolf Bahro, *Magazin 2000*, vol. 22, nos. 81–82 (1989), p. 64, cited in Niedenführ, “New Age,” p. 148.

[128] Niedenführ, “New Age,” pp. 147–48.

[129] Rudolf Bahro, “Lösung des Schattens und ökologische Kulturentwurf,” *Connection*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1990), p. 65, cited in Niedenführ, “New Age,” pp. 147–48.

[130] Bahro, *Logik*, p. 153.

[131] Bahro, *Logik*, p. 335; emphasis in the original.

[132] Peter Kratz, “Bahros ‘Grüne Adolfs’: Die ‘Neue Rechte’ an der Berliner Humboldt-Universität,” reprinted in *A-Kurier* [Berlin] 41 (1993), pp. 6–15.

[133] Bahro, *Logik*, p. 391.

[134] Bahro, *Logik*, pp. 67–70. On the Conservative Revolution, see Stern, *Cultural Despair*, passim.

[135] Conversation with Rudolf Bahro, “Die deutschen,” *Streitschrift*, quoted in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 210.

[136] Kratz, “Bahros ‘Grüne Adolfs,’” p. 6.

[137] Quoted in Dietmar Pieper, “Schickimicki unter Wolfen,” *Der Spiegel* 26 (22 June 1992), pp. 62–63. See also Bahro, *Logik*, pp. 344, 481.v

[138] Rudolf Bahro, “Über kommunale Subsistenzwirtschaft und ihre Startbedingungen in die neuen Bundesländer,” working paper, p. 10, cited in Kratz, “Bahros ‘Grüne Adolfs,’” p. 9.

[139] Bahro, *Logik*, p. 363.

[140] “Salvation government” in Bahro, *Logik*; “god-state” in Pieper, “Schickimicki.”

[141] Bahro, *Logik*, p. 325.

[142] Bahro, *Logik*, p. 491ff.

[143] Bahro, *Logik*, p. 59.

[144] Quoted in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 206.

[<sup>145</sup>] Conversation with Rudolf Bahro, “Die deutschen,” *Streitschrift*, quoted in Kratz, “Bahros ‘Grüne Adolfs,’” p. 8.

[<sup>146</sup>] Bahro, *Logik*, p. 64.

[<sup>147</sup>] Bahro, *Logik*, pp. 344–45.

## Liberating the ‘Brown Parts’

Since the mid-1980s, Bahro has been remarkably open about proclaiming his embrace of the spiritual content of fascism for the ‘salvation’ of nature and humanity. In *The Logic of Salvation*, he asks, “Is there really no thought more reprehensible than a new 1933?” — that is, Hitler’s rise to state power. “But that is precisely what can save us! The ecology and peace movement is the first popular German movement since the Nazi movement. It must co-redeem [miterlösen] Hitler.” <sup>[148]</sup> Indeed, “the Nazi movement [was] among other things an early reading of the ecology movement.” <sup>[149]</sup> Germans are to look for “the positive that may lie buried in the Nazi movement” and reclaim it, he says, “because if we do not, we will remain cut off from our roots, the roots from which will grow that which will save us.” <sup>[150]</sup> Today one must “liberate” the “brown parts” in the German character. <sup>[151]</sup> The fact is, says Bahro, that today “there is a call in the depths of the *Volk* for a Green Adolf.” <sup>[152]</sup>

When Bahro’s critics reproach him for this assertion, Bahro responds that no, he does not mean Adolf *Hitler*. That his leftist critics think he means Adolf *Hitler* shows that the left “responds only with fear, instead of comprehending that a Green Adolf would be an entirely different Adolf from the one we know about.” <sup>[153]</sup> Yet as Kratz points out, Bahro himself is evasive about what this ‘Green Adolf’ actually would be: perhaps a personified *Führer*, perhaps a spiritual elite, or perhaps some inner self-recognition that within each of us there is supposedly a ‘Green Adolf,’ to whom we must subordinate ourselves voluntarily through spiritual insight. This evasiveness is itself a matter of concern. Kratz believes that Bahro really means a personified *Führer*; for one thing, Bahro invokes the ‘sleeping emperor’ myth, <sup>[154]</sup> the nationalistic notion that the Emperor Barbarossa is sleeping in the Kyffhäuser Mountain and will one day come back as the *Führer* and rescue Germany from dire straits <sup>[155]</sup> — an idea that is also one of the foundations of the Nazi *Führer* principle.

For Bahro, this *Führer* will clearly be a spiritualistic leader. In a foreword to a book by his colleague Jochen Kirchhoff, he argued that National Socialism had had the right spiritual aims: it sought to manifest the ‘German essence’ on the material plane. It went wrong in the execution — for one thing, it was very violent. But even this was understandable since, arising as it did in the 1920s, it was the task of National Socialism to make the first real spiritual revolt against

the overwhelming materialism of the age. Thus, the materialistic thinking of the Weimar era, against which National Socialism rebelled, was the real cause of the Nazis' material "vehemence" — that is, mass murder. <sup>[156]</sup>

The materialistic thinking of Weimar modernity that the Nazis were so correct to oppose, says Bahro, is also today the immediate cause of the ecological crisis. Only the spiritualization of consciousness, Bahro believes, can prevail over biosphere-destroying materialism. Hence Germans today have no alternative but to invoke the spiritually "deep forces" from the Nazi movement — in order to "be present with our whole potential." <sup>[157]</sup>

But it must be a strictly spiritual endeavor: undertaking concrete political resistance on the material plane is, for Bahro, itself an integral component of materialistic secularism, an expression of negative spirituality. Those who engage in politics on the material plane today, he says, in fact politically resemble — Nazis! True, the Nazis had to struggle in the twenties, but at least they had the right spiritual ideas. But "revolt (under the conditions of our imperial situation) is fascistic. That is to say, it redeems [*rettet*] nothing." <sup>[158]</sup> Bahro's religious dispensation thus does not synthesize spirituality and politics at all, as critic Niedenführ points out; on the contrary, it simply eliminates political action. <sup>[159]</sup>

Repelled by these ideas, critics have denounced *The Logic of Salvation* as fascistic or 'fascistoid' — potentially fascist. Bahro responds that such "faint-hearted antifascism" has "refused" to "look for the strength that lay beneath the brown movement." <sup>[160]</sup> Precisely because the left rejects the insights of spirituality, it can never see the necessity of *völkisch*-authoritarian structures and therefore can never give material form to the 'German essence,' he believes. Bahro replied further in his next book, *Rückkehr*:

It can be instructive that there was a strong wing of the Nazis that wanted to be socially and culturally revolutionary. This wing was not consolidated, and the Hitler movement went on to serve a regenerated German capitalism... We can no longer allow fascism to be a taboo subject.

It should be noted that fascism has hardly been a 'taboo subject' in the Federal Republic — on the contrary, it has been much discussed. What has been rightly rejected — and hardly merely 'taboo,' since a taboo begs to be broken — is sympathy for the Nazis. Bahro continues:

I can't rule out the possibility that at the end of the 1920s I wouldn't have gone with the Nazis. And it's very important that we be prepared to ask

such a question. As for what would have happened later, I don't know. There were people in the Nazi movement who gave it up before 1933; there were people who saw the light with the Röhm affair; some went into the resistance; others were executed. But we're not supposed to imagine what we ourselves would have done. And I was ready and am ready to go into such questions. I think that if we are serious about forming a popular movement and overcoming the ecological crisis, and if we are really to address what comes out of the depths, we will have to have a lot to do with what it was that found expression then and that is seeking another, better expression this time. That can go well only if there is a great deal of consciousness about whatever unhappy mechanisms lie in all of us, the resentment reactions, mere rebellion instead of revolution. <sup>[161]</sup>

Posing as a courageous inquiry into the breaking of taboos, such practices do nothing more than give people permission to envision themselves as Nazis — a horrifying dispensation in any era, but particularly in one when present-day Nazis routinely attack foreigners in German towns and cities and when fascist parties are having electoral victories.

Some of Bahro's associates add to the strong suspicion that his 'Green Adolf' refers to a new *Führer*. One of his fellow teachers at the Lernwerkstatt, for example, is Rainer Langhans, a former anarchistic 'wild man' of the 1960s German student organization SDS who writes today that "spirituality in Germany is named Hitler. And only when you have gone a little bit further can you go beyond it. Until then, however, you must reclaim the inheritance ... not in the sense of this fine exclusionary antifascism but in the sense of further developing what Hitler tried to do." And: "This dumb Enlightenment, which builds up dams against so-called 'outbreaks of the irrational,' is actually merely laughable as an antifascist syndrome." And: "We have to be, so to speak, the better fascists." <sup>[162]</sup> Another of Bahro's fellow teachers at the Lernwerkstatt is Jochen Kirchhoff, who writes that "National Socialism was a botched attempt at healing the world ... and to ground politics in the spiritual." <sup>[163]</sup>

To speak at his seminar at Humboldt, Bahro also invited Wolfgang Deppert, a onetime head of the *völkisch*-racist sect German Unitary Religion Community (DUR), even though at the end of 1990 Deppert permitted the publication in one of his periodicals of an article by Princess Marie-Adelheld Reuss-zur-Lippe. Earlier in her life, in the 1920s, this person was a founder of the 'Nordic Ring' and later a close political and personal confidante of the Third Reich's Agriculture Minister, Walther Darré, who called her "my little sister." In 1985, she was the editor-in-chief of the journal *Bauernschaft* (*Peasantry*), whose

publisher is Thies Christophersen, the notorious author of the despicable 1973 pamphlet *Die Auschwitz Lüge (The Auschwitz Lie)*.<sup>[164]</sup> Deppert, apparently, spoke at the Humboldt seminar on philosophy and science.

But whatever happened at that lecture, Murray Bookchin's appearance at the seminar on November 21, 1990, did not go over well with the host. Bahro had asked Bookchin to address such questions as "Is the alternative to ecological destruction freedom from domination or an 'ecological' dictatorship?" Bookchin replied that "an 'ecological' dictatorship would not be ecological — it would finally finish off the planet altogether. It would be the glorification, the hypostasization, of social control, of manipulation, the objectification of human beings, the denial of human freedom and selfconsciousness, in the name of ecological problems... An 'ecological' dictatorship is a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron."

When Bookchin had finished his presentation, the following exchange took place:

**Bahro:** You put such a spotlight on the positive side of human nature — cooperation and so on — that if that were true, it's improbable that again and again we would have fallen back into egotism and competition. You see human nature predominantly as positive. But more often than not, it has worked out for the worse rather than for the better. Most often the institutions that the human species has created have had hierarchy and domination. The fact that they did so must have a foundation in human nature...

When you talk about rationality, *Geist*, the fully developed capacity of being human, you are confronting this side least — the "dark side." Because that is what gives us the capacity to dominate, this *Geist*, our rationality. You don't want to confront that as fundamental...

**Bookchin:** I don't ignore the "dark side" of humanity ... But if the "dark side" exists everywhere, then why has it been necessary for the "dark side" to express itself in institutions of the most barbarous kind? Why did there have to be coercion? Why does that "dark side" always have to be institutionalized through force, through superstition, through fear, through threat, and through ideologies of the most barbarous nature? ... There's no question that there is a "dark side" to human history... But it's very hard to find the biological reasons for that "dark side." Because that "dark side" has always operated through the institutions of a minority



who relied on force and depended on propaganda and superstition, and on the worst things that the human mind can develop, to suppress the millions and millions.

**Bahro:** But does it have natural foundations?

**Bookchin:** It emerges from a social foundation... If the “dark side” is natural, why is it that in all the great revolutions that we know of, people have broken out with a generosity of spirit that is incredible? They have been willing to trust, to care, to feel the pain even of their masters — when their masters tried to oppress them, owing to their own insecurities... In warrior societies, to make the adolescent transformation into a warrior, you have to inflict pain upon him. You have to spoil him, to make him a sufferer in order to make him part of the community of warriors... I don’t see the “dark side” of human nature, but of social nature. <sup>[165]</sup>

After Bookchin gave his lecture, Bahro told Bookchin that he would not invite him to speak again.

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<sup>[148]</sup> Bahro, *Logik*, p. 346f. See also Robert Jungk, “Sein Kampf: Kritik an *Logik der Rettung*,” in *tageszeitung* (10 Oct. 1987).

<sup>[149]</sup> Bahro, *Logik*, p. 350.

<sup>[150]</sup> Bahro, *Logik*, p. 461.

<sup>[151]</sup> Bahro, *Logik*, p. 399.

<sup>[152]</sup> Conversation with Rudolf Bahro, “Die deutschen,” *Streitschrift*, p. 6, quoted in Kratz, “Bahros ‘Grüne Adolfs,’” p. 8.

<sup>[153]</sup> Conversation with Rudolf Bahro, “Die deutschen,” *Streitschrift*, p. 6, quoted in Kratz, “Bahros ‘Grüne Adolfs,’” p. 8.

<sup>[154]</sup> Bahro, *Logik*, p. 347.

<sup>[155]</sup> On the ‘sleeping emperor,’ see Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millennarians and the Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970; original, 1961), chaps. 6–7.

<sup>[156]</sup> Summarized by Nidenführ, “New Age,” p. 149ff.

<sup>[157]</sup> Rudolf Bahro, foreword to Jochen Kirchhoff, *Nietzsche, Hitler und die Deutschen: Die Perversion des Neuen Zeitalters* (Berlin, 1990), quoted in Nidenführ, “New Age,” p. 150.

<sup>[158]</sup> Bahro, foreword to Kirchhoff, *Nietzsche, Hitler*, quoted in Nidenführ, “New Age,” p. 150.

<sup>[159]</sup> Nidenführ, “New Age,” p. 150.

<sup>[160]</sup> Bahro, *Logik*, p. 346.

<sup>[161]</sup> Rudolf Bahro, *Rückkehr: Die In-Welt Krise als Ursprung der Weltzerstörung* (Frankfurt: Horizonte Verlag/Berlin: Altis Verlag, 1991), pp. 24–25.

<sup>[162]</sup> All Langhans’s quotes are from Nidenführ, “New Age,” p. 146.

<sup>[163]</sup> Bahro, foreword to Kirchhoff, *Nietzsche, Hitler*, p. 26, cited in Nidenführ, “New Age,” p. 152.

<sup>[164]</sup> On Christophersen and Holocaust denial, see, for example, Roger Eatwell, “The Holocaust Denial:

A Study in Propaganda Technique,” in *Neo-Fascism in Europe*, Cheles, Ferguson, and Vaughan, eds.

[165] This exchange was transcribed from a tape recording of the Bookchin-Bahro discussion, at which the author was present.

## Social Darwinist ‘Ecology’: Herbert Gruhl

Bahro, let it be said, claims to look for the roots of the ecological crisis in the “sickness” in “white Nordic humanity.” But the far right most often locates these roots in non-Europeans and uses ‘ecology’ to marshal classic racist arguments against Third World immigration. In the “Europe of fatherlands” of the “ethnopluralism” concept, each *Volk* requires its own specific, familiar home environment in order to thrive. Interference from outside — including immigration — disturbs that natural environment, the “natural ecology of the *Volk*.” Most often, the far right claims to be defending cultures rather than races; if the Nazis persecuted those who practiced ‘*race* mixing’ and sought to preserve ‘*racial* purity,’ today’s fascists say they oppose *cultural* mixing and seek to preserve their *culture*. Thus, the ecofascist and misleadingly named Ecological Democratic Party (Ökologische Demokratische Partei, or ÖDP) calls for “asylum-seekers [to] be accepted by countries that belong to the same *cultural* area as the asylum seekers themselves,” and they call for “*Heimat* instead of multicultural.” [166]

The hollowness of such claims becomes evident, however, when they are clothed in terms of ‘ecology.’ For the far right’s notion of ecology is in fact nothing more than social Darwinism, the reactionary ideology that biology dictates the form of society, that genes rather than environment determine culture. Social Darwinist ‘ecology’ can then advance seemingly ‘ecological’ reasons for keeping out immigrants and for asserting ethnic or national identity — while avoiding the terminology of race.

Social Darwinism has deep roots in the German ultra-right. When it first emerged as a doctrine in the nineteenth century, its German form was very different from its Anglo-American form. Like Anglo-American social Darwinism, German social Darwinism projected human social institutions onto the nonhuman world as ‘natural laws,’ then invoked those ‘laws’ to justify the human social arrangements as ‘natural.’ It also applied the maxim ‘survival of the fittest’ to society. But where Anglo-American social Darwinism conceived the ‘fittest’ as the individual entrepreneur in a ‘bloody tooth and claw’ capitalist jungle, German social Darwinism overwhelmingly conceived the ‘fittest’ in terms of race. Thus, the ‘fittest’ race not only would but should survive, vanquishing all its competitors in its ‘struggle for existence.’ As

historian Daniel Gasman observes:

It may be said that if Darwinism in England was an extension of *laissez faire* individualism projected from the social world to the natural world, [in Germany it was] a projection of German romanticism and philosophical idealism... The form which social Darwinism took in Germany was a pseudo-scientific religion of nature worship and nature-mysticism combined with notions of racism. <sup>[167]</sup>

Since this social Darwinism seemed to give a 'scientific' basis to racism, National Socialism drew heavily on it to provide 'scientific' grounds for its virulent racism. Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*, for example, that people "owe their higher existence, not to the ideas of a few crazy ideologists, but to the knowledge and ruthless application of Nature's stern and rigid laws." Among these 'laws': "Nature usually makes certain corrective decisions with regard to the racial purity of earthly creatures. She has little love for bastards." <sup>[168]</sup> To establish their totalitarian regime and implement genocide, the Nazis easily drew on the common ideology that the *Volk* mediates between individual and cosmos, rendering the individual mainly a member of a larger whole, the 'Volk whole' or 'Volk community.'

It is well known among ecological activists today that Ernst Haeckel coined the term *ecology* in the 1860s; what is less known is that Haeckel was the primary spokesperson for German social Darwinism in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as Gasman shows. German social Darwinism was thus almost immediately married to the concept of ecology. Haeckel was also a believer in mystical racism and nationalism, so that German social Darwinism was from the beginning a political concept that lent romantic racism and nationalism a pseudo-biological basis. In fact, as Gasman argues,

racially inspired social Darwinism in Germany ... was almost completely indebted to Haeckel for its creation... His ideas served to unite into a full-bodied ideology the trends of racism, imperialism, romanticism, anti-Semitism and nationalism... It was Haeckel who brought the full weight of science down hard on the side of what were Volkism's essentially irrational and mystical ideas. <sup>[169]</sup>

Haeckel himself was a proponent of carrying over concepts like 'selective breeding' and 'racial hygiene' from nonhuman nature into human society.

Despite the widely different scientific concepts of ecology that have emerged

since Haeckel's day, the 'ecology' that today's ecofascists draw upon is essentially the social Darwinism of Haeckel. Perhaps the most prominent social Darwinist-'ecological' racist in Germany today is Herbert Gruhl, <sup>[170]</sup> a former Christian Democrat parliamentarian whose best-selling 1975 book, *A Planet Is Plundered: The Balance of Terror of Our Politics*, makes an explicit social Darwinist interpretation of ecology. <sup>[171]</sup> In the late 1970s and early 1980s Gruhl participated in the formation of the German Greens with a new political group he had founded, Green Action Future (GAZ). It was Gruhl who created the slogan "We are neither left nor right; we are in front," according to Charlene Spretnak and Fritjof Capra. <sup>[172]</sup> In the early 1980s, ultrarightists, including Gruhl's GAZ, struggled with leftists and centrists for the direction of the Green Party; the center-left ultimately took control. "It is to the credit of the leftist tendencies in the founding phases of the Greens," writes Dittfurth, "that the ultra-right and neofascists were prevented from taking over ecological politics, as they were threatening to do at the time." <sup>[173]</sup>

Gruhl, on the losing end, concluded that the Greens had given up their "concern for ecology in favor of a leftist ideology of emancipation" and walked out of the party. He continued his fight for his conception of ecology outside the Greens, however; with his fellow ultra-rightist Baldur Springmann, he founded the Ecological Democratic Party (ÖDP) in 1982 and wrote most of its programmatic literature, orienting ecology toward fascism and endowing racism and population policy with an 'ecological' legitimation. In 1989, when an ÖDP party congress dared to pass a resolution formally distancing the party from the NPD and the Republicans, this 'leftist victory' was too much for Gruhl, and he left to form yet another group. Since the mid-1980s, Gruhl has appeared as a guest speaker at various neo-Nazi and Holocaust-denial events and continues to publish books on 'ecology.' <sup>[174]</sup>

Gruhl's social Darwinist 'ecology' reduces human beings to their biological attributes and applies the 'laws' of nature to society: "All laws that apply to living nature generally apply to people as well, since people themselves are part of living nature," he maintains. <sup>[175]</sup> These 'natural laws' dictate that people should accept the present social order as it is. Domination, hierarchy, and exploitation should be accepted, since "the swan is white, without anyone artificially cleaning it. The raven is black, and everything is in its natural place of its own accord. This is good. All the strivings of people ... for organized justice are simply hopeless." <sup>[176]</sup> People should adapt to existing conditions instead of making futile attempts to change them, since "every life-form accommodates itself to that which it cannot change." <sup>[177]</sup>

If society were set up according to nature, Gruhl believes, cultures would institute prescriptions against those who deviate from their existing norms, since “in the hunting grounds of the wilderness, if an animal breaks the unwritten law of the herd and goes its own way, it generally pays for this independence with its life.” [178] Moreover, cultures should be kept separate from one another: “When many cultures are all jumbled together in the same area, the result will be that they live alongside each other, in conflict with each other, or ... they will undergo entropy, becoming a mixture whose value lessens with every intermixing, until in the last analysis it has no more worth.” The reason for cultural separation too has its basis in ‘natural law,’ “a law of entropy which we particularly have in ecology, and this law also holds for human cultures.” [179]

In the coming years, Gruhl believes that cultures around the globe will compete for survival over the means of life, in a social Darwinist struggle for existence. “There is no doubt that the wars of the future will be fought over shares in the basic foundations of life — that is, over the basis of nutrition and the increasingly precious fruits of the soil. Under these circumstances, future wars will far surpass in frightfulness all previous wars.” [180] The peoples who have the best prospects for survival will be those who are best armed and who best conserve their resources; those who “succeed in bringing their military preparedness to the highest level, while keeping their standard of living low, will have an enormous advantage.” [181]

In the interests of this struggle, Germans must not only arm themselves but preserve their environment by keeping the number of people who inhabit it down: “Violations of ecological equilibrium and the destruction of natural living spaces [*Lebensräume*] are directly related to population density.” [182]

“Overpopulation” in the Third World, however, has produced “armies of job-seekers” who are entering Germany with a “capacity for annihilation” comparable to a “nuclear bomb,” Gruhl writes. This “tidal wave of humanity” is a primary menace that will cause “all order to break down” in Europe. Third World immigrants are thus threatening European culture itself, which will “perish not because of the degeneration of its own people, as previous high civilizations have, but because of physical laws: the constantly overflowing mass of humanity on an earth’s surface that remains constant.” [183] Therefore, there is no room for immigrants in the Federal Republic: “Because of its high population density, the Federal Republic of Germany, one of the most densely settled countries on earth, cannot be a destination country for immigrants. We therefore reject the unlimited acceptance of foreigners.” [184] Accordingly,

Gruhl demands “an end to immigration for ecological reasons.” [185]

The ‘laws of nature,’ for Gruhl, offer a solution to Third World immigration, especially the ‘law’ that “the only acceptable currency with which violations of natural law can be paid for is death. Death brings the equalization; it cuts back all life that has overgrown on this planet, so that the planet can once again come into equilibrium.” [186] Fortunately, in his view, Third World people will accept this lethal solution since their lives “rest on a completely different basic outlook on life from our own: their own death, like that of their children, is accepted as fate.” [187]

Needless to say, Gruhl does not think democracy is the most efficient way to address these problems. After all, this situation “will take on the proportions of an emergency in coming years, and attempts that will be made to prevail in it will produce a permanent state of emergency.” [188] In an interview with the editors of *Junge Freiheit* (*Young Freedom*), the flagship publication of the National Revolutionaries, Gruhl was asked whether the problems of protecting the environment and life can be solved within a democracy. “Probably not,” he replied, “because democracies follow the *Zeitgeist*, and in all countries of the world today the *Zeitgeist* is to raise the standard of living further. Parties that warn about this and advocate renunciation of consumption seem to have little chance.” Instead, Gruhl demands a “strong state,” strong both internationally and domestically — if possible, even a state with “dictatorial powers.” [189]

In the autumn of 1991, the environmental minister of Lower Saxony shocked many observers by awarding Herbert Gruhl a highly prestigious state honor. “With his international best-seller *A Planet Is Plundered*,” minister Monika Greifahn said, Gruhl has “placed ideas of environmental protection and care at the forefront of public political consciousness.” [190]

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[166] Quoted in Anti-EG Gruppe Köln, “Mit ‘LebensschützerInnen’ und RassistInnen gegen EG und Kolonialismus? Anmerkungen zur ÖDP und anderen ‘BundnispartnerInnen’ in der Kampagne ’92,” *ÖkoLinX: Zeitschrift der ökologischen Linken* 6 (July-Aug.-Sept. 1992), pp. 11 and 19, translated into English as “Should We Work in Coalition with ‘Right-to-Lifers’ and Racists?” *Green Perspectives*, no. 27 (Aug. 1992), pp. 2–6.

[167] Daniel Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism: Social Darwinism in Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League* (New York: American Elsevier; London: Macdonald & Co., 1971), pp. xxii–xxiii.

[168] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), pp. 288, 400.

[169] Gasman, *Scientific Origins*, p. xxiii.

[170] For critiques of Gruhl, see: Anti-EG-Gruppe Köln, “Mit ‘LebensschützerInnen’”; Antifa-Gruppe Freiburg und Volksfront gegen Reaktion, Faschismus und Krieg, eds., *Beitrag zur Kritik des Ökologismus und Beitrag zur Ideologie und Programmatik der ÖDP* (Cologne: GNN-Verlag, 1989); and Ditfurth, *Feuer*, pp. 151–69.

[171] Herbert Gruhl, *Ein Planet wird geplündert* (reprint Frankfurt/Main, 1987; original, 1975).

- [172] Charlene Spretnak and Fritjof Capra, *Green Politics* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), p. 15.
- [173] Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 152.
- [174] See, e.g., *Tageszeitung* (7 Nov. 1991).
- [175] Quoted in Antifa-Gruppe Freiburg, *Beitrag*, p. 30.
- [176] Herbert Gruhl, *Das irdische Gleichgewicht* (Munich, 1985), p. 127; Antifa-Gruppe Freiburg, *Beitrag*, p. 27; and Anti-EG Gruppe Köln, "Mit 'LebensschützerInnen,'" p. 10.
- [177] Quoted in Antifa-Gruppe Freiburg, *Beitrag*, p. 35.
- [178] Antifa-Gruppe Freiburg, *Beitrag*, p. 68.
- [179] Quoted in Ditfurth, *Feuer*, p. 159.
- [180] Gruhl, *Ein Planet*, p. 322f.
- [181] Quoted in Antifa-Gruppe Freiburg, *Beitrag*, p. 114f.
- [182] Quoted in Anti-EG Gruppe Köln, "Mit 'LebensschützerInnen,'" p. 11.
- [183] Herbert Gruhl, "Die Menschheit ist am Ende," *Der Spiegel* 13 (1992), pp. 57–58.
- [184] Quoted in Anti-EG Gruppe Köln, "Mit 'LebensschützerInnen,'" p. 11.
- [185] Quoted in Anti-EG Gruppe Köln, "Mit 'LebensschützerInnen,'" p. 10.
- [186] Gruhl, *Ein Planet*, p. 110.
- [187] Herbert Gruhl, *Himmelfahrt ins Nichts* (Munich: Verlag Langen Müller, 1992), p. 242. See Thomas Ebermann's criticism, "Massakriert den Armen!" *Konkret* (June 1991), pp. 36–37, translated into English as "Massacre the Poor!" *Green Perspectives*, no. 27 (Aug. 1992), pp. 6–7.
- [188] Quoted in Antifa-Gruppe Freiburg, *Beitrag*, p. 113.
- [189] Quoted in Reimar Paul, "EK III in Grün-Braun," *Konkret* [Hamburg] (Dec. 1991), pp. 35–36.
- [190] Quoted in Paul, "EK III," pp. 35–36.



## A Social Ecology of Freedom

A combination of nationalism, authoritarianism, and yearnings for charismatic leaders that is legitimated by a mystical and biologicistic ‘ecology’ is potentially socially catastrophic. Just as the *völkisch* movement ultimately was channeled into the Nazi movement, so too new social movements that appeal to these concepts must be mindful of their potential for political and social catastrophe if they are channeled into a dangerous political direction that draws on mysticism.

A love of the natural world and alienation from modern society are in themselves innocent and legitimate ideas, and it was by no means a historical necessity that they be permutated into a justification for mass murder. Nor is ‘ecology’ limited to an interpretation as a social Darwinist racial jungle, or politicized along tribal, regional, and nationalist lines. Nor is ‘ecology’ inherently an antirational, mystical concept. Finally, the ecological crisis can hardly be dismissed; it is itself very real and is worsening rapidly. Indeed, the politicization of ecology is not only desirable but necessary.

Although this article has focused on the ‘ecological’ right in the Federal Republic, ‘ecological’ fascism is hardly limited to that country. In Britain, a wing of the National Front issues the cry, “Racial preservation is Green!” In the United States, the notorious white supremacist Tom Metzger remarks:

I’ve noticed that there’s an increased number of young people in the white racist movement who are also quite interested in ecology, protecting the animals from cruelty and things like that, and it seems to me that as we are becoming more aware of our precarious state, the white man, the white woman’s, state in the world, being only about 10 percent of the population, we begin to sympathize, empathize more, with the wolves and other animals.” [191]

His colleague Monique Wolfing agrees: “Well, naturally. They’re in the same position we are. Why would we want something created for ourselves and yet watch nature be destroyed? We work hand in hand with nature and we should save nature along with trying to save our race.” [192] The noted U.S. deep ecologist Bill Devall, who is certainly not a fascist, has allowed anti-

immigration themes to enter his views: He notes with apparent relief that while “population is beginning to stabilize in Western Europe and North America,” there is a caveat — “in-migration.” Devall chastises those who would “justify large-scale in-migration to Western Europe and North America from Latin America and Africa” as guilty of “misplaced humanism.” [193]

What is clearly crucial is how an ecological politics is conceived. If the Green slogan “we are neither left nor right but up front” was ever meaningful, the emergence of an ‘ecological right’ defines the slogan’s bankruptcy conclusively. The need for an ecological left is urgent, especially one that is firmly committed to a clear, coherent set of anticapitalist, democratic, antihierarchical views. It must have firm roots in the internationalism of the left and the rational, humanistic, and genuinely egalitarian critique of social oppression that was part of the Enlightenment, particularly its revolutionary libertarian offshoot.

But an ecologically oriented politics must deal with biological phenomena warily, since interpretations of them can serve sinister ends. When ‘respect for Nature’ comes to mean ‘reverence,’ it can mutate ecological politics into a religion that ‘Green Adolfs’ can effectively use for authoritarian ends. When ‘Nature,’ in turn, becomes a metaphor legitimating sociobiology’s ‘morality of the gene,’ the glories of ‘racial purity,’ ‘love of *Heimat*,’ ‘woman equals nature,’ or ‘Pleistocene consciousness,’ the cultural setting is created for reaction. ‘Ecological’ fascism is a cynical but potentially politically effective attempt to mystically link genuine concern for present-day environmental problems with time-honored fears of the ‘outsider’ or the ‘new,’ indeed the best elements of the Enlightenment, through ecological verbiage. Authoritarian mystifications need not be the fate of today’s ecology movement, as social ecology demonstrates. But they could become its fate if ecomystics, ecoprimitivists, misanthropes, and antirationalists have their way.”

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[191] Tom Metzger, quoted in Elinor Langer, “The American Neo-Nazi Movement Today,” *Nation* (16–23 July 1990), pp. 82–107, at 86.

[192] Quoted in Langer, “American Neo-Nazi Movement,” p. 86.

[193] Bill Devall, *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1988), p. 189.

**Murray Bookchin**

**The Bernie Sanders Paradox**

**When Socialism Grows Old**

**November-December 1986**

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Socialist Review 90

This is a polemic written by Bookchin when he and Bernie Sanders were both making their political homes in Burlington, Vermont. While other writers, such as the late Alexander Cockburn and other contributors to Counterpunch, have long chronicled Sanders' career and his embrace of Democratic Party imperialism, union busting, and mistreatment of frontline communities, Bookchin's analysis is unique in that it took on Sanders' politics from a position that included both policy as well as economics.

The posters that appeared all over Burlington — Vermont's largest city (pop: 37,000) in the winter of 1980-81 were arresting and provocative. They showed an old map of the city with a label slapped across it that read: "For Sale." A bold slogan across the top, in turn, proclaimed that "Burlington Is Not for Sale," and smiling amiably in the right-hand corner was the youngish, fairly well-known face of Bernard Sanders, sans tie, open-collared, almost endearingly shy and unpretentious. The onlooker was enjoined to rescue Burlington by voting for "Bernie" Sanders for mayor. Sanders, the long-time gubernatorial candidate of Vermont's maverick Liberty Union, was now challenging "Gordie" Paquette, an inert Democratic fixture in City Hall, who had successfully fended off equally inert Republican opponents for nearly a decade.

That Sanders won this election on March 3, 1981, by only ten votes is now a Vermont legend that has percolated throughout the country over the past five years. What gives Sanders almost legendary qualities as a mayor and politician is that he proclaims himself to be a socialist — to many admiring acolytes, a Marxist — who is now in the midpoint of a third term after rolling up huge margins in two previous elections. From a ten-vote lead to some fifty-two percent of the electorate, Sanders has ballooned out of Burlington in a flurry of civic tournaments that variously cast him as a working-class hero or a demonic "Bolshevik." His victories now make the New York Times and his trips outside of Burlington take him to places as far as Managua, where he has visited with Daniel Ortega, and to Monthly Review fundraising banquets, where he rubs shoulders with New York's radical elite. Sanders has even been invited to the Socialist Scholar's Conference, an offer he wisely declined. Neither scholarship nor theory is a Sanders forte. If socialist he be, he is of the "bread-and-butter" kind whose preference for "realism" over ideals has earned him notoriety even within his closest co-workers in City Hall.

The criss-crossing lines that deface almost every serious attempt to draw an intelligible sketch of the Sanders administration and its meaning for radicals result from a deep-seated paradox in "bread-and-butter" socialism itself. It trivializes this larger issue to deal with Sanders merely as a personality or to evaluate his achievements in the stark terms of lavish praise or damning blame. A sophomoric tribute to Sanders' doings in the Monthly Review of a year ago was as maladroit as the thundering letters of denunciation that appear in the Burlington Free Press. Sanders fits neither the heaven-sent roles he is given in radical monthlies nor the demonic ones he acquires in conservative letters to

moderate dailies.

To dwell heavily on his well-known paranoia and suspicious reclusiveness beclouds the more important fact that he is a centralist, who is more committed to accumulating power in the mayor's office than giving it to the people. To spoof him for his unadorned speech and macho manner is to ignore the fact that his notions of a "class analysis" are narrowly productivist and would embarrass a Lenin, not to mention a Marx. To mock his stolid behavior and the surprising conventionality of his values is to conceal his commitment to thirties' belief in technological progress, businesslike efficiency, and a naive adherence to the benefits of "growth." The logic of all these ideas is that democratic practice is seen as secondary to a full belly, the earthy proletariat tends to be eulogized over the "effete" intellectuals, and environmental, feminist, and communitarian issues are regarded as "petit-bourgeois" frivolities by comparison with the material needs of "working people." Whether the two sides of this "balance sheet" need be placed at odds with each other is a problem that neither Sanders nor many radicals of his kind have fully resolved. The tragedy is that Sanders did not live out his life between 1870 and 1940, and the paradox that faces him is: why does a constellation of ideas that seemed so rebellious fifty years ago appear to be so conservative today? This, let me note, is not only Sanders' problem. It is one that confronts a very sizable part of the left today.

Sanders is by no means the sole focus of this paradox. The fact is that Sanders' problems, personal as they seem, really reflect problems that exist in Burlington itself. Contrary to the notion that Vermont is what America used to be, the state — and particularly, Burlington — is more like what America is becoming than what America was. The major corporations in the city and its environs are IBM and GE — and the GE plant in Burlington makes the only Gatling gun in the United States, a horrendous fact that should by all rights trouble any socialist mayor. The Old North End, Sanders' sans-culottes wards (Numbers Two and Three), consists in large part of home-bred Vermonters who work in service, repair, and maintenance jobs when they have jobs at all. The remaining four wards are filled with newcomers to the city and with elderly people who have the luck to own their homes.

Basically middle-class in work and values, the form a pepper mix of old Vermonters and "new professionals," a term that embraces anyone from insurance brokers, real-estate operators, and retailers to doctors, lawyers, and professors. Hippies still mingle freely with Yuppies; indeed, in egalitarian Vermont, there is a reasonable degree of intercourse between the wealthy, the well-to-do, and the poor. What is most important: Burlington is a town in

frenzied transition. A sleepy little place some fifteen years ago with bacon-and-egg diners, hardware stores, clothing emporiums, and even a gun shop in the center of town, it is becoming a beehive of activity. Electronics in all its forms is moving into Vermont together with boutiques, inns, hotels, office buildings, educational institutions — and in Burlington, particularly, a thriving academic establishment that draws thousands of students and their parents into its commercial fold.

The problems of “modernization” that confront the town produce very mixed reactions — not only in its inhabitants but in Sanders. A large number of people feel plundered, including some of the plunderers, if you are to believe them. Burlington is living evidence that myth can be real, even more real than reality itself. Accordingly, myth holds that Burlington is small, homey, caring, crime-free, independent, mutualistic, liberal, and innocently American in its belief that everything good can happen if one so wills it to be. This glowing American optimism, in my view one of our national assets, often lives in doleful contradiction with the fact that if everything good can happen, everything bad does happen — including union-busting, growing contrasts between rich and poor, housing shortages, rising rents, gentrification, pollution, parking problems, traffic congestion, increasing crime, anomie, and growth, more growth, and still more growth — upward, inward, and outward.

The tension between myth and reality is as strong as between one set of realities and another. Burlingtonians generally do not like what is happening, although there are far too many of them who are making the most of it. Even the alleged “benefits” of growth and modernization are riddled by their own internal contradictions. If there are more jobs and little unemployment, there is lower pay and rising living costs. If there are more tourists and a very amiable citizenry to receive them, there is less spread of income across social lines and more robberies. If there is more construction and less labor shortages, there are fewer homes and more newcomers. Office-building and gentrification go hand in hand with fewer small businesses and far too many people who need inexpensive shelter.

Very crucial to all of this is the conflict of values and cultures that “modernization” produces. Basically, Burlingtonians want to keep their city intimate, caring, and liberal. They like to believe that they are living an older way of life with modern conveniences and in accord with fiercely independent values that are rooted in a colorful past. It is this underlying independence of Vermonters generally, including newcomers who are absorbed into Burlington, that makes the clash between a lingering libertarian Yankee tradition and a corrosive, authoritarian corporate reality so inherently explosive. Ironically,

Bernard Sanders owes his present political career to the irascible public behavior this libertarian tradition produces, yet he understands that behavior very little. To Sanders, Burlington is basically Detroit as it was two generations ago and the fact that the town was “not for sale” in 1981 carried mixed messages to him and his electorate. To the electorate, the slogan meant that the city and its values were priceless and hence were to be guarded and preserved as much as possible. To Sanders, all rhetoric aside, it meant that the city, although not on an auction block, had a genuinely high price tag.

Whether the electorate who voted for him was less “realistic” than Sanders is not relevant: the fact is that both saw the “sale” of the city from different, if not radically opposing, perspectives. Both, in fact, were guided by varying “reality principles.” The electorate wanted a greater say in the city’s future; Sanders wanted to bring more efficiency to its disposition. The electorate wanted to preserve the city’s human scale and quality of life; Sanders wanted it to grow according to a well-designed plan and with due regard for cost-effectiveness. The electorate, in effect, saw Burlington as a home and wanted to keep its emphasis on old-style values alive; Sanders, together with many of his opponents, saw it as a business and wanted its “growth” to be beneficial, presumably to “working people.”

This is not to deny that Burlington has its fair share of economic predators and political operators or that property taxes are very important and material problems ranging from shelter to the cost of food are very real. But this town also has a deep sense of municipal pride and its highly independent, even idiosyncratic, population exudes a form of local patriotism that fades as one approaches larger, less historically conscious, and less environmentally oriented communities. Sanders would never admit that for Burlingtonians, the electorate’s independence has begun to clash with his fading regard for democratic practice; that technological “progress” and structural “growth” can arouse more suspicion than enthusiasm; that the quality of life runs neck and neck as an issue with material benefits. Indeed, for Sanders and his administration (the two are not necessarily identical), thirties socialism is notable for the fact that it rescues the marketplace from “anarchy,” not that it necessarily challenges the market system as such and its impact on the city. In Sanders’ version of socialism, there is a sharp “business” orientation toward Burlington as a well-managed corporate enterprise.

Herein lies the greatest irony of all: all rhetoric aside, Bernard Sanders’ version of socialism is proving to be a subtle instrument for rationalizing the marketplace — not for controlling it, much less threatening it. His thirties-type radicalism, like Frankenstein’s “monster,” is rising up to challenge its own

creator. In this respect, Sanders does not make history; more often than not, he is one of its victims. Hence to understand the direction he is following and the problems it raises for radicals generally, it is important to focus not on his rhetoric, which makes his administration so alluring to socialists inside and outside of Vermont, but to take a hard look at the realities of his practice.

### **Sanders' Record**

SANDERS' CLAIM that he has created "open government" in Burlington is premised on a very elastic assumption of what one means by the word "open." That Sanders prides himself on being "responsive" to underprivileged people in Burlington who are faced with evictions, lack of heat, wretched housing conditions, and the ills of poverty is not evidence of "openness" — that is, if we assume the term means greater municipal democracy and public participation. What often passes for "open government" in the Sanders cosmos is the mayor's willingness to hear the complaints and distress signals of his clients and courtiers, not a responsibility to give them any appreciable share in the city's government. What Sanders dispenses under the name of "open government" is personal paternalism rather than democracy. After six years of Sanders' paternalism, there is nothing that resembles Berkeley's elaborate network of grassroots organizations and councils that feed into City Hall.

When it comes to municipal democracy, Sanders is surprisingly tight-fisted and plays his cards very close to his chest. Queried shortly after his 1981 election on a local talk-show, *You Can Quote Me*, Sanders was pointedly asked if he favored town-meeting government, a very traditional form of citizen assemblies that has deep-seated roots in Vermont townships. Sanders' response was as pointed as the question. It was an emphatic "No." After expressing his proclivity for the present aldermanic system, the mayor was to enter into a chronic battle with the "Republicrat" board of aldermen over appointments and requests that were to be stubbornly rejected by the very system of government that had his early sanction.

Sanders' quarrels with the board of aldermen did not significantly alter his identification of "open government" with personal paternalism. As an accepted fixture in Burlington's civic politics, he now runs the city with cool self-assurance, surrounded by a small group of a half-dozen or so aides who formulate his best ideas and occasionally receive his most strident verbal abuse. The Mayor's Council on the Arts is a hand-picked affair, whether by the mayor directly or by completely dedicated devotees; similarly, the Mayor's Youth Office. It is difficult to tell when Sanders will create another "council" — or, more appropriately, an "office" — except to note that there are peace, environmental, and gay communities, not to speak of unemployed, elderly,



welfare, and many similar constituents who have no “Mayor’s” councils in City Hall. Nor is it clear to what extent any of the existing councils authentically represent local organizations and/or tendencies that exist in the subcultures and deprived communities in Burlington.

Sanders is a centralist and his administration, despite its democratic proclivities, tends to look more like a civic oligarchy than a municipal democracy. The Neighborhood Planning Assemblies (NPAs) which were introduced in Burlington’s six wards in the autumn of 1982 and have been widely touted as evidence of “grassroots democracy” were not institutions that originated in Sanders’ head. Their origin is fairly complex and stems from a welter of notions that were floating around Burlington in neighborhood organizations that gathered shortly after Sanders’ 1981 election to develop ideas for wider citizen participation in the city and its affairs. That people in the administration played a role in forming assemblies is indisputably true, but so too did others who have since come to oppose Sanders for positions that have compromised his pledges to the electorate.

Bernard Sanders’ view of government appears in its most sharply etched form in an interview the mayor gave to a fairly sympathetic reporter on the Burlington Free Press in June, 1984. Headlined “Sanders Works to Expand Mayor’s Role,” the story carried a portrait of the mayor in one of his more pensive moods with the quote: “We are absolutely rewriting the role of what city government is supposed to be doing in the state of Vermont.’ The article leaped immediately into the whole thrust of Sanders’ version of city government: “to expand and strengthen the role of the [mayor’s] office in city government.” This process has been marked by an “expanding City Hall staff,” an increased “role in the selection of a new fire chief,” “a similar role in the Police Department,” and “in development issues, such as the proposed downtown hotel.” In response to criticism that Sanders has been “centraliz-ing” power and reducing the checks and balances in city government, his supporters “stress that citizen input, through both the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies and expanded voter output, has been greatly increased.” That the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies have essentially been permitted to languish in an atmosphere of benign neglect and that voter participation in elections hardly equatable to direct participation by the citizenry has left the mayor thoroughly unruffled.

A FAIR CONSIDERATION of the results produced by Sanders’ increased role in city affairs provides a good test of a political strategy that threatens to create institutional forms for a Burlington version of New York’s Mayor Koch. The best case for the mayor appears in the Monthly Review of May, 1984, where a

Pollyanna article written by Beth Bates, “a writer and farmer,” celebrates the virtues of Sanders’ efforts as “Socialism on the Local Level” — followed, I might add, by a prudent question mark. Like Sanders’ own claims, the main thrust of the article is that the “socialist” administration is “efficient.” Sanders has shown that “radicals, too, can be fiscal conservatives, even while they are concerned that government does the little things that make life more comfortable” like street repair, volunteer aid to dig paths for the elderly after snowstorms, and save money. The administration brings greater revenues into the city’s coffers by modernizing the budgetary process, principally by investing its money in high-return institutions, opening city contracts to competitive bidding, centralizing purchasing, and slapping fees on a wide range of items like building permits, utility excavations, private fire and police alarms, and the like.

That Sanders has out-Republicaned the Republicans should not be taken lightly. Viewed in terms of its overall economic policies, the Sanders administration bears certain fascinating similarities to the Reagan administration. What Sanders has adopted with a vengeance is “trickle-down” economics — the philosophy that “growth” for profit has a spillover effect in creating jobs and improving the public welfare. Not surprisingly, the City’s 1984 “Annual Report” of the Community and Economic Development Office (a Sanders creation) really begins with a chunky section on “UDAG Spur Development.” UDAGs are Urban Development Action Grants that are meant to “leverage” commitments to growth by the “private sector.” The Office celebrates the fact that these grant requests to Washington will yield \$25 million from “the private sector” and “create an estimated 556 new full-time, permanent jobs, and generate an additional \$332,638 per year in property taxes.” Among its many achievements, the grant will help the owners of the Radisson Hotel in Burlington (an eyesore that is blocking out part of Burlington’s magnificent lake view, and a corporate playground if there ever was one) expand their property by “57 guest rooms and an additional 10,000 square feet of meeting and banquet space. A new 505 space parking garage with covered access to the hotel will be constructed. The Radisson Hotel will now be able to accommodate regional and association conventions. The project also includes expansion of retail space (32,500 square feet) within the Burlington Square Mall. Construction has begun, and the project is scheduled for completion in late 1985.” The other grants are less lascivious but they invariably deal with projects to either construct or rehabilitate office, commercial, industrial, and department-store construction — aside from the noxious Sanders waterfront scheme, of which more shortly.

One seriously wonders who this kind of descriptive material is meant to satisfy. Potential employees who commonly sell their labor power for minimum wage-rates in a city that is notoriously closed to unionization? The Old North Enders who are the recipients of scanty rehabilitation funds and a land-trust program for the purchase of houses, an innovative idea that is still to fully prove itself out? A few small businessmen who have received loans to develop their enterprises or others who have had their façades improved in what Sanders celebrates as an attempt to “revitalize” the Old North End, an area that is still one of the most depressing and depressed in Vermont? The ill-housed and elderly for whom the office-building spree makes the limited amount of low-income housing construction seem like a mockery of their needs? Apart from the condos and so-called “moderate-income” houses that have surfaced in part of the city, housing for the underprivileged is not a recurring theme in Sanders’ speeches except when the mayor is on an electoral warpath. After a tentative stab at some kind of “rent control” which was defeated at the polls on the heels of a huge propaganda blitz by well-to-do property owners, the administration has been reticent about raising rent-control issues generally, let alone making a concerted effort at educating the public about them. Burlington, in effect, is witnessing what one journalistic wag has appropriately called “gentrification with a human face.” Indeed, such crucial issues as housing for the poor and elderly, unionization of the grossly underpaid, environmental deterioration, and the rapid attrition of old, socially useful, small concerns that can no longer afford the soaring downtown rentals — all have taken second place during the past year to big structural schemes like a waterfront plan. More so than any other Sanders proposal, this plan has opened a long overdue schism between the mayor and his popular supporters in the Old North End, the most radical constituency in Burlington.

SANDERS’ WATERFRONT PLAN is burdened by a highly convoluted a history that would take an article in itself to unravel. The 24.5-acre property, owned partly by the Vermont Central Railroad, the Alden Corporation (a consortium of wealthy locals), and the city itself, faces one of the most scenic lake and mountain areas in the northeast. Paquette, Sanders’ predecessor, planned to “develop” this spectacular site with highrise condos. Sanders has made the demand for a “waterfront for the people” a cardinal issue in all his campaigns. Civic democracy was ostensibly served when an open meeting was organized by the administration in February, 1983, to formulate priorities which the public felt should be reflected in any design. Broken down by wards in NPA fashion, the meeting’s priorities centered around walkways, open space, public access, restaurants and shops, even a museum and wildlife

sanctuary — and, in addition to similar public amenities, mixed housing. Whether these priorities could have been met without a UDAG is highly problematical. What is fascinating about Sanders' response, even before the UDAG was refused, was the clutter of structures that grossly compromised the whole thrust of the public's priorities: a second version of a Radisson-type hotel, a retail pavilion that spanned half the length of the city's pedestrian mall, a 1200-car parking garage, an office building, a narrow public walkway along the lakeside — and an ambiguous promise to provide three hundred mixed housing units, presumably "available for low and moderate income and/or handicapped people." Even so, this housing proposal was hedged by such caveats as "to the extent feasible" and the need to acquire "below-market financing" and rent-level "subsidies."

Following the refusal of the UDAG, the plan resurfaced again from City Hall with two notable alterations. Mixed housing disappeared completely even as a promise — to be replaced by 150 to 300 condos priced at \$175-300,000 each (a typical Burlington houses sells for \$70-80,000) and public space, meager to begin with, was further attenuated. From a residential viewpoint, the "waterfront for the people" had become precisely an "enclave for the rich," one of the verbal thunderbolts Sanders had directed at the Paquette proposal.

The privileges accorded by the waterfront plan to moneyed people are a reminder that only token aid has been provided to the poor. The methods employed by Sanders to engineer public consent for the plan have been especially offensive: the blitz of ads favoring the mayor's and Alden Corporation's version of the scheme, in which Sanderistas found their names listed with those of the most notorious union-busters in the state, stands in sharp contrast with the relatively weak campaigns launched by City Hall on behalf of rent control and improved housing.

Public reaction came to a head when the electorate, summoned to vote on a bond issue to cover the city's contribution to the plan, produced startling results. Despite the sheer frenzy that marked the mayor's campaign for a "yes" vote, the ward-by-ward returns revealed a remarkable shift in social attitudes toward Sanders. Although a two-thirds majority is needed to carry a bond issue in Burlington, Wards 2 and 3 of the Old North End voted down the bond issue flatly. So much for the reaction of Sanders' "working-class" base which had given the mayor his largest pluralities in the past. Ward 4, a conventional middle-class district, regaled the mayor with barely a simple majority of five votes, and Ward 5, the most sympathetic of his middle-class constituencies, a flat fifteen-vote rejection. Sanders' highest returns came from Ward 6 — "The Hill," as it has been called — which contains the highest concentration of

wealth in the city and its most spacious and expensive mansions.

For the first time, a Sanders proposal that patently placed the mayor's public credibility on the line had been soundly trounced — not by the wealthiest ward in Burlington which alone supported the bond issue by a two-thirds vote, but by the Old North End, which flatly rejected his proposal. A class issue had emerged which now seems to have reflected a disgust with a rhetoric that yields little visible results.

THE ULTIMATE EFFECT Of Sanders' aging form of "socialism" is to facilitate the ease with which business interests can profit from the city. Beyond the dangers of an increasingly centralized civic machinery, one that must eventually be inherited by a "Republicrat" administration, are the extraordinary privileges Sanders has provided to the most predatory enterprises in Burlington — privileges that have been justified by a "socialism" that is committed to "growth," "planning," "order," and a blue-collar "radicalism" that actually yields low-paying jobs and non-union establishments without any regard to the quality of life and environmental well-being of the community at large.

Bernard Sanders could have established an example of a radical municipalism, one rooted in Vermont's localist tradition of direct democracy, that might have served as a living educational arena for developing an active citizenry and a popular political culture. Whether it was because of a shallow productivist notion of "socialism" oriented around "growth" and "efficiency" or simply personal careerism, the Burlington mayor has been guided by a strategy that sacrifices education to mobilization and democratic principles to pragmatic results. This "managerial radicalism" with its technocratic bias and its corporate concern for expansion is bourgeois to the core — and even brings the authenticity of traditional "socialist" canons into grave question. A recent Burlington Free Press headline which declared: "Sanders Unites with Business on Waterfront" could be taken as a verdict by the local business establishment as a whole that it is not they who have been joining Sanders but Sanders who has joined them. When productivist forms of "socialism" begin to resemble corporate forms of capitalism, it may be well to ask how these inversions occur and whether they are accidental at all. This question is not only one that must concern Sanders and his supporters; it is a matter of grim concern for the American radical community as a whole.

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