

# Radical Ecology and Class Struggle: A Re-Consideration

JEFF SHANTZ

## ABSTRACT

An essential tension underlying much thinking about social movements is the relationship between so-called “new” social movements, such as radical ecology, and “older” movements such as those involving industrial workers. Indeed, analyses of class have posed a difficult challenge for much radical green thought. This paper discusses new social movement and radical ecology theories to identify perspectives that may pose obstacles to an articulation between radical ecology and industrial workers. Addressed also are approaches which seek to overcome these obstacles by theorizing radical ecology in terms of class analysis. Especially helpful are Marxist approaches as well as what I term green syndicalism, a view that combines radical unionism and ecology. The work of Judi Bari and Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) Local 1 is offered as one fruitful attempt to bring a class perspective to ecological theory and practice.

**KEY WORDS:** Judi Bari, Murray Bookchin, Industrial Workers of the World, Marxism, new social movements, social ecology, syndicalism.

## Introduction

The development of what, in the West, have been called new social movements has given rise to wide-ranging discussions concerning the dynamics of social change and the strategies for transforming advanced capitalist societies. These various “new social movements” theories assert that social movements such as the women’s movements, the gay and

lesbian movements and the environmental movements represent truly novel sources of change (Halfmann 1988; Eckersley 1989; Rohrschneider 1990; Darnovsky 1995). The essential tension underlying much of new social movement theorizing, indeed the very thing against which these arguments are implicitly or explicitly formulated, is a strong sense of unease concerning class struggle and the position of industrial workers in collective movements for radical social change.

In recent years social movement and environmental theorists have devoted a great deal of energy to efforts that argue the demise of class struggle as a viable force for social change (see Eckersley 1989; Bowles and Gintis 1987; Bookchin 1993, 1997). These theorists argue that analyses of class struggle are unable to account for the plurality of expressions which hierarchy, domination and oppression take in advanced capitalist or “postindustrial” societies (see Bookchin 1980, 1986). The result of this has been a broad turn away from questions of class and especially class struggle. Concerns have been raised that analyses of class inevitably assume one-dimensional identities of a fixed and determined character (see Adkin 1992). Unfortunately, the response has too often been a denial of the significance of class struggle without a more critical analysis of the ways in which class struggle is conceptualized.

Both the orthodox construction of class struggle and the arguments raised against that conceptualization have been constrained by theoretically narrow visions of class struggle. Commentators have either taken class to mean an undifferentiated monolith (Bookchin 1986, 1987) which acts, or more often fails to act, as the instrumental agent in history or else as a fiction generated to obscure hopelessly divided and antagonistic relations (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Bourdieu 1987). What is generally missing from these otherwise disparate accounts is a dynamic understanding of people as workers and workers as activists.

Indeed one might argue that much of the difficulty arises from arguments over the sociologically constructed working class (e.g., the Marxist “totality” which posits a privileged role to workers) rather than the working class in its variety of daily-negotiated manifestations. Certain theorists have examined the economic construction of the working class as constituted by orthodox Marxism (see Laclau and Mouffe for an excellent analysis of the orthodox Marxist perspective of the working class and class struggles). The typical extension of such examinations, however, has been to reject the orthodox construction and, in rejecting it, to reject all ideas of class struggle and its revolutionary implications (Adkin 1992; Sandilands 1992).

Perhaps nowhere has this tension between workers and social movement initiatives been more openly contested and hostile than in the case of the

radical ecology movements (Shantz and Adam 1999). As Kivisto (1986: 38) noted over a decade ago: “Here in microcosm the fundamental issues that confront the new social movements coalesce.” Indeed, this remains true despite some advances in alliance building during the recent demonstrations against the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.<sup>1</sup> Therefore this paper addresses the issues of workers and the ecology movement through a discussion of new social movement and ecological theories and the obstacles that they present to a broadened articulation of anti-systemic struggles.

### **New Social Movement Theories and Class Struggle**

Much of new movement theory is based upon a premise that capitalist societies have entered a new, possibly post-industrial, age in which class conflicts have given way to struggles over culture. Clearly the class identities (or lack thereof) of participants in new movements (especially students and radical youth) and the issues raised by those movements (e.g., ecology, gay and lesbian rights, feminism) have posed important and compelling challenges to class analysis. Various proponents of new movement theory (Kivisto 1986; Melucci 1989; Tarrow 1994; Darnovsky 1995; Omi and Winant 1996) have noted that the movements are, in large part, a response to the perceived hegemony of Marxist class analyses in previous struggles for progressive social change – analyses that are no longer adequate for an understanding of oppression under modern or post-industrial capitalism. In Kivisto’s (1986:32) view: “An important consequence of the emphasis on class divisions and class conflicts is that other modes of societal dissent and protest are devalued.” In response to this, new social movements theorists give less attention to economic class divisions. Class conflict has seemingly passed over to new forms of conflict that have as their terrain the civic and cultural realms.

Of particular interest to the present work is the claim of new social movements theories that the working class has failed as an engine for radical change. Eckersley (1989:205) notes “much has been written in recent times about the decline . . . of the traditional ‘blue-collar’ working class as an innovatory political force.” An argument is made that if the working class struggle once held potential for a transformation of society

---

<sup>1</sup> The city-by-city demonstrations against bodies of global corporate rule, such as the WTO, World Bank and IMF, are located away from the frontlines of ecological destruction where industrial workers and environmentalists clash and are therefore not typical. Still emerging rifts within those movements between direct actionists and trade unionists highlight the lingering difficulties in building alliances.

that time has since passed. So-called postindustrial society is deemed too complex for a simple two-class Marxian analysis in this view.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) have provided perhaps the most penetrating analysis and critique of the conception which views social division as arising from a duality of “opposing systems of equivalences” – in the case of Marxism, from the antagonisms of class. According to Laclau and Mouffe the last time a dualist conception of social division could be reasonably posed was in the opposition between the “people” and the “*ancien regime*.” After that particular moment the dualist understanding of antagonism “became increasingly fragile and ambiguous, and its construction came to be the crucial problem of politics” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:151). It was, according to Laclau and Mouffe, in answer to this problem that Marx developed the principle of class confrontation.

For Laclau and Mouffe this Marxian conceptualization was flawed from the start. In their words, “class opposition is incapable of dividing the totality of the social body into two antagonistic camps, of reproducing itself automatically as a line of demarcation in the political sphere” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:151). They suggest that it was because of this fundamental flaw that Marxist theoreticians have been in constant need of supplementary hypotheses which have sought to attach conditions to the historical realization of class struggle as the fundamental principle of political division. These supplementary hypotheses have included such imaginative constructions as “class consciousness,” “false consciousness,” or the “homogenization” of the social through immiseration.

The criticisms raised by Laclau and Mouffe have very serious implications when one turns from the realm of theory to the actual initiatives of the new social movements and to their visions of social change. Laclau and Mouffe suggest that any truly radical democracy must reject the dual opposition posed in Jacobin and Marxist political conceptions. Likewise, they call for the rejection of notions of privileged historical players and accept instead “the plurality and indeterminacy of the social” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:152). They are particularly bothered by the idea that the working class represents the privileged agent in which the fundamental engine of social change is housed.

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe (1985), through a fascinating and well argued discussion of the problems confronting orthodox Marxism, critically address the idea of social totality. They suggest that it is the very lack of unity represented by the working class that provides the cause of the so-called crisis in Marxism. As a result corollary ideas such as the historical necessity of class struggle or “Revolution” as the founding moment in societal transformation are also called into question.

For new social movement commentators the most obvious example of the lack of unity of the working class has been the recent rise of the new social movements themselves. These movements, which include the feminist, gay and lesbian, anti-racist and ecology movements have seriously challenged the ontological centrality of working class struggle. That such movements have arisen in the highly industrialized capitalist nations of the West, where the Marxist vision would have been most likely confirmed, has supposedly added a final nail in the coffin of class struggle.

One significant result of such analyses has been that new social movement theorists spend much time and energy in an attempt to locate new forces for change (Eckersley 1989; Rohrschneider 1990; Boockchin 1986). These forces for change are seen as coming less and less from workers and more and more from a “new middle class” who are viewed as having greater opportunities to challenge social relations or to improve their positions within them.

It is obvious that workers occupy different subject positions influenced by factors such as race, sex, age, nationality or income. No one needs a postmodernist, post-Marxist or poststructuralist discourse to tell him or her this (although one might be required to obscure the banality of such “revelations”). This does not, however, negate the fact that in a society based upon the private ownership and regulation of the requirements for existence, those who do not own must sell their labor power, thereby constraining their expressivity of subject positions. The fundamental act of theft by class has enormous implications for the articulation of peoples’ lives under capitalism. These are implications that cannot be ignored in the manner of those who seek to turn away, or in Wood’s (1986) terms retreat, from class. As Bowles and Gintis (1987:206) note, any society which “allows a significant fraction of its members to live in conditions of financial insecurity and material distress expresses a degree of indifference or callousness toward its members which both exhibits and fortifies social division and invidious comparison rather than community.” Even Laclau and Mouffe (1985) are careful to clarify that the extension of diverse forms of social conflict into a wide range of areas creates new possibilities for the construction of more democratic and egalitarian societies but does not mean the end of struggles over class. Likewise, the fact that all of the new movements have representation in Latin America, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, warns against locating their genesis in a shift to post-industrialism or “post-modernism.”

Overlooking these facts has deeply impacted new movements. Several commentators (Jezer 1977; Adam 1993; Aronowitz 1996; Epstein 1996; Brym 1998), however, have noted that the shift away from class struggle has fundamentally impaired the new social movements’ capacities to enact

any substantial and lasting changes to the existing socio-political structure. By turning away from issues of class, the new movements are open to criticism for having left major sources of domination and power largely untouched, both in theory and in actual practice.

Not only is there no significant theorizing of this question among intellectuals linked to the new social movements (except among ecologists), but many intellectuals remain adamantly opposed to raising the question of global capitalism and the changing terrain of class relations on the premise that to speak the language of political economy is to sink into some version of marxist orthodoxy. (Aronowitz 1996:94)

In Boggs' (1986:13) early, but still accurate, assessment, their "failure to confront the issue of power has in the end only weakened, rather than empowered, those social forces capable of subverting the status quo." Thus, while the new social movements have been significant in broadening an awareness of complex and multifarious forms of hierarchy and domination, their reluctance to deal with class struggles has severely restricted their transformative capabilities. As Boggs (1986:14) recognized, "the ongoing conflict between prefigurative (value-oriented) and instrumental (power-oriented) dimensions of popular movements has all too often been resolved in favour of the prefigurative." Perspectives that ignore or downplay political economy in favor of cultural issues or "postmodern values" and identities do a disservice by denying the ways in which the development of culture, values and identities are rooted in capitalist power relations.

Even movements that are mostly clearly expressive of "new values," such as environmentalism, have important intersections with class movements. One might note in this regard the important ongoing efforts of union health and safety committees to limit harmful industrial impacts on nature. That these intersections have been conceptually separated from "environmentalism" proper in much new movement writing is purely arbitrary.

Similarly, new movements also have real effects upon the exercise of property rights and state authority. To limit these movements to cultural expressions or manifestations of identity is to overlook their impact on interfering with state and capitalist violence or in shifting power relations (Adam 1993). What is needed is an approach that moves beyond both uncritical culturalism and deterministic economism to look at the interweaving of cultural meaning and political experience in social movements.

The construction of totalities is an affliction that befalls not only Marxist theorists. The idea of a privileged, unilaterally developed agent as the commanding force of social change should be obviously problematic.

Such notions represent a gross misreading of a dialectical model of social change (a misreading which may have been made by Marx through an instrumentalist approach to Hegelian dialectics, according to Bookchin 1980). Ironically, social movement critics of Marxism, including Murray Bookchin, repeat this error in their attempts to locate agents of change beyond the working class.

### **Social Ecology Against Class Struggle**

The concerns raised by social movement theorists such as Laclau and Mouffe have been expressed in even stronger terms from within the radical ecology movement (Bookchin 1980, 1993, 1997; Foreman 1991; Watson 1994). Social ecologist Murray Bookchin has been especially critical of analyses and strategies that assign any centrality to a particular group such as the working class. Bookchin has gone beyond merely turning away from notions of class struggle to actively condemning them, even in their anarchist expressions. In *Toward an Ecological Society*, Bookchin (1980:218) argues that it is “the very class nature of the proletariat . . . and its highly particularistic interests . . . [which] belie Marx’s claims for its universality and its historic role as a revolutionary agent.” Bookchin suggests that it is as class actors that workers are at their most reactionary. In his view, the fact of workers’ exploitation by the bourgeoisie and their position within the factory system only reinforce workers’ “actual one-sided condition under capitalism as a ‘productive force,’ not as a revolutionary force” (Bookchin 1980:241).

Bookchin is rightly critical of the factory system and sees it as a major factor in the de-humanization of the working class. However, he goes a step further by suggesting that the factory system also assures the de-radicalization of the working class. In *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1986), Bookchin argues that the factory system serves as the training ground for bourgeois society and for the instilling of bourgeois values. Through the imposition of a work ethic, the hierarchical organizations of management, and the demands for obedience, the factory system serves to indoctrinate workers as subservient upholders of capitalism. Bookchin (1986:205) states that, in a sad parody of the Marxist vision, the “factory serves not only to ‘discipline,’ ‘unite,’ and ‘organize’ the workers, but also to do so in a thoroughly bourgeois fashion.” This leads Bookchin (1987:187) to argue elsewhere that socialist, anarchist or syndicalist struggles focused around the factory give “social and psychological priority to the worker precisely where he or she is most co-joined to capitalism and most debased as a human being – at the job site.”

For Bookchin, the only answer is to leave the job site and turn solely to struggles within the “community” – as though communities exist without

workplaces. In Bookchin's view communities are somehow separate from the class positions of those who live in them. He argues that the workers who are so brutalized at the job site are able to shed those experiences and become different people within their communities. "Their human focus is the community in which they live, not the factory in which they work" (Bookchin 1987:191). In Bookchin's analysis, as in liberal theory, "the most powerful form of collective organization in contemporary capitalism – the modern business corporation – is stripped of its communal status" (Bowles and Gintis 1987:16).

This perspective leads Bookchin (1987, 1997) to insist that the efforts of socialists or anarcho-syndicalists who organize and agitate at the workplace are only strengthening the very aspects of workers' social beings that must be overcome if a radical transformation of society is to occur. Such work, he argues, only serves to distract from the potentially beneficial developments of consciousness that he expects to arise from activities within the community.

While not rejecting Bookchin's insights – of course community initiatives are important; certainly the disciplined regimentation of the workplace must be overcome – there remain difficulties which must be further discussed. First, if workers are to overcome their alienated class character, then they must at some point confront the growing contradiction between their developing community consciousness and the material confinement and dehumanization experienced at the job site. Rather than being simply left behind, or ignored, the job itself will be a crucial arena for struggle. The constitution of new identities as expressive human beings in transcendence of alienated class identities implies a successful struggle over the very structures of domination, regimentation, hierarchy and discipline that exist concretely within the workplace. One cannot assume that the job site will simply wither away with the flowering of a new identity. More likely it will be impossible to fully develop the human expressivity of which Bookchin (1986) speaks, given the continued existence of this significant nexus of capitalist power, domination and exploitation.

Appeals to humanity, conscience and personality cannot be made in abstraction from the very material conditions that restrict and deform peoples' humanity, conscience and personality. While struggles at the level of the workplace should not, indeed cannot, be elevated to the sole site of transformation, the corrective to this is not to abandon these struggles all together. "The constitutive aspect of social interaction starts from the fact that individuals are recognized (in their own eyes and in the eyes of others) by their acts. The self as a social self is in continual need of definition, validation, and recognition through action" (Bowles and Gintis 1987:150). Likewise, it is not enough simply to condemn or ignore peoples' identities



as workers. Rather the fullest implications of this subject position must be understood through the activities and through the voices of workers themselves.

Rather than arguing for or against the workplace as opposed to the community one must move forward to a fuller articulation of engagement carried out at both sites. That each realm of experience and action is an important site for transformation and struggle must be appreciated. That the workplace must be transcended and the community developed, or even restored, does not erase the fact that the process through which each can occur will not allow a retreat from one and a romantic preoccupation with the other. The development of community must be the dissolution of the factory system and all that it entails.

When attempting to articulate a fuller understanding of class struggles it is worthwhile to remember that such struggles do not begin and end at the point of production. As Bookchin (1986:249) himself has noted, without understanding the class implications, “it may emerge from the poverty of the unemployed and unemployables, many of whom have never done a day’s work in industry.” Likewise, the class struggle entails an extremely crucial ideological dimension that extends far beyond any restricted notions of “class consciousness” or “superstructure.” It is an ideological development that arises fundamentally from peoples’ varied activities in a society ruled by the dictates of private property. Bookchin (1986:249) comes up against this when he concedes that class struggle “may emerge from a new sense of possibility that slowly pervades society – the tension between ‘what is’ and ‘what could be.’” This tension is precisely the contradiction which workers in struggle experience between their desires for self-determination and the limits of the workplace.

As importantly, such an understanding may infuse struggles over class with radically new visions of the vast terrain from which social change can emerge. A deeper understanding of class struggle concerns itself with the expression of ethical and cultural rebellions that occur along with economic rebellions. Out of this awareness the potential for an ecological understanding of class society and a class analysis of ecological society might emerge.

Certainly the historic anarcho-syndicalist and industrial union struggles have exhibited this conscious awareness that class struggle entails more than battles over economic issues carried out at the workplace (see Kornblugh 1964; Thompson and Murfin 1976; Salerno 1989; Rosemont 1997a, 1997b). Class struggles have been concerned with the broad manifestations of domination and control that are constituted along with the ruthlessly private ownership of the planet’s ecosystems and their vast potentials for freedom.

One might argue that Bookchin's analysis represents a misreading of historical labour struggles or a rather too narrow understanding of socialism (see Deutsch and Van Houten 1974; Cleaver 2000; Hardt and Negri 2000). This does not diminish, however, the resonance with which his views have impacted radical ecology and the new social movements in general.

### **Ecosocialism: Light Green Radicalism?**

In an early discussion of the modern environmental movement Jezer (1977) posited the importance of socialist engagement as an element in the political development of the movement and in forging strategic linkages to resist the ecological devastation wrought through the specific workings of capitalist economic relations. His primary concern was that without the active intervention of socialist discourse the environmental movement would be susceptible to domination by the reform practices of liberal environmentalism. Jezer quite rightly argued that liberal environmental discourses are lacking any critical strategies for attacking matters of concern to workers, i.e., workplace exploitation or the coerced requirements of existence within capitalist exchange relations. Further, in accepting the permanence and legitimacy of capitalist relations liberal discourse argues against any practical connections with workers within any formation of ecology as a possibly counter-hegemonic force.

If one looks at the articulation of environmentalism since the time of Jezer's writings it appears that a hegemonization of liberal discourse has been constituted. Liberal tendencies have shaped the parameters of much environmental practice. In recent years, however, through confrontations around ecology a radicalization of liberal discourses has emerged bearing some resemblance to socialist critiques of class relations. Such radicalization has suggested (Rudig 1985; Adam 1993) that there is developing what might here be termed an "organic socialism" among activists located within various realms of ecological practice.

What are more remarkable are the 'socialists' born not (or at least not only) of the labour movement, but produced out of the new social movements themselves. This other face of new social movement mobilisation includes a great many participants who understand their *praxis* within a comprehensive worldview which recognizes and supports subordinated people wherever they exist. (Adam 1993:330)

This blurring of boundaries between radical liberalism and socialism, first theorized in the works of Thomas Paine (see Arblaster 1991), suggests that processes of articulation among different actors problematise essentialist and reductionist discourses and open possibilities for the rethinking of

supposedly fixed identities. Specifically, within ecology it is through ongoing struggle “when capitalists attempt to mobilize workers into opposing environmentalists, that environmentalists come to see the importance of economic issues for the actors involved” (Adkin 1992:145). Because articulation is ever-present it cannot be assumed that such an awareness is assured. However, it is within these emergent ecosocialist discourses that one can see the precarious and ambiguous nature of articulations between ecology and labor.

The radicalization of politics has convinced ecosocialists of the strategic importance of alliances to counter the hegemony of capital. “Because unions have been viewed as the representative bodies of citizens-as-workers, ecosocialists have been concerned to create forums for environmentalists and unions to meet and to work out common agendas” (Adkin 1992:146). Thus, priority has been given by ecosocialists to building coalitions between existing environmental groups and unions. Indeed, much of the distress of the ecosocialist project relates to the economistic priorities of traditional unionism. “In relation to environmental conflicts, they have tended to accept the logic of owners that profit is the only basis for economic growth and, hence, employment” (Adkin and Alpaugh 1988:54). Corporatist unions still adopt a resource management vision of human relations with nature while favoring current legislative approaches to environmental protection. “In accepting the domination of nature as the primary basis for ‘jobs’ and through the continued equation of politics with the state, unions have resisted the more radical demands of ecology activists to forge ‘dark green’ alliances which question the existing logic of production and consumption and the defining of nature within it” (Shantz and Adam 1999:49). Leaving capitalist categories largely unscathed within union environmental discourses has indeed allowed for their easy re-articulation along capitalist lines. Thus union environmentalism forms the workers’ chorus of green capitalism in an all too familiar arrangement.

### **The Limitations of Socialist Discourse**

The stagnation of ecosocialism is not entirely attributable to the light green formation of traditional unionism. Ecosocialism’s failure to radicalize alliances is largely related to the limitations of *Marxist* discourse as a possible nodal point in the formation of an alternative anti-hegemonic project. This is related to a persistent inability or unwillingness to transcend given bourgeois categories, i.e., positivism and productivism, even as they collapse under continuous interrogation from radicals.

The privileging of “legitimate” means through union-centered activism and statist reforms, helpful in forming relations with workers, has stood diametrically opposed to the inclinations of activists raised on direct actions

and de-centered organizations. Conceptions of autonomy, participation, and cultural transformation, which occupy the political ground of alternative movements, have been only reluctantly engaged within ecosocialist strategies. “Perhaps most fatally, ecosocialist acceptance of structurally given identities and interests, as reinforced in a ‘jobs and environment’ discourse, could not articulate the challenge to hegemonic conceptions of nature demanded by radical Greens” (Shantz and Adam 1999:49).

Ecosocialism’s commitment to productivism and other traditional Marxist categories has contextualized “environmental relations” to mean not conditions of mutualism and complementarity with nature, but rather such forms of reproducible exploitation as tree farming. “Arguments are advanced about how environmental practices would create employment, but where is a radically different vision of an ‘equilibrium’ society whose dynamics are given not by the expansion of social labour and the consumption of goods” (Adkin 1992:152)? Guattari and Negri (1990:13) voice the sentiments of many radicals in asserting that socialism, if it is to hold any relevance for alternative movements, “must be more than just the sharing of wealth (who wants all this shit?) – it must inaugurate a whole new way of working together.”

Inasmuch as ecosocialism resists the colonisation of workers and nature by the logics of profit and accumulation, it offers a radicalisation of ecology beyond the parameters of liberal environmentalist discourse. By adhering to productivist, growth dependent visions of human liberation and relations with nature ecosocialism remains “light green” environmentally speaking. (Shantz and Adam 1999:50)

For many ecology activists, Marxism is characterized by progressivism, statism, authoritarianism, and centralism – conceptions that are, for the most part, shunned within new movements. Instead the new politics allow for a renovation and renewal of long-eclipsed themes of radicalism shorn of the debilitating labels or categories that remain from the left/right construction. More relevant to movement activists, though certainly not determinate, has become the distinction between authoritarian and libertarian approaches to social transformation. “A more profound challenge was emanating from the radical ecologists, feminists, anarchists, and libertarian socialists” (Adkin 1992:148). The movements of resistance that have emerged in the past several decades have aroused “a new conception of the emancipatory project of which socialism has been the leading proposal” (Aronowitz 1990:123). Activist sensibilities bearing certain resemblances to marginalized libertarian or radical projects, i.e., utopian socialism, anarchism, and anarcho-syndicalism (Offe 1985; Tucker 1991; Roussopoulos 1991), as well as republicanism (Tucker 1991) and Romanticism (Scott

1990) have posed serious challenges to political and social theory. Confronting these questions and the problems that they raise has required a critical rethinking of new movements' activism and those moments of continuity and discontinuity with the strategies of earlier social movements.

Previously, radicalism of various sorts, had been characterized chiefly by progressivism, the idea that "the natural," with its mysterious and threatening forces might be brought under human control as society moved through new, improved stages of human development, leading towards the benefit of all humankind. Progressives of various stripes envisioned the taming of wild uncertainty in the post-scarcity march to the future. The making of history required that nature be made predictable. It was believed that the mastery of natural forces – especially through science and technology – would provide the basis for human freedom. As we approach a new millennium, however, these utopian fantasies have become ecological nightmares as the spectre of global ecological catastrophe – deforestation, toxic contamination, ozone depletion, desertification and species annihilation offer but a few examples – looms over us. While there may be – and clearly there has developed – some affinity between certain aspirations of ecology and those of the Left, the ecology movement is just as likely to pursue objectives which are directly opposed to traditional concerns of leftism, especially where those regard questions of productivism and security (see Offe 1985).

Some of the blame, of course, must be placed squarely on the shoulders of Marx and Engels whose "scientific socialism" rigidified and eventually displaced earlier utopian and anarchist expressions of socialism (e.g., those of Fourier). I would certainly argue that a socialist vision of class struggle would benefit from an emphasis on more utopian elements. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985:190) state, "without the possibility of negating an order beyond the point that we are able to threaten it, there is no possibility at all of the constitution of a radical imaginary – whether democratic or of any other type." Such a perspective may provide a richer understanding of class, class struggle and the potential for socialist transformation. One important source of neo-utopian thought may be found in radical ecology, if one moves beyond that movement's many excesses. Indeed, it is important to note that many commentators offering radical ecological perspectives have themselves been inspired by utopian cultural visions.

### **Green Syndicalism: An Alternative Red-Green Vision**

As a corrective to the retreat from class in much anarchist, new social movement and "radical" thought some activists have tried recently to learn the lessons shown by the history of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or "Wobblies"). The late Earth First! organizer Judi Bari used her

knowledge of IWW organizing work to help build an alliance between timber workers and radical environmentalists in the redwood forests of northern California. By showing that a radical working class perspective may also contain a radical ecological perspective, Bari contributed much to a radicalization of alliances within the ecology movement. Moreover, her efforts in northern California provided a sharp and living critique of the common view among environmentalists (see Foreman 1991; Bookchin 1980, 1986, 1987) that class analyses and class struggle approaches have little to offer in the effort to bring about an ecological society.

This approach has led to the development of syndicalist practice informed by radical ecology – a “green syndicalism.” Green syndicalists have articulated labor as part of the environmental community (see Bari 2001; Purchase 1994, 1997a, 1997b). Within green syndicalism this assumption of connectedness between historical radical movements, including labor and ecology, has much significance. “We find ecological consciousness in both the history of the IWW and the philosophy and practice of earlier anarchists” (Kauffman and Ditz 1992:41). This helps to explain why the IWW has become a focal point for radical ecologists seeking to build alliances with workers.

These green syndicalist articulations are important in reminding (or informing) ecology activists and workers alike that there are radical working class histories in addition to the histories of compromise which so preoccupy Bookchin’s thinking. “Historically, it was the IWW who broke the stranglehold of the timber barons on the loggers and millworkers in the nineteen teens” (Bari 1994:18). It is precisely this stranglehold that environmentalists are trying to break today. “Now the companies are back in total control, only this time they’re taking down not only the workers but the Earth as well. This, to me, is what the IWW-Earth First! link is really about (Bari 1994:18). In her work, Bari forged conceptual bonds between the suffering of timber workers in the 1920s and ecological destruction today. The history of workers’ struggles becomes part of the history of ecology in Bari’s genealogy of the present.

Significantly, green syndicalists reject the productivist premises of “old-style” Marxists who often viewed issues such as ecology as external to questions of production, distracting from the task of organizing workers at the point of production. Within green syndicalist perspectives, ecological concerns cannot properly be divorced from questions of production or economics. Rather than representing “separate discursive universes,” nature, producers or workplace become understood as endlessly contested features in an always-shifting terrain. Furthermore these contests, both over materiality and over meanings, contradict notions of unitary responses.

Green syndicalists thus stress the mutuality and interaction of what had been discursively separated – nature, culture, workers (see Bari 2001).

We are not trying to overthrow capitalism for the benefit of the proletariat. In fact, the society we envision is not spoken to in any leftist theory that I've ever heard of. Those theories deal only with how to redistribute the spoils of exploiting the Earth to benefit a different class of humans. We need to build a society that is not based on the exploitation of the Earth at all – a society whose goal is to achieve a stable state with nature for the benefit of all species. (Bari 1994:57)

Through this expanded analysis of class struggles one may come to a more concrete understanding of the dynamic nature of conflict. No longer posited as one-sided or pre-given, it becomes clear that the struggles themselves lead to the emergence of entirely new issues and demands such as the quality of work and ecology.

The question becomes how these newly opening political spaces might contribute to deeper expressions of democracy and freedom. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) suggests that ecology and class might converge in new articulations which actually modify or transform the identity of participants such that the demands of each are rendered as equal. Thus a process of “hegemonic equivalence” changes the very constitution of the class and ecology forces that are engaged in social struggles. Following Boggs (1986:231) one might expect an articulation of new social movement and class forces to occur as part of a transformation from a capitalist economy to an ecological community.

This suggestion is consistent with a key insight provided by radical ecology. “Unity-in-diversity is a basic attribute of healthy eco-communities. Why shouldn't it be a healthy characteristic for radical movements?” (Chase 1991:10)? Diversity is something to be cherished and cultivated as an important element of a new ecological society.

Green syndicalists insist that overcoming ecological devastation depends on shared responsibilities towards developing convivial ways of living wherein relations of affinity, both within our own species and with other species, are nurtured (see Bari 2001). They envision, for example, an association of workers committed to the dismantling of the factory system, its work discipline, hierarchies and regimentation – all of the things that Bookchin identifies (Kaufmann and Ditz 1992; Purchase 1994, 1997b). This involves both a literal destruction of factories and their conversion towards “soft” forms of small, local production. These shifting priorities express the novelty of green syndicalism – not the discourse of industrial management presented in the caricatures of its detractors.

Within green syndicalism one sees evidence of “deep green” perspectives that express new visions of relations between industrial workers and radical

ecology. Green syndicalist perspectives are suggestive of some tentative synthesis. The emphasis still remains on possibility. Green syndicalist visions include elements that may be unrealistic or improbable.

### **Conclusion**

The shift away from class analysis in ecology movements presents many problems, both theoretical and practical. Adam (1993:331) has raised the question of whether such movements will “necessarily leave the deep structures of capitalism untouched and avoid taking on the prevailing distribution of wealth and power.” The recent struggles of the ecology movement suggest that without a serious radicalization, which includes the contributions of workers, future attempts will continue to be constrained in their efforts to bring about fundamental change.

By accepting the structure of existing society rather than directly confronting its underlying assumptions and class antagonisms the potential for co-optation is a pervasive and serious danger. The case of Greenpeace is illustrative. There the acceptance of existing structural relations has reduced Greenpeace to an organizational weapon focused largely upon short-term success and with little interest in cosmological or ideological questions. Adkin (1992:149) has identified Greenpeace activists as “young, militant, imbued with a sense of urgency, and too impatient to stop environmental degradation to engage in the painstaking process of building alliances with organizations like the unions.” Whether or not one agrees with the reasons provided by Adkin for the lack of alliances, the main point remains that connections have been limited. The failure to broaden the lines of engagement has greatly compromised Greenpeace’s actions. Thus, rather than building direct action efforts on a broadened base of solidarity the elitist separation between “vanguard” and “masses” is maintained and the transformative potential of the direct actions is left largely unmet.

Part of the problem must be attributed to the lack of understanding by new movement theorists and activists that removing economic forces from a position of analytical primacy does not mean that matters of class can be treated carelessly or abandoned. “Surely even a post-Marxist scheme will have to incorporate an understanding of the economy and class forces into its conceptual structure” (Boggs 1986:16). Unfortunately such an understanding has been largely absent in the theoretics of the new social movements. There has been a particular resistance to incorporating class forces and the efforts of workers. It may be argued that much of this resistance comes from a narrow and historically superficial understanding of class struggles. Furthermore, in the case of ecology, efforts to understand alliances have been impeded by a rigid



construction of “official” environmentalism and a lack of attention to workers’ contributions to “eco-defense.”

The real consequences of such views for radical ecology have been expressions of ambiguity or suspicion towards workers and towards the prospects for an articulation of environmental and workers’ struggles that might confront the capitalist roots of current ecological threats. The typical response for many activists, despite the efforts of green Marxists and green syndicalists, has been a move away from class analyses altogether. Critical focus has shifted away from exploitation and towards discussions of hierarchy and domination more generally, and often vaguely, conceived.

In *Remaking Society* Bookchin (1987:172) concludes, “the bases for conflicting interests in society must themselves be confronted and resolved in a revolutionary manner. The earth can no longer be owned; it must be shared.” These statements represent truly crucial aspects of a radical vision for an ecological society. What is perplexing is that Bookchin does not draw the necessary implications out of his own radical conclusions. The questions of ownership and control of the earth are nothing if not questions of class.

As conflicts over nature deepen and the theft represented by property becomes de-legitimized by the further destruction of varied eco-communities there is the potential for greater mobilizations of people as workers in a diverse but united struggle for communitarian reconstruction. It is from a standpoint of unity-in-diversity (social and ecological) that a newer, richer understanding of class and class struggle must begin. Through open communication and alliance workers as environmentalists (and indeed environmentalists as workers) will add to this deeper understanding of class struggle.

## References

- ADAM, BARRY D.  
1993 “Post-Marxism and the New Social Movements.” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 30(3): 316-333.
- ADKIN, LAURIE, E.  
1992 “Counter-Hegemony and Environmental politics in Canada.” In: William K. Carroll (ed.), *Organizing Dissent*. Canada: Garamond.
- ADKIN, LAURIE, E. AND CATHERINE ALPAUGH  
1988 “Labour, Ecology, and the Politics of Convergence.” In: Frank Cunningham, Sue Findlay, Marlene Kadar, Alan Lennon, and Ed Silva (eds.), *Social Movements/Social Change: The Politics and Practices of Organizing*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

ARBLASTER, ANTHONY

- 1991 "Thomas Paine: At the Limits of Bourgeois Radicalism." In: Peter Osborne (ed.), *Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism*. London: Verso.

ARONOWITZ, STANLEY

- 1990 *The Crisis in Historical Materialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.  
1996 "Towards Radicalism: The Death and Rebirth of the American Left." In: David Trend (ed.), *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State*. London: Routledge, 81-101.

BARI, JUDI

- 1994 *Timber Wars*. Monroe: Common Courage.  
2001 "Revolutionary Ecology: Biocentrism and Deep Ecology." *Hodge Podge* 7: 35-38.

BOGGS, CARL

- 1986 *Social Movements and Political Power: Emerging Forms of Radicalism in the West*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

BOOKCHIN, MURRAY

- 1980 *Toward and Ecological Society*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.  
1986 *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.  
1987 *The Modern Crisis*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.  
1990 *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.  
1997 "Deep Ecology, Anarchosyndicalism, and the Future of Anarchist Thought." In: *Deep Ecology and Anarchism: A Polemic*. London: Freedom Press, 47-58.

BOURDIEU, PIERRE

- 1987 "What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32: 1-18.

BOWLES, SAMUEL AND HERBERT GINTIS

- 1987 *Democracy and Capitalism*. New York: Basic Books.

BRYM, ROBERT

- 1998 "Social Movements and Politics." In: *New Society: Sociology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 461-475.

CHASE, STEVE

- 1991 "Whither the Radical Ecology Movement?" In: Steve Chase (ed.), *Defending the Earth*. Boston: South End Press, 7-24.

CLEAVER, HARRY

- 2000 *Reading Capital Politically*. Edinburgh/Leeds: AK Press/Anti/Theses.

DARNOVSKY, MARCY

- 1995 "Introduction." In: Marcy Darnovsky, Barbara Epstein, and Richard Flacks (eds.), *Cultural Politics and Social Movements*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, vii-xvii.

DEUTSCH, STEVEN AND DONALD VAN HOUTEN

- 1974 "Environmental Sociology and the American Working Class." *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 2(1)(Fall-Winter): 22-26.

ECKERSLEY, ROBYN

- 1989 "Green Politics and the New Class: Selfishness or Virtue." *Political Studies* 37(2): 205-223.

EPSTEIN, BARBARA

- 1996 "Radical Democracy and Cultural Politics: What About Class? What About Political Power?" In: David Trend (ed.), *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State*. London: Routledge, 127-139.

- FOREMAN, DAVE  
 1991 *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*. New York: Harmony Books.
- GUATTARI, FELIX AND ANTONIO NEGRI  
 1990 *Communists Like Us*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- HALFMANN, JORST  
 1988 "Risk Avoidance and Sovereignty: New Social Movements in the United States and West Germany." *Praxis International* 8(1): 14-25.
- HARDT, MICHAEL AND ANTONIO NEGRI  
 2000 *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- JEZER, MARTY  
 1977 "The Socialist Potential of the No-Nuke Movement." *Radical America* 11(5) (Sept.-Oct.): 63-71.
- KAUFMANN, MARK AND JEFF DITZ  
 1992 "Green Syndicalism." *Libertarian Labor Review* 13(Summer): 41-42.
- KIVISTO, PETER  
 1986 "What's New About the 'New Social Movements'?: Continuities and Discontinuities With the Socialist Project." *Mid-American Review of Sociology* XI(2): 29-44.
- KORNBLUGH, JOYCE L.  
 1964 *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- LACLAU, ERNESTO AND CHANTAL MOUFFE  
 1985 *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. London: Verso.
- MELUCCI, ALBERTO  
 1989 *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- OFFE, CLAUS  
 1985 "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics." *Social Research* 52(4) (Winter): 817-868.
- OMI, MICHAEL AND HOWARD WINANT  
 1996 "Imagine There's No Heaven: Radical Politics in an Age of Reaction." In: David Trend (ed.), *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State*. London: Routledge, 157-164.
- PURCHASE, GRAHAM  
 1994 *Anarchism and Environmental Survival*. Tucson: See Sharp Press.  
 1997a *Anarchism and Ecology*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.  
 1997b "Social Ecology, Anarchism and Trades Unionism." In: *Deep Ecology and Anarchism: A Polemic*. London: Freedom Press, 23-35.
- ROHRSCHEIDER, R.  
 1990 "The Roots of Public Opinion Toward New Social Movements: An Empirical Test of Competing Explanations." *American Journal of Political Science* 34(1): 1-30.
- ROSEMONT, FRANKLIN  
 1997a "Introduction to the Life and Ravings of Slim Brundage." In: Franklin Rosemont (ed.), *From Bughouse Square to the Beat Generation: Selected Ravings of Slim Brundage*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 11-45.  
 1997b "Mysteries of a Hobo's Life." In: Franklin Rosemont (ed.), *Juice is Stranger than Friction: Selected Writings of T-Bone Slim*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 7-33.
- ROUSSOPOLOUS, DIMITRIOS  
 1991 *Green Politics: Agenda for a Free Society*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.

- RUDIG, WOLFGANG  
1985-86 "Eco-Socialism: Left Environmentalism in West Germany." *New Political Science* 14(Winter): 3-37.
- SALERNO, SALVATORE  
1989 *Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- SANDILANDS, KATE  
1992 "Ecology as Politics: The Promise and Problems of the Ontario Greens." In: William K. Carroll (ed.), *Organising Dissent*. Canada: Garamond Press.
- SCOTT, ALAN  
1990 *Ideology and the New Social Movements*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- SHANTZ, JEFFREY A. AND BARRY D. ADAM  
1999 "Ecology and Class: The Green Syndicalism of IWW/Earth First! Local 1." *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 19(7/8): 43-72.
- TARROW, SIDNEY  
1994 *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- THOMPSON, FRED W. AND PATRICK MURFIN  
1976 *The I.W.W.: Its First Seventy Years*. Chicago: I.W.W.
- TUCKER, KENNETH  
1991 "How New Are the New Social Movements?" *Theory, Culture and Society* 8(2): 75-98.
- WOOD, E.M.  
1986 *The Retreat from Class*. London: Verso.

Copyright of Critical Sociology is the property of Brill Academic Publishers and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.