

SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS: Notes on the Ecological Dimension

Marxists & the Environment: Is Marx's critique of Science and Technology radical enough?

By Mitchel Cohen

Five conceptualizations and proposals for greening Marxism:

1. Oppose the privatization of the biological cell, of natural genetic sequences. Understand Genetic Engineering as the mechanism through which this new and fundamental expansion of capitalism is taking place. This is a new expansion of capital, colonizing the "Nature within." We must:

- a) Ban all genetic engineering of agriculture, plants, pesticides, and foods -- this demand becomes essential to the new anti-colonial movements of the 21st century, which are fighting everywhere to retain control of their indigenous plants and animals, and to their own biological legacies.
- b) Abolish the private patenting of genetic sequences and seeds -- so-called "intellectual property rights."
- c) Take private profit out of research and development of genetically engineered health-related drugs.
- d) In the meantime, require all bio-engineered products and those derived from them to be clearly labeled.
- e) Develop the theoretical framework to show how biotechnology is fundamental to the expansion of capitalism in this era, and not just another important issue *per se*.

2. Challenge what is meant by "Progress" and "the Good Life." Reject the notion that the "good life" is based on the mass production and accumulation of commodities, and its consumption of Nature.

Does the industrial *form* of production itself -- regardless of who owns it or how it is administered -- propel anti-social, anti-loving behavior? How?

Two hundred years ago, in 1811, the Luddites -- like the Iroquois and other American Indian communities -- offered a different measure of progress, one not defined by artificial discipline, efficiency or the expropriation of Nature or exploitation of Labor. Contrary to popular mythology, the Luddites did not oppose machines *per se*, but "machinery hurtful to Commonality."

3. Train ourselves to see "holistically". This is not something that will come about on its own within the capitalist or patriarchal frameworks -- nor will it come about in the kind of socialist framework based on industrial development.

4. Stop fetishizing science and technology.

Are the Marxist and Anarchist anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-Statist frameworks sufficient for turning back and repairing the destruction wrought on the natural environment, or is something more required -- the overthrow of the technological industrial system itself?

The ensemble of capitalist *and* patriarchal *and* anti-ecological relations exist and are reproduced through every moment of industrial production, under socialist governments as well as capitalist ones. Technology is not some "neutral force"; it is dripping with the ideology and power relations of the sys-

tem in which it was manufactured. It is not only a matter of which class owns it and to what use it's put. By using it one reproduce the very devastating conditions we had aspired to change in the first place.

The social and economic conditions in which the factory form of production developed have indelibly stamped the rapaciousness of capitalism into every moment of the production process. Capitalism is "in its genes," so to speak. And we, raised in those same conditions, can barely conceive of human relations or modern societies producing to satisfy human needs in any other way. Industrial production seems, to us, most "natural" and integral to our notions of progress.

Unless leftists also dismantle the factory *form*, capitalist and patriarchal relations will continue to be pushed up from within technology and destroy Nature. There is a complex internal dynamic within technology itself that goes beyond which class owns and controls it (the "social relations"), calling into question the whole industrial schema of what constitutes progress and challenging both bourgeois and traditional leftist notions of growth and development.

The idea that science and technology are (or could be) somehow "neutral" or "objective" is itself an ideological construct and a figment of capitalist mythology. Calls for more intensive technological development ignore the capitalist relations embedded in technology, and facilely peel away the critical Marxian category "forces of production" from the intricate constraints of its dialectical integuments.

Some examples of how this Marxian fetishization of technology has played out in our recent history and has hurt the Left. The Marxist parties endorsed:

- nuclear power plants in the 1960s.
- fluoridation of drinking water
- mass vaccination of children
- spraying of pesticides and over-application of antibiotics
- the torture of animals by cosmetic companies under the guise of "scientific research"
- genetic engineering
- "Subsidize the Pharmaceutical Industry" form of health care and factory model

Technology is an ensemble of social relations, and as such every product, and every means for making it (whether it be an assembly line, State, or genetically engineered crop) is a crystallization of the history of the exploitation, organization of production, and destruction of the Commons that went into making it. But, like the state, the factory form has become a model that official Marxism seeks to emulate, take over and administer, not smash. Marxists must stop treating science and technology as the answer to our problems. Imagine a different *kind* of future, one that is not based on factories, assembly lines, industrial farming, and factory-type health care.

5. Marxists must actively search for the ecological dimension in every social justice issue and raise it as part of every fight. We must practice doing this.

EVERY issue is multidimensional. Every issue has an ecological dimension that is fundamental to it. It is our job as revolutionaries to search for that green dimension and unpeel it, reveal it, and organize around it even when it does not seem obvious at first. This must become a fundamental component of every fight that we enter. Practice doing this.

All of these are necessary to Green Marxism, to enable our movements and the working class in general to reveal and explore the deeper connections, which then would allow us to take actions that strike more deeply into the system itself and provide the basis for more powerful, successful, and radical social movements.