

Environmental Anarchism in Vermont: Anne Petermann of Global Justice Ecology Project

Anonymous

2010

Contents

References	13
----------------------	----

To fully understand the context of global environmental problems, one must assess the role that humans have played in the destruction of the nature. Environmentalists and social science scholars have argued on behalf that social justice and environmental justice go hand-in-hand. Long time Vermont resident and activist Murray Bookchin brought forth the philosophy of social ecology, which laid out the ideological framework that bridged social and environmental justice movements. In his seminal work *Post Scarcity Anarchism*, Bookchin argues to challenge the social order that is rooted in the exploitation of man and nature alike. He writes, “Owing to its inherently competitive nature, bourgeois society not only pits humans against each other, it also pits the mass of humanity against the natural world. Just as men are converted into commodities, so every aspect of nature is converted into a commodity, a resource to be manufactured and merchandised wantonly” (85).

In this paper I will analyze the discourse of ecological anarchism through the context of the Global Justice Ecology Project, (GJEP) in order address the flaws of contemporary “technocratic” environmentalism and accentuate the anthropological significance of alternative perspectives on environmental and social justice. My thesis argues that the constructs of our hierarchal capital society have only fostered “false solutions” to global environmental problems, one must distance themselves from such conventional views on the environment and look at the environment from an anarchist perspective to understand the root causes of both social and environmental ills.

So where does anarchism fit into Vermont’s environmental movement? Well I found out that it really has not played a large role in VT’s environmental politics. The hierarchy of environmental campaigns in Vermont has been dominated by scientific based means of conservation and elitist perspectives from conventional “mainstream” environmental NGO’s. The Global Justice Ecology Project, a NGO based in Hinesburg VT, was involved with a coalition to preserve the Green Mountain National Forest and resigned after persistent conflicts of interest. Anne Petermann, Co-director of GJEP remarks,

“I haven’t seen a whole lot of anarchism in VT’s environmental movement and VT politics to be honest with you, aside from you know our own work. I’ve seen a lot of the opposite...a lot of hierarchal environmental work. For example, we used to be involved in a coalition of forest groups working on increasing the wilderness in the Green Mountain National forest. That was extremely hierarchal. The big groups, Forest Watch, The Wilderness Society, and the Sierra Club that really dominated that and if you veered at all from their philosophy and strategies then you were basically shunned from the group, so we quit. (Laughter) We didn’t get along very well” (Witman 2008: 6).

Never before has modern human society seen a rise of environmental advocacy groups as there are today. Despite the broad shared concern about the state of the environment, there is much debate in the environmental community as to what type of ideologies and strategies should be implemented to protect the natural world. . Governments and international environmental NGO’s continue to lobby for strict environmental legislation and place great faith in international treaties to address pressing environmental concerns. I would argue that this mainstream method of environmentalism celebrates small victories or “piecemeal reforms” instead of taking action to counter the root causes of environmental degradation.

This “mainstream environmentalism” treats the destruction of the environment as something inherently anthropogenic. Prominent opinions on “environmental awareness” have been shaped by the hierarchal Neo-Malthusian views on population growth. Thomas Malthus, 19th century reverend that proclaimed that the human population was increasing exponentially whereas natu-

ral resources and food supplies could only grow arithmetically. Richard Robbins notes, “ Without preventive checks to control fertility, such as ‘moral restraint’ or ‘marriage postponement,’ argued Malthus, population will constantly increase, deplete resources, and bring into play ‘positive checks’ — famine, disease, and war — that will return population to a balance with resources” (2005: 148). Such opinions have been reaffirmed by ecologist Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb*, which wrongfully places the majority of the blame upon the developing world for its role in resource exploitation rather than addressing the flaws of Western Culture.

People in the developing world also impact global environmental problems, but generally on a much smaller scale. In the realm of environmentalism, the comparison is frequently made the average ecological footprint of an US citizen is 5.1 hectares, whereas the average Indian citizen has ecological footprint of 0.4 hectares (www.worldwatch.org). The ecological footprint is a calculation that is used to determine how much land a person requires for the resources necessary to sustain her/his lifestyle. So what shapes this disparity in ecological footprints? “Radical” environmentalists, social activists and anarchists have distanced themselves from conventional Neo-Malthusian views on the environment and laid out a critique of consumer culture as the true culprit of environmental destruction and social inequality. People aren’t the sole cause of environmental problems; rather such problems are a byproduct of the flaws of resource-intensive capitalist culture, which contributes to an “anthropocentric” worldview. On the contrary, anarchist environmental perspectives examine the root causes of environmental degradation and social injustice — tracing back to the inception of hierarchal society and the rise of the culture of capitalism. Before exploring anarchist theories on the environment, let’s take a moment to address the how modern environmental knowledge is produced.

Peter Taylor and Fredrick Buttel title their chapter with the question “*How Do We Know We Have Global Environmental Problems?*”. Analyses of global warming and environmental demolition are dominated by quantitative scientific studies, rather than qualitative sociopolitical inquiry of the contributing factors to global environmental problems. Taylor and Buttel note,

“Over the last few years, environmental scientists and environmentalists have called attention, in particular, to analyses of carbon dioxide concentrations in polar ice, measurements of upper atmospheric ozone depletion, remote sensing assessments of tropical deforestation, and, most notably, projections of future temperature and precipitation changes drawn from computation-intensive atmospheric circulation models” (2006: 407).

For example, The Keeling Curve, construed by Charles Keeling of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, is the definitive chart that depicts the linear correlation between time and atmospheric carbon dioxide levels. This chart has been politicized through Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth* to illustrate the trend of anthropogenic greenhouse gas pollution. A quick glance at the chart confirms the “gloom and doom” of the current state of the environment, as it shows a precipitous increase in carbon dioxide emissions from 1960–2000. Contemporary scientific graphs and literature essentially homogenize the human population as being equally responsible for the rise in greenhouse gas pollution and corresponding rise in mean global temperature. It can be argued scientific methodology fails to conceptualize the “bigger picture” of global warming. Taylor & Buttel comment,

“This dominance of physical climate research over institutional analysis points to the second issue, the hierarchy of the physical over the life and social sciences. This hierarchy constitutes an environmental determinism: the physics and chemistry of climate change set the parameters for

environmental and biological change; societies must then adjust as best as they can to change in their environment” (412).

This theme of hierarchy in academic and environmental discourses will be revisited in a further analysis of the Global Justice Ecology Project. Unsurprisingly, the notion of control and power is not an alien concept to present day science-based and “technocratic” views of nature. Timothy Luke deconstructs, the definition of environment,

“In its original sense, which is borrowed by English from Old French, an environment is an action resulting from, or the state of being produced by a verb: ‘to environ.’ And environing as a verb is, in fact, a type of strategic action. To environ is to encircle, encompass, envelop, or enclose. It is the physical activity of surrounding, circumscribing, or ringing around something. Its uses even suggest stationing guards around, thronging with hostile intent, or standing watch over some person or place. To environ a site or a subject is to beset, beleaguer, or besiege that place or person” (2006: 261).

The very word environment is rooted in a sense of ownership, paralleling to the pervasive ideological divide between human culture and nature. Anthropologist Timothy Ingold has defined culture as the dichotomy of the mind and the environment. He does not see a separation between the human culture and the environment. The ideological separation of humans from the environment has contributed to the dominant anthropocentric views on the natural world. Challenging the means in which humans relate to the natural world is pivotal aspect of GJEP’s environmental work.

GJEP was founded in 2003 to bring forward an alternative means of viewing social and environmental justice. GJEP’s old website notes,

“After ten years coordinating a Resource Center in Burlington, Vermont that focused on forest protection, free trade, Central America, indigenous, labor and global justice issues, as well as the links between them and their local connections, in the summer of 2003, GJEP co-Directors Anne Petermann and Orin Langelle left the Resource Center to co-found Global Justice Ecology Project in September 2003.”(www.globaljusticeecology.org)

Anne and Orin both came from extensive activist backgrounds and believe in non-conventional means of working for environmental justice. Namely, both Anne and Orin are anarchists by political affiliation and emphasize working for justice outside the constructs of our hierarchal social system. Anne and Orin see the links between social and environmental injustice and seek to expose to the underlying aspects of these problems rather than lobbying for “band-aid” solutions. GJEP’s *Our First Year in Brief* states, “Economic globalization, war, environmental devastation and human rights abuses are inextricably linked. Social movements can magnify their effectiveness by linking together to create a powerful movement for change that addresses the common economic, social and political roots of our issues. The Global Justice Ecology Project was founded to advance these alliances” (Ibid.). GJEP utilizes civil disobedience and face-to-face contact to gain support and awareness for their campaigns. This organization actively pressures corporations and constituents of international environmental summits to take action rather than lobbying politicians to make change for them.

As discussed earlier, Vermonter Murray Bookchin, founder of social ecology was renowned for making the argument against hierarchal society, which has brought about social and environmental calamities. Although Anne and Orin agreed with some aspects of Bookchin’s work neither of them explicitly subscribe to the tenets of social ecology, Anne comments,

Right well you know social ecology certainly had a good important role in furthering this concept of understanding the connection between human society and the environment and why you have to address both and not just one or the other. I think my personal interactions with Murray were later in his life and he was really crabby and crotchety. So (laughter) that was kind of the view I had of Murray, someone who was extremely difficult and my background being Earth First! Of course there was a big split between social ecology and deep ecology, so what we tried to do in our work was to try to find the best points of each and merge them together in what we call “Revolutionary Ecology” because social ecology had its limitations as did deep ecology. Deep ecology didn’t have enough of a political analysis and social ecology was too anthropocentric. So we kind of tried to bridge them and tried to find something that was both had more of an earth-centered perspective but also understood political reality and the role of humans on this planet and capitalism and so on” (Witman 2008: 4).

Drawing from an affinity for deep ecology and social ecology, GJEP formed a hybrid theory, which they classified as “Revolutionary Ecology”. Let’s take a moment to explore both theories. Deep Ecology, pioneered by Norwegian Arne Naess, calls for “biospheric egalitarianism”, and does not distinguish the needs of humans from that of the nature. Humans have lost their respect for nature and see it merely as a malleable resource, Naess affirms, “The attempt to ignore our dependence and to establish a master-slave role has contributed to the alienation of humans from themselves” (1973: 4). Murray Bookchin’s theory of social ecology is rooted in anarchist views along the lines of Peter Kropotkin’s challenge to the hierarchal state. Bookchin sees the need to evaluate environmental and social crises based on the underlying factors that paved the way for such problems rather than addressing the superficial products of such injustice. In *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, Bookchin writes,

“In this book I contend that nature can indeed acquire ethical meaning — an *objectively* grounded ethical meaning. Rather than an amorphous body of personalized, often arbitrary values, I contend that this ethical meaning involves an expanded view of reality, a dialectical view of natural evolution, and a distance — albeit by no means hierarchal — place for humanity and society in natural evolution. The social can no longer be separated from the ecological any more than humanity can be separated from nature. Mystical ecologists who dualize the natural and the social by contrasting ‘biocentricity’ with ‘anthropocentricity’ have increasingly diminished the importance of social theory in shaping ecological thinking. Political action and education has given way to values of personal redemption, ritualistic behavior, the denigration of human will, and the virtues of human irrationality. At a time when the human ego, if not personality itself, is threatened by homogenization and authoritarian manipulation, mystical ecology has advanced a message of self-effacement, passivity, and obedience to the ‘laws of nature’ that are held to be supreme over the claims of human activity and praxis. A philosophy must be developed that breaks with this deadening aversion to reason, action and social concern” (1990: 47).

Bookchin’s lengthy quote is an attack upon Arne Naess’ philosophy of deep ecology, which he denounces as “mystical ecology” seeing that it is grounded upon a spiritualistic reverence for the environment and fails to incorporate sociopolitical analysis and action. Deep ecology emphasizes spiritual and psychological change as the stepping stone for creating a much needed holistic outlook on the environment Andrew McLaughlin in *For a Radical Ecocentrism* states, “But the deep ecology movement does aim to transform society, and it is not clear that spiritual conversions or transformational psychologies are foundations that can effectively support this goal in a broadly based social movement” (266). On the contrary, social ecology places its emphasis on challeng-

ing the capitalist social order and restructuring society based on mutual aid and solidarity. Social ecology calls for an active role in transforming society rather than the fatalistic quasi-spiritual doctrine of deep ecology. Bookchin's essay *What is Social Ecology* elaborates,

"Social ecology 'radicalizes' nature, or more precisely, our understanding of natural phenomena, by questioning the prevailing marketplace image of nature from an ecological standpoint: nature as a constellation of communities that are neither 'blind' nor 'mute,' 'cruel' nor 'competitive,' 'stingy' nor 'necessitarian' but, freed of all anthropocentric moral trappings, a *participatory* realm of interactive life-forms whose most outstanding attributes are fecundity, creativity, and directiveness, marked by complementarity that renders the natural world the *grounding* for an ethics of freedom rather than domination" (55).

Proponents of these respected theories have waged scholarly battles as to which is the superior radical environmental theory. GJEP believes that it is more important to accentuate the positive aspects of each theory and thus their hybrid theory of "Revolutionary Ecology" is best suited to integrate rather than alienate environmental thinkers. Revolutionary Ecology is simply a fancy way of describing ecological or "green" anarchism. Brian Tokar's *Earth for Sale* places Kropotkin's theory in context of revolutionary ecology,

"One of the most articulate precursors of a radical ecological vision was the Russian naturalist and geographer Peter Kropotkin, who renounced the prevailing interpretation of Charles Darwin's principle of evolution as a relentless "struggle for existence," and set out to examine cooperation and mutual aid as factors in both natural and social evolution. Kropotkin also examined the irrationalities of mass industry in a detailed study that offered ample evidence to support this anarchistic social philosophy. The abolition of authoritative state power, he wrote would create the basis for a cooperative society in which confederated, village-based economies combined agriculture and industry, and enhanced human creativity by reconciling mental and manual work" (1997: 113).

I was able to gain a broader understanding of the praxis of ecological anarchism and understand GJEP's role in both global and local environmental movements through an interview with Anne Peterman. She worked extensively for the Native Forest Network, a NGO that works to preserve indigenous lands, which placed her in an active role working with the Cree to protect their homelands from the HydroQuebec Dam. More recently, Anne has devoted her efforts towards and anti genetically engineered (GE) tree campaign. So what is the overall mission statement of GJEP?

Anne responds,

"We pretty much try to stick to our mission which is to build local, national and international alliances and incorporate direct action to address the common root causes of environmental destruction social injustice and economic domination. In our work we really feel that finding the root causes and addressing those root causes is really key — putting "band-aids" on things isn't really going to get us anywhere. Until we address the root causes of environmental domination, namely the capitalist system, that you know is really key toward making any progress on the major environmental and social issues that we are dealing with, global warming being the most obvious example. With the emergence of global warming as something that lots and lots of people understand and are beginning to be concerned about we've started to reframe our program work which has traditionally been forest protection and indigenous rights, internationally mainly, reframing that under the umbrella of global warming so that we are starting to tie in why are forests key to the global warming problem" (Witman: 1).

GJEP has taken a firm stance against “false solutions” of the contemporary environmental movement. Carbon trading and carbon sequestration programs are what Anne would call “band-aid” solutions, as they fail to address the flaws of capitalist culture, the underlying cause of global environmental problems. These carbon-offset schemes are dominated government policy and hierarchical environmental NGOs frequently; carbon sequestration schemes force the “Global South” to pay the toll for the global warming pollution from the developed “North”. The most common method of carbon dioxide sequestration involves monoculture tree plantations in the tropics — the argument is made that the newly planted trees absorb carbon dioxide emissions, thus helping to offset climate change. “Green” consumers — namely “eco-conscious yuppies” in first world countries have the ability to purchase carbon credits to help offset carbon dioxide produced by a plane trip or utility bill etc.

There are two important arguments to be made here. First off, the carbon-offset industry caters to a minority niche market of affluent first-world citizens who want to “green” their lifestyle. What’s more, the carbon-offset market caters to the very consumer culture that is responsible for environmental degradation, as it provides a monetary solution to a crisis rooted in capitalism. More importantly, the biodiversity and people of the “Global South” suffer as a result of the creation of carbon-offset tree plantations. These tree plantations are ecological deserts and use up land that could be used for indigenous agriculture or turned into a nature reserve. From an anarchist perspective, carbon offset schemes adhere to the confines of the very social system — capitalism to address problem causes by such system. Anne highlights the hypocrisy of these policies by addressing the price indigenous peoples pay for these carbon-offset tree plantations,

“And also on the indigenous rights piece — indigenous lands are largely being looked at to provide these so-called “solutions” to global warming because they have been traditional stewards of their lands for millennia and have largely protected the resources on those lands. Now institutes such as the World Bank and large corporations are saying, “Well you know we would love to use those lands, the forests that are still standing on those lands to offset our carbon emissions”. Which, you know is completely based on flawed phony science but nonetheless that is what they want to do. They want to use such lands as carbon offsets for their pollution. So the indigenous communities are being impacted that way they are being removed from their lands so that those lands can be protected as “human exclusion zones” — specifically for the purpose of carbon offsets. And at the same time these communities are also on the frontlines of experiencing the impacts of global warming. The closer that you live to the land, the more you are going to be impacted when the climate changes — when the wildlife starts to shift and plants and forests start dying off or species start changing. So, you know this is an issue that is really impacting rural and indigenous more than almost anybody else” (Ibid.).

Although GJEP believes in the significance of alternative energy projects, plans that infringe upon indigenous rights or promote ethnocentrism fall under the umbrella of “false solutions” to environmental problems. In the 1990’s she became active spokesperson for indigenous rights through her affiliation with the Native Forest Network. The controversy over the HydroQuebec dam of St. James Bay was a stellar environmental issue of the mid 1990’s. One hand, HydroQuebec wanted to provide clean energy for Quebec and parts of New England. Yet this alternative energy proposal would come at the expense of the Cree’s homeland. Were there any overarching difficulties mitigating dialogue between environmentalists and the Cree Nation? Surprisingly, this was not the case, Anne comments,

“I don’t really remember having a lot of problems with that, I think there were a few people out there who maybe were anti-nuclear activists who saw HydroQuebec as some sort of alternative to Vermont Yankee, for example. But for the most part, there was a pretty broad alliance of groups that were opposed to HydroQuebec. So there wasn’t too much conflict” (Ibid.: 3).

Although Anne’s academic background is not in anthropology, her positions on environmental justice correlate with central themes of anthropology and cultural relativism. Her attitudes on environmentalism and opinions on scientific conservation coincide with the themes expressed in Mac Chapin’s *Challenge to Conservationists*. Chapin’s main argument is that the “The Big Three” environmental NGOs maintain an arrogant attitude and insist that only their projects generate feasible conservation solutions. Such organizations simply disregard the role of indigenous peoples; Chapin quotes a biologist from Conservation International (CI), “Quite frankly, I don’t care what the Indians want. We have to work to conserve the biodiversity” (2004: 21). Such rhetoric pinpoints the hierarchal and one-sided nature of “mainstream environmentalism”. Later on in the interview, Anne mentions explicit case studies in which indigenous peoples have been marginalized by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and CI, respectively. GJEP critiques the role of the mainstream environmental movement as exacerbating rather than helping solve environmental problems. Anne states,

“And as I just mentioned, these carbon offsets on indigenous lands — this is being done by the World Bank and the United Nations but also in conjunction with The Nature Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy in Bali actually gave the World Bank 5 million dollars for this program its called “The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility” and it is all about coveting and taking over indigenous lands for carbon offsets. So they are very much part of the problem and in fact I talked to an Indonesian activist when I was in Brazil last April who works with “*Via Campesina*” and we were talking about the problems with these “Big Three Groups” and he mentioned that one of the problems of their model, this “human exclusion zone” model of protecting quote unquote “the environment” and in some countries what is actually does is open up the doors to resource extraction. He specifically talked about Indonesia where they had done this thing where they had gone into this area of the Borneo forest and had thrown the indigenous and rural communities off their land, drawn a circle around it and said, “Ok this is now protected”. But because the communities were no longer there it opened up this forest to illegal logging because there was nobody to watch over it anymore. So in some cases their (“The Big Three”) efforts to conserve quote unquote “forests” is actually opening up the door to more resource extraction” (Witman: 2).

This pinpoints the duplicity of large international environmental NGO’s like TNC. Mac Chapin mentions, ExxonMobil, Shell International, Weyerhaeuser, Monsanto, Dow Chemical and Duke Energy are corporate sponsors of “The Big Three” (25). Unfortunately, the fact that TNC would forcibly remove indigenous peoples from their lands to resource extraction is not too surprising considering where they get they get their money from. On a similar note, in 2003, Anne took part in a Global Exchange delegation to study why Conservation International and the Mexican government were trying to throw indigenous communities out of the Lacandón rainforest. The community was allied with the Zapatistas and practiced sustainable agriculture and agroforestry. They were being singled as a “red herring” by the Mexican government for causing deforestation through slash-and-burn agriculture. The observations that Global Exchange made as they did an aerial survey of the landscape proved this assumption couldn’t have been further from the truth. Anne describes,

The delegation did an over flight of the area and what they found was that the Mexican military was destroying the forest and having all of these negative impacts, not the communities. One of the reasons this was happening — why Conservation International had teamed up with the Mexican military on this was because they were trying to open up the area for bioprospecting — for pharmaceutical companies to go in and patent medicinal plants. So this is what these characters do. The people we work with a very much on the other side of that abyss — not working with them (“The Big Three”) at all or working against them” (Ibid.: 3).

This particular action describes the direct action approach of GJEP. GJEP heard about injustice in the Lacandón rainforest, so they headed down to México to see what they could do to help. This type of response is much more successful than lobbying in Washington DC or petitioning the Mexican government to stop removing indigenous peoples from their land. GJEP knew that the hierarchies of government bureaucracy wouldn’t bring justice, so they took matters into their own hands. As an anarchist organization, GJEP believes in self-empowerment and emphasizes the significance of taking direct action to assert your voice, instead of hoping that the hierarchal power structures of government can be pressured to “do the right thing”. Members from GJEP traveled to the last United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bali to protest the US’s lack of commitment to global warming, shed light upon “The real cost of agrofuels” and speak out against GE trees. Members of GJEP stood in solidarity with indigenous peoples who wore gags on their mouths that read, “UNFCCC” to show how indigenous perspectives are silenced at these hierarchal global environmental conventions.

Although I applaud GJEP’s efforts to take action on a global scale it seems as if their impact on Vermont’s environmental movement is nominal at best. Towards the beginning of this paper, I included a quote from Anne that talked about GJEP’s conflicts with the Sierra Club when they were part of a coalition to preserve the Green Mountain National Forest. GJEP felt that their views were squelched by the likes of the Sierra Club and the Wilderness so they felt that being involved was counterproductive. Although I don’t know much about the context of GJEP’s interactions with the other VT environmental groups, perhaps they fall into the anarchist paradigm of being “too-anti”. Additionally, it seems as if GJEP focuses primarily upon global environmental issues rather than fostering a strong sense of unity with other environmental activists in Vermont. After all, isn’t anarchism about community and solidarity? Further commentary on these matters will be made in my policy addendum.

The environmental movement in Vermont is lead by NGOs like VPIRG and the Sierra Club, groups that place nearly all of their efforts on fundraising and lobbying rather than direct action or protest. After working a full summer canvassing for the Sierra Club and RIPIRG I can attest to the fact that such organizations renounce “checkbox environmentalism” and pool millions of dollars lobbying in Washington DC and creating flashy public relations campaigns. Such groups barely scratch the surface of environmental problems and as Anne proclaims, “are part of the problem not part of the solution,” as they adhere to the capitalist status quo and pronounce market-based solutions to environmental problems. As we have examined, such organizations prompt “false solutions” to environmental degradation by “adhering to the hierarchal forces that be” instead of examining and challenging the origins of environmental ills.

The argument has been made to challenge the conventional means of environmentalism and look toward alternative anarchist perspectives; the question arises, how do anarchists, or otherwise anti-hierarchal folk run a social/environmental justice organization? Well it needs to be made clear, that anarchism is not a state of chaos and disarray, as conventional opinions would

have one believe. On the contrary, anarchism is about mutual aid and solidarity, it is about working together with each other for the common good and making decisions through face-to-face democracy. Public opinion limits Anarchism to “circle A” nihilist punks donned with spikey jackets and black T-shirts, and neglects the long history of anarchist scholarship and influx of anarchist thought in academia. Anthropologist David Graeber comments,

“Anarchist- or anarchist-inspired movements are growing everywhere; traditional anarchist principles — autonomy, voluntary association, self-organization, mutual aid, direct democracy — have gone from the basis of organizing within the globalization movement, to playing the same role in radical movements of all kinds everywhere... Yet all this has found almost no reflection in the academy. Most academics seem to have only the vaguest idea of what anarchism is even about or dismiss it with the crudest stereotypes. (‘Anarchist organization! But isn’t that a contradiction in terms?’) In the United States there are thousands of academic Marxists of one sort or another, but hardly a dozen scholars willing to call themselves anarchists” (2004: 2).

As a result of these misunderstandings and lack of self-described anarchists in academia, eco-anarchism or other “radical” environmental discourses alternatives are rarely taught in the university setting. A student can go through a student can go through four years at UVM as whatever type of “environment major,” whether it be through the Rubenstein School of Natural Resources, env. engineering, env. studies or env. sciences, and not really be exposed to the schools of thought of deep ecology, social ecology and eco-anarchism. An environmental studies major often only learns about the CITES treaty, outcomes of Earth Summits, and ecological economics and so forth. I find it particularly upsetting that only one course in the ENVS department details the philosophies of social ecology, an ideology native to Vermont. With respect to anarchism, one may question whether “they” (the forces that influence society and education, “the man” so to speak) prevents such ideologies from flourishing. The fact that David Graeber was denied tenure at Yale University speaks directly to such themes. During my interview with Anne Peterman, I asked her about her personal definition of anarchism to see how her views coincide with those of Graeber. She brought up the common example,

“If you had 10 anarchists in a room and asked them what anarchism was...you would get 10 different answers. It’s a very personal politic, but for myself I tend to be more along the lines of a collectivist anarchist where the feeling of mutual aid and solidarity is really the underpinnings of anarchy, aside from of course the anti-state (laughter) piece of it. Ah and so I really believe that governments are a part of the problem and not part of the solution. So my personal anarchist underpinnings are around building movements and social movements for people to be able to take control of their own reality and start working together on this mutual aid kind of model to come up with solutions that make sense” (Witman 2008: 5).

So if anarchism promotes egalitarianism and challenges the challenges the capitalism government, isn’t socialism just as an alternative environmental discourse just as compelling? There has been a rise in Marxist ecology, promoted by the likes of John Bellamy Foster, but socialism in practice has proved to far from environmentally friendly. Ramachandra Guha’s chapter *Socialism and Environmentalism (or Lack Thereof)* provides historical examples of socialism’s conquest rather than conservation of nature. Guha makes note that Lenin, “Was a brother of a biologist and a trekker and nature lover himself. It was Lenin who signed, in September 1921, a new decree for ‘The Protection of Monuments of Nature, Gardens and Parks,’ which prohibited hunting and fishing in existing *zapovedniki* and encouraged the establishment of new ones” (2000: 129). Yet this commitment to protecting the environment through expansion of *zapovedniki* (nature reserves)

was short lived. The USSR's Five Year Plan of 1929–1934 bolstered intensive agriculture and industry, which derailed previous attempts to create national parks and protect the environment. Guha writes,

“There was now relentless pressure on ecologists to show ‘results,’ to make their research lead directly to the economic exploitation of natural resources. The collectivization of agriculture destroyed numerous protected areas on the steppes, converting natural biological communities into fields. Mining and logging were allowed in other wild areas. Where *zapovedniki* once covered 12.5 million hectares, by the early ‘50s this had declined to a mere 1.5 million hectares” (Ibid).

China maintains the largest and longest lasting communist government while exhibiting one of the world's most dire environmental and human right's records. Corruption under the Chinese Communist Party is ubiquitous on local and national levels. Rural peasants cannot even meet their basic needs let alone dream of upward social mobility. Chen and Wu's *Will The Boat Sink The Water?* describes,

“The villagers all complained that the cadres cheated their superiors and oppressed the people, gave themselves perks and privileges and did not keep proper records of the village finances. The ‘one payment, two records’ scam was just one item in their bag of dirty tricks” (Ibid. 56). These impoverished people resort to drastic measures to sustain their meager existence, Chen and Wu augment, “The villages are so desperately poor that many peasants in some production teams survived by selling their blood at regular intervals” (Ibid. 24) Heavy taxation creates an environment in which farmers cannot even afford to eat their own crops. Chen and Wu were shocked by the stark poverty when traveling through the Baimaio Township in northern Anhui countryside,

“A cartload of fresh scallions would sell for two to three *yuan* or about 31 cents. Cabbages fared slightly better, selling for 10 fen per *jin* (little over a US pound). And yet the peasants could not afford to eat their own vegetables. In the village, we saw a man in his thirties squatting in the door of his house eating a bowl of rice, with nothing on it. We asked him why he didn't cook some of his own cabbages to go with his rice. We were heartbroken by his answer: “If I use one *jin* of cabbage, won't I be ten fen short? (Ibid.: 96).

The CCP is waging a war against its people and the environment, Guha reports,

“In August 1993, villagers in Gansu Province protested against the contamination of their water by a chemical plant, leading to the deaths of fish and livestock and an increase in respiratory illnesses. When the factory's managers, themselves well connected to the Communist Party, disregarded their complaints, peasants took to the streets. Riot police were called in; they killed two protestors and injured several others before restoring order” (133).

As we have seen in the case studies of USSR and Communist China, state socialism does not foster justice, equality or environmental stewardship. The implications of such governments bring about tyranny, fear-mongering and wide-scale environmental destruction. Guha affirms,

“The ideology of state socialism is antithetical to environmentalism on a number of grounds: in its worship of technology; in its arrogant desire to conquer nature; through its system of central planning in which pollution control comes in the way of fulfillment of production targets. Most of all, though, state socialism has inhibited environmentalism by throttling democracy, by denying to those it rules over the basic freedoms of association, combination and expression” (Ibid.: 134).

Not only is socialism flawed in its application, but the theorizing and spin-offs from Marx focus more on scholarly discourse than activism. Graeber comments,

“Just as Marxism sprang from the mind of Marx, so we have Leninists, Maoists, Trotskyites, Gramscians, Althusserians...(Note how the list starts with heads of state and grades almost seamlessly into French Professors.) Pierre Bourdieu once noted that, if the academic field is a game in which scholars strive for dominance, then you know you have won when other scholars start wondering how to make an adjective out of your name. Now consider the different schools of anarchism. There are anarcho-syndicalists, Anarcho-Communists, Insurrectionists, Cooperativists, Individualists, Platformists... None are named after some Great Thinker; instead, they are invariably named either after some kind of practice, or most often, organizational principle. Anarchists like to distinguish themselves by what they do, and how they organize themselves to go about doing it” (5).

Ultimately, Anarchism is focused upon taking action to change the circumstances of environmental and social domination. Anarchism is rooted both in practice and theory and does not hide behind scholarly bickering or government bureaucracy. Anarchism is about ensuring justice for all without compromise. GJEP, as an anarchist organization sees the holistic nature of environmental and social problems and refuses to remain passive by placing faith in mainstream NGOs to get us out of our environmental crises. Ecological anarchism is about creating a reciprocal relationship between humans and humans and humans and the environment. Our new radical environmentalism must abandon societal constraints to achieve a new unity among all of humankind. We have the power create this dynamic non-hierarchical society, the revolution so to speak is in our minds, our revolution will not be fought by guns and bombs, but by revolutionary ideas and collective actions. To conclude I would like to draw again from Bookchin’s *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*

“The cast of mind that today organizes differences among humans and other life forms among hierarchical lines, defining the external in terms of its ‘superiority’ or ‘inferiority,’ will give way to an outlook that deals with diversity in an ecological manner. Differences among people will be respected, indeed fostered, as elements that enrich the unity of experience and phenomena. The traditional relationship which pits subject against object will be altered quantitatively; the ‘external,’ the ‘different,’ the ‘other’ will be conceived of as individual parts of a whole all the richer because of its complexity. This sense of unity will reflect the harmonization of interests between individuals and between society and nature (104).

Conclusively, as GJEP would suggest, the discourse of contemporary environmentalism needs to be re-organized to counter capitalist hegemony and reach out to a more organic and community centered way of life. We are only helping to dig the grave of environmental sustainability and abandon hope for social justice if we choose to accept the confines of environmentalism through capitalist hierarchy.

References

Bookchin, Murray. 1990. *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Naturalism*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.

Bookchin, Murray. 1971. *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*. Oakland: AK Press.

Buttel, Fred and Peter Taylor. 1992. How Do We Know We Have Global Environmental Problems? Science and the Globalization of Environmental Discourse. In *The Environment in Anthropology*. Nora Haenn and Richard Wilk, eds. Pp. 407–416. New York: New York University Press.

- Chapin, Mac. 2004. A Challenge to Conservationists. *World Watch* Nov/Dec: 17–31
- Chen, Guiou & Wu Chuntao. 2006. Will the Boat Sink the Water?: *The Life of China's Peasants*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Global Justice Ecology Project. 2003. GJEP Accomplishments: Our First Year in Brief. Electronic document, www.globaljusticeecology.org, accessed April 28, 2008.
- Graeber, David. 2004. *Fragments of Anarchist Anthropology*. Chicago: Fragments of Anarchist Anthropology.
- Guha, Ramachandra. 2000. *Environmentalism: A Global History*. New York: Longman
- Luke, Timothy. 1995. On Environmentality: Geo Power and Eco-Knowledge in the Discourses of Contemporary Environmentalism. *In The Environment in Anthropology*. Nora Haenn and Richard Wilk, eds. Pp. 257–269. New York: New York University Press.
- McLaughlin, Andrew. 1995. For A Radical Ecocentrism. *In The Deep Ecology Movement*. Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue, eds. Pp. 259- 271. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
- Naess, Arne. 1995. The Shallow and The Deep, Long- Range Ecology Movement. *In The Deep Ecology Movement*. Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue, eds. Pp. 1–12. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
- Robbins, Richard. 2005. *Global Problems and The Culture of Capitalism*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Tokar, Brian. 1997. *Earth for Sale: Reclaiming Ecology in the Age of Corporate Greenwash*. Boston: South End Press.
- VanWynsberghe, Robert. 2002. *AlterNatives: Community, Identity, and Environmental Justice on Walpole Island*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Wilk, Richard. 2006. The Ecology of Global Consumer Culture. *In The Environment in Anthropology*. Nora Haenn and Richard Wilk, eds. Pp. 418–426. New York: New York University Press.
- Williams, Dee. 2004. “Representations of Nature on the Mongolian Steppe: An Investigation of Scientific Knowledge Construction.” *American Anthropologist* 102(3): 503–19.
- Witman, Elias. 2008. Interview with Anne Petermann at Global Justice Ecology Project Office in Hinesburg VT. Conducted March 20, 2008.
- WorldWatch Institute. 2006. *State of the World 2006: China and India Hold World in Balance*. Electronic document, www.worldwatch.org, accessed April 28, 2008.

Anarchist library
Anti-Copyright



Anonymous
Environmental Anarchism in Vermont: Anne Petermann of Global Justice Ecology Project
2010

Retrieved on 22 November 2010 from news.infoshop.org

en.anarchistlibraries.net