

# **A Critique of the Draft Program of the Left Green Network**

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May 24 1991

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**Editors note: The Left Green Network is in the process of writing, developing and debating its program. The draft proposal for the program was published in the April/May 1991 issue of the Network's organizing bulletin, Left Green Notes, number 7. The following critique was written in response to that program. The proposed program will be debated at the upcoming continental conference of the Network, over the July 4 weekend in Chicago, Illinois. To receive a copy of the draft program, and/or information about the continental conference, please write to the Social Ecology Project at the mast-head address, or to the Left Green Network, P.O. Box 5566, Burlington, Vermont 05402.**

The proposed Left Green Network program, as it was published in Left Green Notes, is very much at odds with itself. Lacking coherence, it mixes high-minded revolutionary rhetoric with pragmatic, often blatant forms of social engineering, leaving the thinking reader confused as to its essential intentions and goals. The "strategy" section of the proposed program, for example, states that the Left Green Network "refus[es] to take responsibility for the impossible task of making an irrational system rational," a formulation with which we certainly agree, having emphasized it in our own statements. The proposed program also defines the Left Green Network as a "fundamental opposition" and defines Left Greens as social ecologists. Splendid! This is very much to the good. The same is true for the brief explanation of libertarian municipalism and similar broad views.

But often quite suddenly the reader then encounters concrete demands for "reconstruction" that are little more than liberal in character. In some of its most far-reaching sections, the proposed program presents Left Greens as fundamentally antihierarchical and antistatist, yet ironically, many of its planks presuppose the very existence of the nation-state that it is committed to abolishing. Similarly, the proposed program presents Left Greens as anticapitalist, but some of its key demands can easily be satisfied within the very capitalistic system it so forcefully opposes. In what follows, we shall single out some of the more important - at times, even absurd - errors that we believe Left Greens should carefully consider in altering the proposed program or in developing a new one.

## **Integrate the Hierarchy?**

"The various forms of hierarchy and domination that permeate our society," the proposed program reads, "are integrated by two overarching institutions today: the capitalist economy and the nation-state. If we are to have an ecological society, capitalism and the nation-state must be uprooted and replaced by new decentralized forms of grassroots political and economic democracy." So far, so good. And the proposed program commendably makes an attempt to define short-term goals (minimum program) and long-term goals (maximum program). But unfortunately, these two types of goals become convoluted in the text so that they are often not clearly distinguished from each other and sometimes interlace with each other somewhat carelessly. Many of the minimum demands, in fact, contradict the maximum program. Thus, at the same time that the proposed program calls for the destruction of hierarchy and the state on the one hand, it makes demands that presuppose the existence of state and hierarchy, on the other hand.

We read under "public health service," for example, that Left Greens want "national health service boards." Perhaps the use of the word national here was simply an oversight. But we also read that Left Greens want to "democratize the United Nations," of all things, and we find this for-

mulation astonishing! Obviously, the United Nations is actually the United Nation-States. This demand thus amounts to tacit recognition of nation-states - presumably, as long as their participation in the UN is "democratically" organized! We regret to say that this formulation is silly as well as contradictory. We further read that Left Greens want to extend "sovereignty" to native peoples. Although the document does not say what the word sovereign means, the implication is the establishment of a state of some kind: for example, a sovereign Native American state, outside the existing sovereign United States, and presumably Canada and Mexico.

But are Left Greens really committed to creating more states in this overly nationalistic world? Left Greens, we think, should support cultural autonomy for Native Americans as for other groups who want it, in a decentralized confederation of all peoples. Nobody should have "sovereignty" in the conventional sense of the term in an ecological society, or in any society for that matter, except human beings in free, face-to-face democratic assemblies. Today, nationalism is one of the "real banes of our era, and in the past it was perhaps the most powerful force that fragmented the workers" movement (as witness the national divisions within the Socialist International at the beginning of World War I). The "internationalism" of the Left Greens, namely their abhorrence of all nation-states, should be one of their theoretical hallmarks, whether they are dealing with a minimum or maximum program. This point cannot be stressed too emphatically.

To continue: The proposed program calls for "genuine representative democracy" - but only a statist mentality would not see that "representative democracy" is an oxymoron. Have discussions of the difference between democracy and representation not filled a library of volumes? Still further, we read that Left Greens think that "if a woman is a manager, she should be called a manager and paid accordingly, rather than called an executive secretary and paid much less." Really! In other words, the proposed program thinks that Left Greens want to call women by their appropriate ranks in a bourgeois status hierarchy, lest women not get due recognition of their place in it or due remuneration. Presumably, if Left Greens accept this document, it means that they would like their hierarchies to be very clear-cut and people in different ranks to be paid according to their hierarchical status. Come now! Much as we believe that people are discriminated against in their jobs, we shall show that this is not a problem intrinsic to capitalism as such, and a great deal can be said about the nature of work and its remuneration today. However well intended this demand may be, as it stands, it basically presupposes the very hierarchy that other parts of the document claim Left Greens are trying to eliminate. Would Left Greens advocate women generals, too, with equal pay, as an emancipatory step? Or that women should aspire for titular and remunerative "equality" in a managerial status system? Such demands reveal a traditionally economistic bias in which equality of pay becomes so important that it tends to override the serious effects of hierarchical structures and ways of thinking. In seeking equal pay for equal work, the proposed program unconsciously absorbs the hierarchical structures and titles that have always been so oppressive in human history.

Further instances of an implicit acceptance of hierarchy and/or the state permeate the proposed program: Independent politics is defined as independence of the Democratic and Republican parties. (Independence of the Canadian NDP, we think, should also be emphasized, as well as independence of the Institutional Revolutionary party in Mexico, the repellent claimant to the traditions of the Mexican Revolution.) But this very narrow definition of the term independent politics implies that a third party in the United States might be acceptable to Left Greens, as long as it is not one of the mainstream parties. "Independent politics" of this kind could give

Left Greens carte blanche to run for statewide, provincial, and national office. We would like to think that Left Greens are trying to establish an independent movement, one that has no parallel or equal on the present political horizon. The Left Greens, we would like to think, are trying to reflect an entirely new outlook toward politics, freedom, and ecological problems - indeed, a new outlook toward the natural world itself - not simply a collection of programmatic planks that can be matched up with, contrasted with, or melded with those of other parties and movements. We believe that the term independent politics should be defined more broadly to include a "new politics" and a commitment to free citizens, independent of the nation-state and its institutions, as well as independent of all parties.

We further read that Left Greens want to "dismantle the national security state apparatus." But if the Left Greens want to dismantle the state, of which this apparatus is a major part, why single out the "national security state apparatus," as if it had a life apart from the state? Either this passage is redundant, or it implies that Left Greens would tolerate the existence of other parts of the state, such as its vast bureaucracies, its judicial, legislative, and executive institutions, and the like. Similarly, the demand to "cut the Pentagon budget by 95 percent" implies that Left Greens are prepared to accept at least the existence of a Pentagon, albeit one that is reduced in size. Given the Left Green worldview, one may reasonably ask, why do we need any institution like the Pentagon, even one with 5 percent of the budget or less? This demand becomes especially silly when the proposed program calls for a "civilian defense system . . . eventually (!) as a substitute for military defense." Even the Second International's 1908 program did better than this when it called for the replacement of armies by militias. That the "civilian defense system", is to be "nonviolent," alas, eliminates the legitimacy of citizens' militias armed in defense of their freedoms.

The proposed program is riddled with such ambiguities and hedgings, but they are most evident in its sections on economics. Here again, many of the demands presuppose the existence of the nation-state, albeit without saying so. The "Economic Reconstruction" section, for example, calls for a guaranteed right to a job through public job banks; a guaranteed annual income at 125 percent of the poverty line (an old liberal bromide that dates back at least to the 1950s); progressive taxation (as in Sweden, perhaps?); variable taxation (by whom?) of automated production; a \$10 per hour minimum wage (marvelous - and certainly quite possible under capitalism, inasmuch as such a minimum wage would still be inadequate for many families); a thirty-hour work week with no loss in income (also possible); and a worker's superfund (again, quite possible under capitalism). Most of these demands, the result of conventional statist thinking, imply statecraft on a national scale and seem to point to a new version of Swedish Social Democracy. The section on "taxation on automated production," too, implies a national scope. Apart from the fact that this passage is so overloaded with convoluted language as to be difficult to understand, it is unnecessary for a Left Green program to spell out funding mechanisms and the like. Left Greens, the proposed program tells us elsewhere, are committed to the principle "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs." If that is the case, why even talk about taxes that are quite compatible in principle with the capitalist system and that are partly in existence already?

Moreover, in these and other sections of the proposed program, the word public is used, disquietingly, with no adjectives before it. The word used alone is ambiguous: it can mean the "public" of the direct-democratic politics we are trying to create, or it can mean the "public" of the nation-state. Like the word democracy, the word public has so many connotations that,

lacking a suitable rootedness in the idea of a municipal-confederal "public sphere," it can mean anything to anyone.

## **A General or a Particularistic Interest?**

In our view, it is basic to Left Green politics that Left Greens seek to create a new citizen in a new political sphere at the municipal level, confederated regionally and beyond. The subtitle of the "Cooperative Economic Democracy" section seems to promote this process by calling for "public ownership and democratic control of basic industries," although this formulation conspicuously lacks the word municipal. Happily, the section states that Left Greens "seek to replace capitalist and statist economic forms with grassroots-democratic forms." But then what?

The proposed program goes on to demand something very different from the concept of municipal control that social ecology advances, indeed something rather archaic. "Private sector firms in the market sector," it states, "should be collectively owned and controlled by their employees on the model of the Mondragon cooperative" (emphasis added). Most people know very little about the Mondragon cooperative, whose future as a social entity is very uncertain and whose weaknesses can easily be debated. But it is startling to come upon an endorsement of workers' ownership of the production process when no such thing is mentioned in the Principles of the Left Green Network. In fact, this is a major departure from the agreed-upon Left Green Principles, offered without batting an eye.

It should be understood by everyone concerned that employee ownership is not public ownership, and that "workers' control" of enterprise is not necessarily a form of economic democracy. When social ecologists argue that the municipalities should control the economic life of the community, one of their purposes is to eliminate the possibility that particularistic interests of any kind will develop in economic life, interests that could potentially return us to the kind of competitive market society in which we are all now being strangled. But workers' ownership and control places the workers of an enterprise in a position where they can become such a particularistic interest within their community, possibly outside its control and solely accountable to themselves as "collective capitalists" with a common interest in expanding their enterprises and increasing their profits. The proposed program even demands that the municipal public subsidize the take-over of firms by workers - currently a claim of the "Progressives" in our own city, Burlington, Vermont, not to speak of many Social Democrats.

The history of many such efforts shows that worker-owned cooperative enterprises have indeed drifted toward capitalistic forms of competition on behalf of their own entrepreneurial interests, competing with each other no differently from typical capitalist firms. Any close student of the anarcho-syndicalist industrial confederations formed during the Spanish Revolution of 1936-37 knows that the CNT (Spain's huge anarchosyndicalist labor union) was deeply vexed by the fact that many of the enterprises that even CNT workers had taken over began to function mere collectivities of capitalists. Although this fact has not been emphasized in anarchist or syndicalist accounts of the revolution, it appears clearly in the writings of Gaston Laval, who surveyed the collectives produced by that great event, and it is known in some detail by one of the authors of this critique, who talked to many CNT militants-in-exile in the 1960s.

Another problem that arose historically is what one means by "workers' control." Again, one of the authors who has examined the data on the Spanish revolution with care found that the mean-

ing of "control" varied considerably in Spain. It could mean little more than co-management, in which workers were merely consulted about the operations of an enterprise, or it could mean a fairly extensive takeover, in which assembly forms of democracy were practiced, at least at the very beginnings of the revolution. Many of these enterprises were eventually absorbed with regrettable ease by the bureaucrats of the Catalan government and even the burgeoning bureaucracy of the CNT itself, although one always encounters notable exceptions.

Actually, "workers' control" does not necessarily threaten capitalism. In the years that lie ahead, in fact, it may become merely a different form of capitalism. Recently, some firms, even Fortune 500 companies like IBM, Goodyear, and General Mills, have been instituting "workers' self-management." A composite picture of the authority that these companies have given to their workers in certain plants would dazzle some of the most diehard syndicalists: the authority to discipline workers, to set production schedules, to determine if individual "colleagues" deserve raises, to participate in interviewing and selecting employees, and to shut down production lines if products are defective. Supervisors have been abolished in some cases and replaced by a "manager" and team with rotating coordinators.

Who knows where they will stop? Such companies reportedly find that these programs reduce costs and make for better quality products, greater efficiency, and happier workers - or "members," as they are sometimes euphemistically renamed. Employee stock ownership plans have given a degree of ownership to ten million U.S. workers; in many of them, in fact, employees own the majority of the stock. Avis was actually bought by its workers in 1987. Combined with worker-involvement programs, such worker-participation schemes boost morale, "productivity," and competitiveness, in the spirit of the Avis worker-owners who sport buttons that read "Owners Try Harder." Capitalist corporations may well eventually let workers look at their books without fear of revealing their appetite for profits - partly because workers' class consciousness has been waning enormously since the 1930s, and partly because there is growing agreement among Americans generally that "entrepreneurs" should make profits from their efforts. In Sweden and Switzerland, distribution cooperatives have proved "successful" only when they aggressively managed and marketed their commodities like any other capitalist company. And in Mexico, the government is now actively promoting "partnerships" between campesino cooperatives and private agribusiness - an effort that the campesinos are rejecting by fuming to a version of municipal control very similar in character to what we have propounded.

Is this what Left Greens want? Demands that may have seemed terribly radical fifty years ago are gradually turning into a bourgeois cliché today. The slogans and cries of yesteryear that seemed to be so earth-shaking and innovative are being coopted - without the traditional radical language, to be sure - to accommodate the capitalist economy to an increasing extent.

As social ecologists and libertarian municipalists, we believe that workers should be regarded not as workers per se - a particularistic class existence that has been inflicted upon them by bourgeois society - but as human beings like everyone else, with mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, and the full range of human needs and sensibilities, including civic and ecological concerns. For years, this has been a key argument of social ecologists against conventional socialists, Marxists, and anarchosyndicalists. We have stressed values as well as material problems, ecology as well as factory problems, freedom as well as "social justice." We are trying to create a new political sphere by developing citizen assemblies that actively participate in the management of enterprises under their control, rather than limit that control to those who operate those enterprises and thereby reinforce their proletarian status and ways of thinking.

We work with the category of "citizens," not "workers," because like all other citizens, workers in a democratized polity would have a general public interest as social beings continually in mind. We do believe that workers in their area of the economy have a technical expertise that gives them a place on technical advisory boards at the service of the community, but only as part of their own roles as citizens. In this capacity, knowledgeable as they are about their vocational and professional activities, they can assist the citizen assemblies in making decisions that pertain to the economic area with which they are very familiar. These functions are purely advisory and do not entail policy-making. They are not "soviets," factory councils, or syndicalist trade-union locals. They are merely technical agencies, with no power to make policy decisions, a function that must be relegated exclusively to citizen assemblies. Indeed, the more varied the suggestions they make for the resolution of a particular problem, the more desirable their suggestions will be, so that citizens' assemblies can at least make choices and thereby exercise their autonomy as the policy-making bodies of society. But for any kind of economic cooperative to remain benign, it must be brought under the control of the municipality - that is, the people in face-to-face assemblies - like any other part of the economy. We therefore favor citizens' control of a moral economy, not workers' control of an entrepreneurial economy. (We note that the crucial phrase moral economy does not appear in the proposed program; nor would we want it to appear if its meaning is warped and distorted by obsolete notions of council communism and syndicalism.)

We believe that if Left Greens are to be truly radical and ecological, they must also raise the images of rotation of work, of high-quality and artistic products, and of the virtues of craftsmanship after machinery is used to remove onerous toil. We are as concerned with the quality of life in what Marx called "the realm of necessity" as we are with liberty in "the realm of freedom." Indeed, it is one of social ecology's major tenets that "the realm of necessity" - toil, repetitive work, and alienated labor - must be increasingly colonized by the "realm of freedom" so that work becomes an expressive, self-defining, creative, and pleasurable activity that enriches the human spirit.

Amazingly, of all things, the proposed program takes no descriptive account of the ecological problems that workers encounter in the workplace today, such as the toxins they handle, the polluted air they breathe, and the generally unhealthy environment in which they work - an issue that could provide them with a linkage to a radical ecology movement in their vocational capacities as well as in their civic capacities as citizens, parents, and neighbors who live in communities as well as work in factories. On these questions, as on the question of the quality of work, the debilitating impact of toil, and other seemingly "utopistic" issues that we have raised, the proposed program has nothing to say. We gain no sense that the proposed program has even as a maximum demand a realm of work or "economy" that will be marked by these attributes. In this respect, it lacks utopian vision, vitality, and expressiveness. It still falls within the orbit of old-time socialist programs that read more like inventories of the evils of present-day society with suggested "correctives" than a visionary utopistic program - a dimension that we believe belongs as much in the Left Green Network Program as it does in the Statement of Principles of the Left Green Network.



## Capitalism with a Human Face?

The proposed program has a strangely ambiguous attitude toward capitalism itself that appears in several disturbing ways. Despite the fact that the proposed program opens with a great deal of anticapitalist rhetoric, under "Economic Reconstruction," we are told that Left Greens want in the short term to "stabilize the economy." Stabilize the economy? We are accustomed to such language from the Business Roundtable, but since when has economic stability been even a short-term radical, much less a revolutionary demand? This word comes out of the academic textbooks of business schools. Let us make this clear: It is not the responsibility of Left Greens, if they bear the name Left, to stabilize the economy or to try to rationalize its basic contradictions. Capital and the state do what they can to accomplish this, together with their social democratic allies. Since when have the Left Greens joined that unholy team?

Nor are the demands in the economic section of the proposed program particularly confrontational in dealing with capitalism. Consider these words from the program: "We advocate a system of 'truecost' pricing [!] to democratically internalize social and ecological costs in production." "A \$10/hour minimum wage, indexed to inflation [!], will raise demand for basic necessities (an antirecessionary stimulus [!])." The public health service, we are told, would "employ" "salaried" health workers. (One cannot help but wonder who the "employers" will be who pay the "salaries" in this system). Left Greens, we are told, want to "recategorize ... jobs where needed to protect women's rights to ... comparable worth ... raising salaries for traditional women's work." Here again, the Left Green ecotopia sounds more like Sweden than anything else.

The proposed program goes on to state that Left Greens support "democratic unions and rank-and-file movements in existing unions for union democracy" as well as the "unionization of workforces predominantly women." It cannot have escaped many people's notice by now that the establishment trade unions are among the pillars of capitalism, however much they are denounced by various capitalists today. There is little reason, alas, to think that "democratic" and "women's" unions would be much different from those we already have. The fact is that the trade union movement, despite its radical aspirations in earlier periods of social history, plays a complementary role to the prevailing system. Its ambition is to gain for workers their share of capitalist society's existing wealth. To do so, trade unions, especially since the 1930s, have largely become the system's instruments for mobilizing and disciplining labor. Today their activities are streaked by chauvinistic asides against Japanese and Mexican workers and by using ethnic stereotypes in some advertising that hardly do the trade union movement credit. "Democratic" trade unions may resist such blatant appeals to chauvinism (we hope!), but we see little prospect that they will uphold a genuinely revolutionary practice any better than their forebears did or seek something beyond their share of the wealth.

Let it be understood that none of these remarks are intended to diminish the efforts of workers or other exploited groups to organize in order to improve their lot. It is the Left Greens' responsibility, however, as we shall point out below, to consistently and unfailingly anchor their practical demands in the need for basic social change, if they are to get at the sources of the problems we face. The passages in the proposed program dealing with workers and trade unions, wages and job equality, do not link the problems of workers and their organizations to the need for fundamental social change. They offer no hint of the history of the trade unions' portrayals of the working class as a whole, or of the need to go beyond economic analyses and capitalist institutions and emphasize the "political realm," as social ecology understands that term.

Today, Left Greens have good reason to feel chary of programmatic encomiums to trade unions that lack the radical attributes of movements like the English Chartists (particularly its Owenite wing), the French CGT, the Spanish CNT, and the American IWW. The latter two were explicitly committed to an unrelenting "class war" against the capitalist system, as anyone who reads the preamble of the IWW will instantly recognize. Yet as militant and revolutionary as that preamble was in its day, we have long passed the time when the workers' movement and its institutions can be regarded as "hegemonic," much less revolutionary. The industrial proletariat is not only diminishing numerically as automated machinery replaces the routine functions of the factory, but enough of a labor aristocracy has been created (called "technicians" or "associates") who no longer have anything resembling the class consciousness that marked the proletariat from the late nineteenth century to the 1940s. Even those workers who have a modicum of class consciousness, are marginal to the economy as a whole, have lost the attributes of a "proletarian culture" that reinforced the class struggles of yesteryear, and are not susceptible in any meaningful way to radical, much less revolutionary, ideas. Regrettable as this may be, we must face the brutal fact that the proletariat (allowing for all the myths that may have existed about its revolutionary destiny) is today so formless that even striking workers, as one of the authors has observed, call themselves "us middle-class workers."

We would remind Left Greens that even Marx and Engels were very hesitant to place much hope in labor unions in their day. They usually emphasized the need to form "a revolutionary workers' party." An outstanding anarchist like Errico Malatesta was initially a strong opponent of syndicalism because of its limited proletarian orientation and its economistic bias. Malatesta instead called for a broader and more moral type of movement - regrettably only to be swept up later in the syndicalist tide that deluged many anarchist groups during the early part of this century. Ironically, Lenin too fought a bitter battle against economic reformers in the Russian Social Democratic party, whom he designated "economists." It was primarily with the growth of Stalin's Popular Front policies during the 1930s, which avowedly suspended the class struggle and formed amalgams with middle-class and even bourgeois parties, that statements of unqualified support for even "democratic" trade unions of the kind that appears in the proposed program, became widespread among "leftists." (We may note that even the most "democratic" of the trade unions in the 1930s, like the United Automobile Workers, had a hierarchical structure, which Walter Reuther utilized to the hilt until trade union "democracy" was virtually eliminated from this fascinating labor union, as one of the authors of this critique can attest.)

We hope we are not mistaken, but we really have been thinking all along that it is basic to Left Green politics not to confine its program overwhelmingly to the goal of 'giving everyone a piece of the capitalist pie, whether it be democratic unions or nondemocratic unions, women or men, black or white. After all, if the bourgeoisie wanted to, it could give way to part or all of the proposed program's "demands" and thereby make everybody think they had won something - ironically, it could even remove poisons from factories, albeit with the greatest difficulty - and capitalism would continue, even more successfully, with even more "stability" than before. Why should the proposed program stop with merely endorsing comparable worth and democratic unions? Why does it not demand that corporations provide childcare and even eldercare, as many companies already are? Why not demand that companies manage the wildlife on their acreage, as Du Pont has already found it expedient to do, in the name of ecological consciousness? Why not demand the full range of "benefits" that corporations could provide - and thereby interlock workers' lives even further with the future of their beloved corporations?

## Left Greens as Social Engineers?

Many sections of this surprisingly nonconfrontational program, far from challenging the marketplace, do indeed seek to stabilize it and the economy as a whole. In fact, taken together, the economic and other sections of this program constitute a good way to plan capitalism, to create what amounts to "capitalism with a human face." The proposed program seems to feel that it must provide a solution for every problem that capitalism has created, for every social idiocy that exists today - and to a considerable extent these solutions are provided within the orbit of capitalism itself. Even the reform of public education gets a plank such as one could find in any Democratic party, Rainbow Coalition, or NDP platform, all of which are eager to manage the present social order "for the benefit of the people" and essentially make an irrational society seem rational. (Issues like racism and the AIDS pandemic, however, are strangely absent.)

Nor is it far-fetched to characterize the proposed program this way. Indeed, by the program's own admission, it is a Left Green goal to feed other parties ideas. Under "independent politics," we read that Left Greens "will force the establishment parties to adopt some of our reforms." Reforms is a well-chosen word here, for many of the demands in the proposed program seem tailored precisely for "adoption" by "establishment parties" or self-styled "progressive" organizations. But all in all, this is truly an amazing and, we regret to say, rather revealing statement. Who is the proposed program trying to please, after all, with these liberal demands? The Green Committees of Correspondence? Wavering social democrats? The youth section of DSA? It is hard to recall a genuinely revolutionary movement that stated its own willingness for its planks to be amicably coopted by mainstream parties. Please, dear friends, let us seriously question why such formulations appear in the proposed program - and why they should be removed.

There are, to be sure, social problems around which Left Greens should make demands that could well be ameliorated within capitalism although not, we think, resolved by it. These problems are those that threaten the basis for life itself, which are by their very nature the worst disasters - the massive destruction of nonhuman nature to the point where forests are virtually disappearing; the ravages of diseases and epidemics like AIDS; genocide, whether in the form of catastrophic famine or outright mass murder that threatens to biologically exterminate an entire people all these directly threaten not only the existence of complex life-forms but vast sections of humanity itself. A Left Green program should oppose anything that threatens this prepolitical fabric of human and nonhuman life. It should demand immediate solutions to the problems raised by the AIDS pandemic that threatens to wipe out the populations of entire Third World countries, for example, and by the destruction of tropical rainforests, which may disastrously alter climatic patterns and completely efface aboriginal cultures that have been in existence from prehistory. It should voice Left Greens' unqualified opposition to genocide, most recently the danger of biological and cultural extinction that faced the Kurdish people in northern Iraq. Furthermore, Left Greens should adamantly oppose anything that threatens the rights that have been hard won over centuries of human history, such as civil rights and human rights. They should seek to preserve and expand these rights (including reproductive freedom for women) in any way they can, for it is essential to the Left Green project to expand existing human rights, even within the capitalist system. It is not accidental that as social ecologists, we have raised the slogan: "Democratize the Republic, and Radicalize the Democracy!" - a slogan that is underpinned by a considerable analysis of North American history.

Like all Left Greens, we are sympathetic to the miserable conditions under which the homeless exist. Like all Left Greens, we are horrified by the devastation that drugs like crack have wrought in black communities (not even mentioned in the proposed program). Like all Left Greens, we want the conditions of people's lives to improve. But Left Greens should raise these problems in a descriptive manner, as symptoms of the system's irrationality, to orient the thinking of people toward basic social change. There are other movements that are more than willing to engage in reformist enterprises - liberals, socialists, "progressives," Jesse Jackson supporters, Audrey McLaughlin supporters, et cetera ad nauseam. The most fundamental problems of the present society can be solved only by a transformation of the social order. It is the existence of intractable problems that cannot be solved within the capitalist system that makes it necessary for us to be revolutionaries rather than social engineers. A leftist movement that seeks to distribute a piece of the existing pie for everyone, within the existing social order, faces the problem of its own embourgeoisement and renders it and its planks vulnerable to absorption or negotiation by reformist movements. One has only to look at the German Greens to see how easily this was done - owing in great measure to their attempt to form coalitions with bourgeois parties and gain electoral support in periods of social reaction.

Fundamental to the problems with the proposed program is that it confuses the reactionary policies of the Reagan and Bush administrations with capitalism as such. Today in the United States we are immersed in the Reagan-Bush era, in Canada in the Mulroney era, in Mexico in the Salinas era. Left Greens should recognize that capitalism permits wide swings within itself, however, and that it allows itself a wide latitude in engineering the system. From time to time the bourgeoisie has also been known to be "enlightened" - in its own interest, to be sure - and to try to give capitalism a "human face," as it did under FDR and Lyndon Johnson (despite the Vietnam war) In its more "enlightened" phases, capitalist leaders are willing to pay higher wages, provide better working conditions, give longer vacations, and recognize professional status, if they help to stabilize the system. In Germany, unions have long participated in management, with union representatives sitting on supervisory boards and boards of directors - arrangements that German managers find useful for controlling the workforce.

Capitalism above all seeks stability and the opportunity to make profits . The prospect of ending ethnic and gender discrimination does not pose a threat to the stability of the system. Indeed, the prospect of social instability troubles the capitalist system much more than prospect of workplace equality for ethnic minorities and women. To be sure, many corporations and a sizable proportion of the population are biased against ethnic minorities and women. But these corporate and "popular" groups represent a cultural lag that capitalism has been slowly diminishing for generations, despite patently atavistic and reactionary periods. The large corporations of the Business Roundtable, for example - certainly Robert Allen of AT&T - recently clashed with the Bush administration over issues of minority hiring. Allen wanted to come to an agreement with minority leaders over hiring that would have been more beneficial to minorities than the Bush administration was prepared to allow, owing to its desire to make itself appetizing to racist elements in the U.S. population for electoral reasons. The welfare states of the world, either in part or in whole, have been willing to grant many of the demands that the proposed program seems to regard as "radical." We are not concerned here with the details of Allen's proposal, ILS adequacy, or the kind of resistance it met from the Bush administration. Such details would be utterly spurious and would mistake the trees for the forest. What we are concerned with is the

overall thrust that a development follows in the long run, and what the system really needs in order to meet its basic goals of profit and stability.

Thus, although many of the reforms on the proposed program may seem radical in the North America of today, a large number of them could easily fit into a future New Deal or Great Society-type program. Under FDR, for example, trade unions won great latitude. That right-wing administrations are in power now on this continent does not mean that leftists should temper their revolutionary demands with reforms and drift in a liberal direction. The fact that the Reagan and Bush administrations, in a very specific political and economic period, have had their own reasons for trying to weaken the influence of trade unions on the economy does not make the proposed program's unqualified support for "democratic" trade unions a radical, much less a revolutionary demand. In ten years the United States may have a Lyndon Johnson-type who would give it all back. The point is that this demand, like so many in the proposed program, is quite negotiable and easily lends itself to cooptation - yes, by existing political parties. The proposed program, in effect, duels with the Reagan and Bush administrations rather than with the capitalist system itself.

We believe that Left Greens should not shape their program in reaction to the specific behavior of those in power at a given time. Nor should their demands be subject to the swings between "enlightenment" and "reaction" within capitalism. Reforms based on an intelligent bourgeois vision of how a class and hierarchical society can be rendered palatable are the job of social democracy and liberalism. What should be a major matter of concern to Left Greens is the system's extraordinary capacity to coopt entire movements that have radical pretensions, as well as specific reform planks. Left Greens should always direct their major focus toward the systemic problems of capitalism: its inexorable need to grow, to simplify the ecology of the planet, to turn back the clock of natural evolution to a point where it will be impossible for complex life-forms to exist. Left Greens should emphasize that capitalism commodifies every aspect of human social relations to a point where people are reduced to mere objects, to buyers and sellers, to consumers of trashy goods that in the course of commodifying not only the economy but society, it subverts all natural and human relations, such as mutual aid, complementarily solidarity, and any balanced relationship between town and country. In short, that it reduces society to a huge shopping mall, in which dazed people move through the corridors of retail outlets beleaguered by Muzak and are ultimately wrapped up with the very commodities they produce and buy. Capitalism projects this as the destiny of humanity as a whole, be it in the first world or the third world. Already third world countries are witnessing the rise of an expanding middle class, of the western work ethic, and of the promise, however unsatisfied as yet, of the "good" life as General Motors and other large corporations conceive it.

The reversal of the natural evolutionary process and the commodification of society are too fundamental for Left Greens to ignore. The centrality of these systemic problems should not be cluttered over with bookkeeping to maintain the "stability" of the social order. It is by means of a forceful analysis of the sources of the systemic problems in economic and political life that Left Greens assume the ethical high ground from which to project the image of a moral and ecological society. In short, Left Greens should be engaged not in social engineering, but in changing consciousness for a social revolution.

## Reform or Revolution?

The problem of relating reformist demands to revolutionary ones has long perplexed the Left historically. In the previously mentioned preamble of the IWW, for example, the expressions of the IWW's intentions are unequivocal: from the very outset, it declares that an irreconcilable war exists between capital and labor. The Wobblies engaged in historic strikes, fought for union recognition, and tried to improve the living conditions of the working class. But even in the minimal reforms to which they acceded, they always emphasized their syndicalist approach and refused to give any ground to the prevailing social order.

In retrospect, we now know they didn't go far enough. Today, as we have seen, there is reason to regard the centrality of the wage labor-versus-capital conflict as limited to a specific historical period. But the orientation of the IWW preamble is not only relevant to our time, it should be crucial to those writing the program of revolutionary movements today. Little if anything in their actions - and there were many different tendencies in the IWW - indicates that they were gentle caretakers who wanted the working class to enjoy the satisfactions of having their reformist demands be met. Their revolutionary framework provided the all-pervasive context of their practical demands. For the Wobblies, fighting for "reforms" was simply a way to enhance the initiative of the working class, to mobilize it, to develop extremely libertarian institutions in its midst that would countervail the hierarchical factory system, and to expand strike movements to a point where they would achieve, they hoped, a revolutionary general strike. No thinking person during the early part of this century could have doubted that the IWW was a revolutionary movement or that it was engaged in an irreconcilable struggle with the capitalist system.

What the IWW could not have anticipated was the enormous cooptive power of capitalism to absorb their demands for the acceptance of industrial unions and a considerable measure of "workers' control." In the time in which they flourished, the capitalist system seemed to them to be utterly intractable, indeed murderously brutal, in preventing workers from creating trade unions on an industry wide scale. Today, we know differently, and the nature of the relationship of reform to revolution has therefore changed. We know that the cooptive powers of capital are absolutely enormous, bearing in mind that capitalism primarily seeks stability, growth, and profiteering. We know that the real historical limits of capitalism are not ones that are "immanent" within the system, as Marxists and many anarchists thought, but external ones, the natural world itself and the threat that the simplification of nonhuman nature poses to humanity and most complex life-forms. The unique function of a revolutionary ecology movement today must be to focus upon the insuperable natural obstacles to capitalist growth and in great measure accumulation and profiteering. More than ever today, in view of capitalism's cooptive powers, leftist criticism of the system must be as fundamental as possible, and the Left Green program should be structured in such a way as to guide its readers and potential supporters toward those systemic problems.

And it must be a political program! Politics plays a far greater role in the ecological and economic facts of life than could have been anticipated in earlier periods, given the increasingly pervasive role of the state in social life today. We live in an era of increasing state capitalism, despite attempts in Eastern countries to create a market economy. In the West, where capitalism has followed a "normal" or classical development, the market, public life, and even private life are increasingly controlled by the state, indeed in great measure enveloped by it, including its enormous powers of surveillance. In the interplay between the commodification of life and the

state's control of even intimate aspects of life by bureaucracies, the overall effect is to totally disempower the individual, who as a commodity and an object of state manipulation and surveillance seems to exercise no control over his or her life. The need to lift bureaucratic controls and state supremacy from public life has given a priority to politics that exceeds anything we have seen in the recent past. The proposed program's economistic bias should be significantly shifted toward an ethical, ecological, democratic, and political orientation. In dealing with the economy, it should make the immediate, minimal demand that the factory system and the capitalist marketplace be increasingly taken over by the municipality and popular citizen assemblies, with alternative technologies, new forms of confederal municipal management of the economy, a people's bank to finance municipally controlled enterprise, and sharp limits to growth. The image of a moral economy should be spelled out in visionary political as well as ethical terms that describe a rational and ecological future based on empowered citizens, rather than in terms of the market economy, to whose abuses this program offers only surprisingly modest correctives. We believe that the Left Greens' minimum program should center on issues like control of growth, creating a decentralized, confederal participatory democracy (which the nation-state and its bureaucracy certainly do not want), and ecological issues that can be dealt with on a local level. The proposed program is surprisingly lacking in even a basic ecological outlook, let alone a prominent one. Left Green groups will surely want to provide guidance to their communities in struggles for the preservation of wetlands, forests, lakes, good agricultural land, and particularly the activation of citizens in municipal and regional public life. With all the fervor they have, Left Greens should cite the many patent injustices - even ones that are unjust by bourgeois standards - as examples of capitalism's abuses. They should view all such struggles as descriptive jumping-off points for elucidating the radical views of the Left Greens and the need for basic changes in the social order - changes that are incompatible with the existence of capitalism and that stand in flat contradiction to the present social order. Even their seemingly "reformist" demands should generate the greatest degree of radicalization possible and present utopistic alternatives to the irrationality of the economy and the overwhelming tendency of capitalism to despoil the natural world and commodify human beings. In this way, the Left Green position - based overwhelmingly on ecological preservation, on opposition to growth, and on the expansion of democratic rights can give a revolutionary thrust to what initially may seem like "reforms."

But Left Greens cannot in all honesty and morality profess to offer remedies for those abuses without fundamental social change. They should eschew programmatic remedies within the capitalist system and avoid carefully formulated, pragmatic, almost fiscally sound, fiduciary solutions. They should not bend basic Left Green notions out of shape and recognition so that they will seem "practical" in the modern political arena. Neither Left Greens nor any other leftists can hope to provide rational answers, we must emphasize again and again, to the problems created by an irrational society without becoming liberal social engineers, making social irrationality more palatable, and its persistence even more assured. The Left Greens should be uncompromising in their spirit of opposition and bitterly critical of attempts by the establishment, particularly conventional parties, to dilute their demands to a point where they become in fact barebone reforms. We know of no other way to countervail the cooptive powers of capitalism but to oppose to it the most demanding ecological positions in our movement.

We would like to remind readers of the sorry history of what happens when a reformist program is presented in the name of revolution. Norman Thomas, the putative heir to Eugene V. Debs and the Socialist party's perennial candidate for U.S. president in the 1930s, moaned shortly

before his death at a public meeting in the 1960s that the reason why the Socialist party in the United States had dwindled from a mass organization into virtual nonexistence was that its proposals had been taken over by the New Deal. Few remarks sum up more pathetically the failure of what had been an avowedly revolutionary movement earlier in this century. In the years that lie ahead, the Left Greens may eventually become a mass Green movement, but if they do so by abdicating their basic ideals, they will be no better than the German Greens, or for that matter the German Social Democratic party, who are now virtually indistinguishable from each other.

*-May 24, 1991*



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Murray Bookchin, Janet Biehl  
A Critique of the Draft Program of the Left Green Network  
May 24 1991

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