



December 2018

Why Ecosocialism: For a Red-Green Future

Michael Löwy



The capitalist system, driven at its core by the maximization of profit, regardless of social and ecological costs, is incompatible with a just and sustainable future. Ecosocialism offers a radical alternative that puts social and ecological well-being first. Attuned to the links between the exploitation of labor and the exploitation of the environment, ecosocialism stands against both reformist “market ecology” and “productivist socialism.” By embracing a new model of robustly democratic planning, society can take control of the means of production and its own destiny. Shorter work hours and a focus on authentic needs over consumerism can facilitate the elevation of “being” over “having,” and the achievement of a deeper sense of freedom for all. To realize this vision, however, environmentalists and socialists will need to recognize their common struggle and how that connects with the broader “movement of movements” seeking a Great Transition.

Ecosocialism puts forth a critique of both “market ecology” and “productivist socialism.”

Introduction

Contemporary capitalist civilization is in crisis. The unlimited accumulation of capital, commodification of everything, ruthless exploitation of labor and nature, and attendant brutal competition undermine the bases of a sustainable future, thereby putting the very survival of the human species at risk. The deep, systemic threat we face demands a deep, systemic change: a Great Transition.

In synthesizing the basic tenets of ecology and the Marxist critique of political economy, *ecosocialism* offers a radical alternative to an unsustainable status quo. Rejecting a capitalist definition of “progress” based on market growth and quantitative expansion (which, as Marx shows, is a *destructive* progress), it advocates policies founded on non-monetary criteria, such as social needs, individual well-being, and ecological equilibrium. Ecosocialism puts forth a critique of both mainstream “market ecology,” which does not challenge the capitalist system, and “productivist socialism,” which ignores natural limits.

As people increasingly realize how the economic and ecological crises intertwine, ecosocialism has been gaining adherents. Ecosocialism, as a movement, is relatively new, but some of its basic arguments date back to the writings of Marx and Engels. Now, intellectuals and activists are recovering this legacy and seeking a radical restructuring of the economy according to the principles of democratic ecological planning, putting human and planetary needs first and foremost.

The “actually existing socialisms” of the twentieth century, with their often environmentally oblivious bureaucracies, do not offer an attractive model for today’s ecosocialists. Rather, we must chart a new path forward, one that links with the myriad movements around the globe that share the conviction that a better world is not only possible, but also necessary.

Democratic Ecological Planning

The core of ecosocialism is the concept of democratic ecological planning, wherein the population itself, not “the market” or a Politburo, make the main decisions about the economy. Early in the Great Transition to this new way of life, with its new mode of production and consumption, some sectors of the economy must be suppressed (e.g., the extraction of fossil fuels implicated in the climate crisis) or restructured, while new sectors are developed. Economic transformation must be accompanied by active pursuit of full employment with equal conditions of work and wages. This egalitarian vision is essential both for building a just society and for engaging the support of the working class for the structural transformation of the productive forces.

Ultimately, such a vision is irreconcilable with private control of the means of production and of the planning process. In particular, for investments and technological innovation to serve the common good, decision-making must be taken away from the banks and capitalist enterprises that currently dominate, and put in the

Democratic ecological
planning ultimately
supports more freedom,
not less.

public domain. Then, society itself, and neither a small oligarchy of property owners nor an elite of techno-bureaucrats, will democratically decide which productive lines are to be privileged, and how resources are to be invested in education, health, and culture. Major decisions on investment priorities—such as terminating all coal-fired facilities or directing agricultural subsidies to organic production—would be taken by direct popular vote. Other, less important decisions would be taken by elected bodies, on the relevant national, regional, or local scale.

Although conservatives fearmonger about “central planning,” democratic ecological planning ultimately supports more freedom, not less, for several reasons. First, it offers liberation from the reified “economic laws” of the capitalist system that shackle individuals in what Max Weber called an “iron cage.” Prices of goods would not be left to the “laws of supply and demand,” but would, instead, reflect social and political priorities, with the use of taxes and subsidies to incentivize social goods and disincentivize social ills. Ideally, as the ecosocialist transition moves forward, more products and services critical for meeting fundamental human needs would be freely distributed, according to the will of the citizens.

Second, ecosocialism heralds a substantial increase in free time. Planning and the reduction of labor time are the two decisive steps towards what Marx called “the kingdom of freedom.” A significant increase of free time is, in fact, a condition for the participation of working people in the democratic discussion and management of economy and of society.

Last, democratic ecological planning represents a whole society’s exercise of its freedom to control the decisions that affect its destiny. If the democratic ideal would not grant political decision-making power to a small elite, why should the same principle not apply to economic decisions? Under capitalism, use-value—the worth of a product or service to well-being—exists only in the service of exchange-value, or value on the market. Thus, many products in contemporary society are socially useless, or designed for rapid turnover (“planned obsolescence”). By contrast, in a planned ecosocialist economy, use-value would be the only criteria for the production of goods and services, with far-reaching economic, social, and ecological consequences.¹

Planning would focus on large-scale economic decisions, not the small-scale ones that might affect local restaurants, groceries, small shops, or artisan enterprises. Importantly, such planning is consistent with workers’ self-management of their productive units. The decision, for example, to transform a plant from producing automobiles to producing buses and trams would be taken by society as a whole, but the internal organization and functioning of the enterprise would be democratically managed by its workers. There has been much discussion about the “centralized” or “decentralized” character of planning, but most important is democratic control at all levels—local, regional, national, continental, or international. For example, planetary ecological issues such as global warming must be dealt with on a global scale, and

Ecosocialism rejects the dualism of growth vs. degrowth.

thereby require some form of global democratic planning. This nested, democratic decision-making is quite the opposite of what is usually described, often dismissively, as “central planning,” since decisions are not taken by any “center,” but democratically decided by the affected population at the appropriate scale.

Democratic and pluralist debate would occur at all levels. Through parties, platforms, or other political movements, varied propositions would be submitted to the people, and delegates would be elected accordingly. However, representative democracy must be complemented—and corrected—by Internet-enabled direct democracy, through which people choose—at the local, national, and, later, global level—among major social and ecological options. Should public transportation be free? Should the owners of private cars pay special taxes to subsidize public transportation? Should solar energy be subsidized in order to compete with fossil energy? Should the work week be reduced to 30 hours, 25, hours or less, with the attendant reduction of production?

Such democratic planning needs expert input, but its role is educational, to present informed views on alternative outcomes for consideration by popular decision-making processes. What guarantee is there that the people will make ecologically sound decisions? None. Ecosocialism wagers that democratic decisions will become increasingly reasoned and enlightened as culture changes and the grip of commodity fetishism is broken. One cannot imagine such a new society without the achievement, through struggle, self-education, and social experience, of a high level of socialist and ecological consciousness. In any case, are not the alternatives—the blind market or an ecological dictatorship of “experts”—much more dangerous?

The Great Transition from capitalist destructive progress to ecosocialism is a historical process, a permanent revolutionary transformation of society, culture, and mindsets. Enacting this transition leads not only to a new mode of production and an egalitarian and democratic society, but also to an alternative *mode of life*, a new ecosocialist *civilization*, beyond the reign of money, beyond consumption habits artificially produced by advertising, and beyond the unlimited production of commodities that are useless and/or harmful to the environment. Such a transformative process depends on the active support of the vast majority of the population for an ecosocialist program. The decisive factor in development of socialist consciousness and ecological awareness is the collective experience of struggle, from local and partial confrontations to the radical change of global society as a whole.

The Growth Question

The issue of economic growth has divided socialists and environmentalists. Ecosocialism, however, rejects the dualistic frame of growth versus degrowth, development versus anti-development, because both positions share a purely *quantitative* conception of productive forces. A third position resonates more with the task ahead: the *qualitative transformation* of development.

A new society would orient production towards the satisfaction of authentic needs.

A new development paradigm means putting an end to the egregious waste of resources under capitalism, driven by large-scale production of useless and harmful products. The arms industry is, of course, a dramatic example, but, more generally, the primary purpose of many of the “goods” produced—with their planned obsolescence—is to generate profit for large corporations. The issue is not excessive consumption in the abstract, but the prevalent *type* of consumption, based as it is on massive waste and the conspicuous and compulsive pursuit of novelties promoted by “fashion.” A new society would orient production towards the satisfaction of authentic needs, including water, food, clothing, housing, and such basic services as health, education, transport, and culture.

Obviously, the countries of the Global South, where these needs are very far from being satisfied, must pursue greater classical “development”—railroads, hospitals, sewage systems, and other infrastructure. Still, rather than emulate how affluent countries built their productive systems, these countries can pursue development in far more environmentally friendly ways, including the rapid introduction of renewable energy. While many poorer countries will need to expand agricultural production to nourish hungry, growing populations, the ecosocialist solution is to promote agroecology methods rooted in family units, cooperatives, or larger-scale collective farms—not the destructive industrialized agribusiness methods involving intensive inputs of pesticides, chemicals, and GMOs.²

At the same time, the ecosocialist transformation would end the heinous debt system the Global South now confronts as well as the exploitation of its resources by advanced industrial countries and rapidly developing countries like China. Instead, we can envision a strong flow of technical and economic assistance from North to South rooted in a robust sense of solidarity and the recognition that planetary problems require planetary solutions. This need not entail that people in affluent countries “reduce their standard of living”—only that they shun the obsessive consumption, induced by the capitalist system, of useless commodities that do not meet real needs or contribute to human well-being and flourishing.

But how do we distinguish authentic from artificial and counterproductive needs? To a considerable degree, the latter are stimulated by the mental manipulation of advertising. In contemporary capitalist societies, the advertising industry has invaded all spheres of life, shaping everything from the food we eat and the clothes we wear to sports, culture, religion, and politics. Promotional advertising has become ubiquitous, insidiously infesting our streets, landscapes, and traditional and digital media, molding habits of conspicuous and compulsive consumption. Moreover, the ad industry itself is a source of considerable waste of natural resources and labor time, ultimately paid by the consumer, for a branch of “production” that lies in direct contradiction with real social-ecological needs. While indispensable to the capitalist market economy, the advertising industry would have no place in a society in transition to ecosocialism; it would be replaced by consumer associations that vet

In a society without sharp class divisions, “being” will take precedence over “having.”

and disseminate information on goods and services. While these changes are already happening to some extent, old habits would likely persist for some years, and nobody has the right to dictate peoples’ desires. Altering patterns of consumption is an ongoing educational challenge within a historical process of cultural change.

A fundamental premise of ecosocialism is that in a society without sharp class divisions and capitalist alienation, “being” will take precedence over “having.” Instead of seeking endless goods, people pursue greater free time, and the personal achievements and meaning it can bring through cultural, athletic, recreational, scientific, erotic, artistic, and political activities. There is no evidence that compulsive acquisitiveness stems from intrinsic “human nature,” as conservative rhetoric suggests. Rather, it is induced by the commodity fetishism inherent in the capitalist system, by the dominant ideology, and by advertising. Ernest Mandel summarizes this critical point well: “The continual accumulation of more and more goods [...] is by no means a universal and even predominant feature of human behavior. The development of talents and inclinations for their own sake; the protection of health and life; care for children; the development of rich social relations [...] become major motivations once basic material needs have been satisfied.”³

Of course, even a classless society faces conflict and contradiction. The transition to ecosocialism would confront tensions between the requirements of protecting the environment and meeting social needs, between ecological imperatives and the development of basic infrastructure, between popular consumer habits and the scarcity of resources, between communitarian and cosmopolitan impulses. Struggles among competing desiderata are inevitable. Hence, weighing and balancing such interests must become the task of a democratic planning process, liberated from the imperatives of capital and profit-making, to come up with solutions through transparent, plural, and open public discourse. Such participatory democracy at all levels does not mean that there will not be mistakes, but it allows for the self-correction by the members of the social collectivity of its own mistakes.

Intellectual Roots

Although ecosocialism is a fairly recent phenomenon, its intellectual roots can be traced back to Marx and Engels. Because environmental issues were not as salient in the nineteenth century as in our era of incipient ecological catastrophe, these concerns did not play a central role in Marx and Engels’s works. Nevertheless, their writings use arguments and concepts vital to the connection between capitalist dynamics and the destruction of the natural environment, and to the development of a socialist and ecological alternative to the prevailing system.

Some passages in Marx and Engels (and certainly in the dominant Marxist currents that followed) do embrace an uncritical stance toward the productive forces created by capital, treating the “development of productive forces” as the main factor

While most contemporary ecosocialists are inspired by Marx's insights, ecology has become far more central.

in human progress. However, Marx was radically opposed to what we now call “productivism”—the capitalist logic by which the accumulation of capital, wealth, and commodities becomes an end in itself. The fundamental idea of a socialist economy—in contrast to the bureaucratic caricatures that prevailed in the “socialist” experiments of the twentieth century—is to produce *use-values*, goods that are necessary for the satisfaction of human needs, well-being, and fulfillment. The central feature of technical progress for Marx was not the indefinite growth of products (“having”) but the *reduction of socially necessary labor* and concomitant increase of free time (“being”).⁴ Marx’s emphasis on communist self-development, on free time for artistic, erotic, or intellectual activities—in contrast to the capitalist obsession with the consumption of more and more material goods—implies a decisive reduction of pressure on the natural environment.⁵

Beyond the presumed benefit for the environment, a key Marxian contribution to socialist ecological thinking is attributing to capitalism a metabolic rift—i.e., a disruption of the material exchange between human societies and the natural environment. The issue is discussed, *inter alia*, in a well-known passage of *Capital*:

*Capitalist production [...] disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth, i.e., prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; hence it hinders the operation of the eternal natural conditions for the lasting fertility of the soil. [...] All progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil [...]. The more a country [...] develops itself on the basis of great industry, the more this process of destruction takes place quickly. Capitalist production [...] only develops [...] by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker.*⁶

This important passage clarifies Marx’s *dialectical* vision of the contradictions of “progress” and its destructive consequences for nature under capitalist conditions. The example, of course, is limited to the loss of fertility by the soil. But on this basis, Marx draws the broad insight that capitalist production embodies a tendency to undermine the “eternal natural conditions.” From a similar vantage, Marx reiterates his more familiar argument that the same predatory logic of capitalism exploits and debases workers.

While most contemporary ecosocialists are inspired by Marx’s insights, ecology has become far more central to their analysis and action. During the 1970s and 1980s in Europe and the US, an ecological socialism began to take shape. Manuel Sacristan, a Spanish dissident-Communist philosopher, founded the ecosocialist and feminist journal *Mientras Tanto* in 1979, introducing the dialectical concept of “destructive-productive forces.” Raymond Williams, a British socialist and founder of

The capitalist system is a primary culprit in the ecological crisis.

modern cultural studies, became one of the first in Europe to call for an “ecologically conscious socialism” and is often credited with coining the term “ecosocialism” itself. André Gorz, a French philosopher and journalist, argued that political ecology must contain a critique of economic thought and called for an ecological and humanist transformation of work. Barry Commoner, an American biologist, argued that the capitalist system and its technology—and not population growth—was responsible for the destruction of the environment, which led him to the conclusion that “some sort of socialism” was the realistic alternative.⁷

In the 1980s, James O’Connor founded the influential journal *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism*, which was inspired by his idea of the “second contradiction of capitalism.” In this formulation, the first contradiction is the Marxist one between the forces and relations of production; the second contradiction lies between the mode of production and the “conditions of production,” especially, the state of the environment.

A new generation of eco-Marxists appeared in the 2000s, including John Bellamy Foster and others around the journal *Monthly Review*, who further developed the Marxian concept of *metabolic rift* between human societies and the environment. In 2001, Joel Kovel and the present author issued “An Ecosocialist Manifesto,” which was further developed by the same authors, together with Ian Angus, in the 2008 Belem Ecosocialist Manifesto, which was signed by hundreds of people from forty countries and distributed at the World Social Forum in 2009. It has since become an important reference for ecosocialists around the world.⁸

Why Environmentalists Need to Be Socialists

As these and other authors have shown, capitalism is incompatible with a sustainable future. The capitalist system, an economic growth machine propelled by fossil fuels since the Industrial Revolution, is a primary culprit in climate change and the wider ecological crisis on Earth. Its irrational logic of endless expansion and accumulation, waste of resources, ostentatious consumption, planned obsolescence, and pursuit of profit at any cost is driving the planet to the brink of the abyss.

Does “green capitalism”—the strategy of reducing environmental impact while maintaining dominant economic institutions—offer a solution? The implausibility of such a Policy Reform scenario is seen most vividly in the failure of a quarter-century of international conferences to effectively address climate change. The political forces committed to the capitalist “market economy” that have created the problem cannot be the source of the solution.

For example, at the 2015 Paris climate conference, many countries resolved to make serious efforts to keep average global temperature increases below 2° C (ideally, they

The environmental challenge becomes inextricably linked to the socialist challenge.

agreed, below 1.5° C). Correspondingly, they volunteered to implement measures to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. However, they put no enforcement mechanisms in place nor any consequences for noncompliance, hence no guarantee that any country will keep its word. The US, the world's second-highest emitter of carbon emissions, is now run by a climate denier who pulled the US out of the agreement. Even if all countries did meet their commitments, the global temperature would rise by 3° C or more, with great risk of dire, irreversible climate change.¹⁰

Ultimately, the fatal flaw of green capitalism lies in the conflict between the micro-rationality of the capitalist market, with its short-sighted calculation of profit and loss, and the macro-rationality of collective action for the common good. The blind logic of the market resists a rapid energy transformation away from fossil fuel dependence in intrinsic contradiction of ecological rationality. The point is not to indict “bad” ecocidal capitalists, as opposed to “good” green capitalists; the fault lies in a system rooted in ruthless competition and a race for short-term profit that destroys nature's balance. The environmental challenge—to build an alternative system that reflects the common good in its institutional DNA—becomes inextricably linked to the socialist challenge.

That challenge requires building what E. P. Thompson termed a “moral economy” founded on non-monetary and extra-economic, social-ecological principles and governed through democratic decision-making processes.¹¹ Far more than incremental reform, what is needed is the emergence of a social and ecological civilization that brings forth a new energy structure and post-consumerist set of values and way of life. Realizing this vision will not be possible without public planning and control over the “means of production,” the physical inputs used to produce economic value, such as facilities, machinery, and infrastructure.

An ecological politics that works within prevailing institutions and rules of the “market economy” will fall short of meeting the profound environmental challenges before us. Environmentalists who do not recognize how “productivism” flows from the logic of profit are destined to fail—or, worse, to become absorbed by the system. Examples abound. The lack of a coherent anti-capitalist posture led most of the European Green parties—notably, in France, Germany, Italy, and Belgium—to become mere “eco-reformist” partners in the social-liberal management of capitalism by center-left governments.

Of course, nature did not fare any better under Soviet-style “socialism” than under capitalism. Indeed, that is one of the reasons ecosocialism carries a very different program and vision from the so-called “actually existing socialism” of the past.

A socialist theory that does not integrate ecology as a central element is anachronistic.

Since the roots of the ecological problem are systemic, environmentalism needs to challenge the prevailing capitalist system, and that means taking seriously the twenty-first-century synthesis of ecology and socialism—ecosocialism.

Why Socialists Need to Be Environmentalists

The survival of civilized society, and perhaps much of life on Planet Earth, is at stake. A socialist theory, or movement, that does not integrate ecology as a central element in its program and strategy is anachronistic and irrelevant.

Climate change represents the most threatening expression of the planetary ecological crisis, posing a challenge without historical precedent. If global temperatures are allowed to exceed pre-industrial levels by more than 2° C, scientists project increasingly dire consequences, such as a rise in the sea level so large that it would risk submerging most maritime towns, from Dacca in Bangladesh to Amsterdam, Venice, or New York. Large-scale desertification, disturbance of the hydrological cycle and agricultural output, more frequent and extreme weather events, and species loss all loom. We're already at 1° C. At what temperature increase—5, 6, or 7° C—will we reach a tipping point beyond which the planet cannot support civilized life or even becomes uninhabitable?

Particularly worrisome is the fact that the impacts of climate change are accumulating at a much faster pace than predicted by climate scientists, who—like almost all scientists—tend to be highly cautious. The ink no sooner dries on an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report when increasing climate impacts make it seem too optimistic. Where once the emphasis was on what will happen in the distant future, attention has turned increasingly to what we face now and in the coming years.

Some socialists acknowledge the need to incorporate ecology, but object to the term “ecosocialism,” arguing that socialism already includes ecology, feminism, antiracism, and other progressive fronts. However, the term ecosocialism, by suggesting a decisive change in socialist ideas, carries important political significance. First, it reflects a new understanding of capitalism as a system based not only on exploitation but also on *destruction*—the massive destruction of the conditions for life on the planet. Second, ecosocialism extends the meaning of socialist transformation beyond a change in ownership to a *civilizational* transformation of the productive apparatus, the patterns of consumption, and the whole way of life. Third, the new term underscores the critical view it embraces of the twentieth-century experiments in the name of socialism.

Twentieth-century socialism, in its dominant tendencies (social democracy and Soviet-style communism), was, at best, inattentive to the human impact on the

The struggle for green socialism in the long term requires fighting for concrete and urgent reforms in the near term.

environment and, at worst, outright dismissive. Governments adopted and adapted the Western capitalist productive apparatus in a headlong effort to “develop,” while remaining largely oblivious of the profound negative costs in the form of environmental degradation.

The Soviet Union is a perfect example. The first years after the October Revolution saw an ecological current develop, and a number of measures to protect the environment were, in fact, enacted. But by the late 1920s, with the process of Stalinist bureaucratization underway, an environmentally heedless productivism was being imposed in industry and agriculture by totalitarian methods, while ecologists were marginalized or eliminated. The 1986 Chernobyl accident stands as a dramatic emblem of the disastrous long-term consequences.

Changing who owns property without changing how that property is managed is a dead-end. Socialism must place democratic management and reorganization of the productive system at the heart of the transformation, along with a firm commitment to ecological stewardship. Not socialism or ecology alone, but ecosocialism.

Ecosocialism and a Great Transition

The struggle for green socialism in the long term requires fighting for concrete and urgent reforms in the near term. Without illusions about the prospects for a “clean capitalism,” the movement for deep change must try to reduce the risks to people and planet, while buying time to build support for a more fundamental shift. In particular, the battle to force the powers that be to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions remains a key front, along with local efforts to shift toward agroecological methods, cooperative solar energy, and community management of resources.

Such concrete, immediate struggles are important in and of themselves because partial victories are vital for combating environmental deterioration and despair about the future. For the longer term, these campaigns can help raise ecological and socialist consciousness and promote activism from below. Both awareness and self-organization are decisive preconditions and foundations for radically transforming the world system. The synthesis of thousands of local and partial efforts into an overarching systemic global movement forges the path to a Great Transition: a new society and mode of life.

This vision infuses the popular idea of a “movement of movements,” which arose out of the global justice movement and the World Social Forums and which for many years has fostered the convergence of social and environmental movements in a common struggle. Ecosocialism is but one current within this larger stream, with no pretense that it is “more important” or “more revolutionary” than others. Such a competitive claim counterproductively breeds polarization when what is needed is unity.

Since global ecological and economic crises know no borders, our struggle must also be globalized.

Rather, ecosocialism aims to contribute to a shared ethos embraced by the various movements for a Great Transition. Ecosocialism sees itself as part of an international movement: since global ecological, economic, and social crises know no borders, the struggle against the systemic forces driving these crises must also be globalized. Many significant intersections are surfacing between ecosocialism and other movements, including efforts to link eco-feminism and ecosocialism as convergent and complementary.¹² The climate justice movement brings antiracism and ecosocialism together in the struggle against the destruction of the living conditions of communities suffering discrimination. In indigenous movements, some leaders are ecosocialists, while, in turn, many ecosocialists see the indigenous way of life, grounded in communitarian solidarity and respect for Mother Nature, as an inspiration for the ecosocialist perspective. Similarly, ecosocialism finds voice within peasant, trade-union, degrowth, and other movements.

The gathering movement of movements seeks system change, convinced that another world is possible beyond commodification, environmental destruction, exploitation, and oppression. The power of entrenched ruling elites is undeniable, and the forces of radical opposition remain weak. But they are growing, and stand as our hope for halting the catastrophic course of capitalist “growth.” Ecosocialism contributes an important perspective for nurturing understanding and strategy for this movement for a Great Transition.

Walter Benjamin defined revolutions not as the locomotive of history, à la Marx, but as humanity’s reaching for the emergency brake before the train falls into the abyss. Never have we needed more to reach as one for that lever and lay new track to a different destination. The idea and practice of ecosocialism can help guide this world-historic project.

Endnotes

1. Joel Kovel, *Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?* (New York, Zed Books, 2002), 215.
2. Via Campesina, a worldwide network of peasant movements, has long argued for this type of agricultural transformation. See <https://viacampesina.org/en/>.
3. Ernest Mandel, *Power and Money: A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy* (London, Verso, 1992), 206.
4. The opposition between “having” and “being” is often discussed in the Manuscripts of 1844. On free time as the foundation of the socialist “Kingdom of Freedom,” see Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Volume III, Marx-Engels-Werke series, vol. 25 (1884; Berlin: Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1981), 828.
5. Paul Burkett, *Ecological Economics: Toward a Red and Green Political Economy* (Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2009), 329.
6. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Volume 1, Marx-Engels-Werke series, vol. 23 (1867; Berlin: Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1981), 528–530.
7. See, for example, Manuel Sacristan, *Pacifismo, Ecología y Política Alternativa* (Barcelona: Icaria, 1987); Raymond Williams, *Socialism and Ecology* (London: Socialist Environment and Resources Association, 1982); André Gorz, *Ecology as Politics* (Boston, South End Press, 1979); Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Man, Nature, and Technology* (New York: Random House, 1971).
8. “An Ecosocialist Manifesto,” 2001, <http://environment-ecology.com/political-ecology/436-an-ecosocialist-manifesto.html>; “Belem Ecosocialist Declaration,” December 16, 2008, <http://climateandcapitalism.com/2008/12/16/belem-ecosocialist-declaration-a-call-for-signatures/>.
9. See <https://www.greattransition.org/explore/scenarios> for an overview of the Policy Reform scenario and other global scenarios.
10. United Nations Environment Programme, *The Emissions Gap Report 2017* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2017). For an overview of the report, see <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/10/569672-un-sees-worrying-gap-between-paris-climate-pledges-and-emissions-cuts-needed>.
11. E. P. Thompson “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present*, no. 50 (February 1971): 76–136
12. See Ariel Salleh’s *Ecofeminism as Politics* (New York: Zed Books, 1997), or the recent issue of *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism* (29, no. 1: 2018) on “Ecofeminism against Capitalism,” with essays by Terisa Turner, Ana Isla, and others.

About the Author



Michael Löwy is a French-Brazilian Marxist sociologist and philosopher. He serves as Emeritus Research Director at the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) in Paris and is the co-author, with Joel Kovel, of *An Ecosocialist Manifesto* (2001). His published works include *On Changing the World: Essays in Political Philosophy from Karl Marx to Walter Benjamin* and *Ecosocialism: A Radical Alternative to the Capitalist Ecological Catastrophe*.

About the Publication

Published by the [Great Transition Initiative](#).

Under our Creative Commons BY-NC-ND copyright, you may freely republish our content, without alteration, for non-commercial purposes as long as you include an explicit attribution to the Great Transition Initiative and a link to the GTI homepage.



Cite as Michael Löwy, "Why Ecosocialism: For a Red-Green Future" *Great Transition Initiative* (October 2018), <https://greattransition.org/publication/why-ecosocialism-red-green-future>.

About the Great Transition Initiative

The [Great Transition Initiative](#) is an international collaboration for charting pathways to a planetary civilization rooted in solidarity, sustainability, and human well-being.

As a forum for collectively understanding and shaping the global future, GTI welcomes diverse ideas. Thus, the opinions expressed in our publications do not necessarily reflect the views of GTI or the Tellus Institute.