

Shades of Green — Part II —

by Richard Evanoff

Last issue we looked at some of the main "schools" of contemporary ecological thinking: light green (NGOs and citizen groups), deep green (deep ecology), black green (social ecology), and "earth green" (ecofeminism). This issue we continue our spectral survey of the various shades of green.

Red Green. The collapse of communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe revealed that socialist countries, as much as capitalist ones, place more value on industrial development and economic growth than on environmental integrity. While most pro-capitalist intellectuals are content to consign Marxism to the ash-heap of history, there are Marxist thinkers who have been arguing all along that *real* communism has never been tried and that the form of communism practiced in the former "socialist" countries was an aberration. The cold war wasn't fought between capitalism and communism, but between two forms of capitalism: private capitalism (i.e., the U.S., Western Europe, Japan) and state capitalism (i.e., the U.S.S.R., Eastern Europe, China). Ecological Marxism suggests that capitalism in both forms is based not only on the exploitation of the working class, but also on the exploitation of nature. In order to overcome the exploitation of nature, it is necessary to also overcome the exploitation of the working class. Environmental problems affect the poor more than the rich, as evidenced by the fact that trash incinerators, toxic waste dumps, and the like are often located in poor neighborhoods where residents have little political clout. Piecemeal environmental reforms within the existing social and economic system are ineffective; the entire system must be changed. Once the profit motive is eliminated from both private capitalism and state capitalism, production will be organized to meet genuine human needs and the relationship between humans and nature will no longer be exploitative.

Dark green. The ideas of modern capitalist "democracies" on what to do about the environment are so depressing that I have labeled them "dark green." In a nutshell, what is causing our current ecological crisis is the overproduction and overconsumption of unnecessary goods and services and the underproduction and underconsumption of basic necessities. While the wealthy in First and Third World countries luxuriate in an oasis of consumer goods, the poor in First

and Third World countries languish in a vast desert devoid of even such basic amenities as food, water, shelter, and clothing. "Greenwashing" is the technique governments and corporations use to make it seem as if they are doing something to "save the environment" when in fact they're simply proceeding with business as usual. The bottom line is profits, not a healthy ecosystem. I recently saw an ad, for example, in a supposedly ecological newspaper for a company that claimed that it was making "environmentally friendly" golf courses. While the ad touted the fact that only "nontoxic" fertilizers are used on the fairways and greens, no mention was made of all the trees that have to be cut to make those fairways and greens. "Technofix" is another key word in the dark green vocabulary. Instead of recognizing that technology is largely responsible for our current environmental mess, the dark greens have a blind faith in the ability of even more technology to solve our problems. Technofix solutions run from the short-sighted to the naively optimistic to the ridiculous. What should we do about cars that emit too much pollution? Install pollution control devices. What should we do when there is no longer any gasoline for cars to run on? Don't worry, technology will create alternative forms of energy by the time that happens. What should we do about the ozone hole? Shoot large amounts of soot into the upper atmosphere to block out the sun's radiation. Companies hoping to boost profits by advertising "green products" and governments promoting "technology transfers" (i.e., the sale for profit of various pollution control devices to other countries) are obvious examples of the dark green approach to solving — er, contributing to — environmental problems.

Blue green. If you're a conservative in the classical sense of the term who believes that big business is just as oppressive as big government, and who recognizes that our present economic and political system poses a real threat to personal liberty as well as to the environment, check out the impressive set of papers John McLaughry circulated among the U.S. Greens a few years back. McLaughry suggests that both the Republican and Democratic parties of the United States have strayed from the original principles of Jeffersonian democracy (Republicans favor big business and are suspicious of big government; Democrats favor big government and are suspicious of big business; Jefferson was suspicious of both big government and big business). McLaughry sees the potential for a Jefferson-inspired Green movement based on (1) the preservation of individual liberty in an age characterized by large public and private institutions; (2) restoration of the small-scale human community; (3) a widespread distribution of private property ownership; (3) the decentralization of economic and government power; (4) individual and community self-

help; (5) agrarian respect for the land; (6) a sound money policy to prevent the accumulation of unearned wealth; and (7) a non-governmental "people-to-people" foreign policy. With conservatives like this, who needs liberals! McLaughry thinks that the Greens would be able to broaden their appeal by experimenting with the "non-liberal" ideas contained in Burkean conservatism, Catholic social thought, libertarianism, and agrarianism.

Green green. The "green greens" are those who are neither right nor left but straight ahead. The Greens reject the modern conservative platform which supports freedom for the lords of big business but not for the serfs who have no choice but to work for them. For contemporary conservatives "liberty" no longer means liberty for all, but rather liberty for the rich and powerful to exploit the poor and powerless. The Greens have little faith in what U.S. Green leader John Rensenbrink calls the conservative vision of "freedom in a plastic consumer paradise where the consumer is at liberty to be governed by the corporation." But the Greens equally reject the modern liberal platform which calls for big government, more social spending, and highly centralized power. For contemporary liberals "equality" no longer means compassion for the poor and oppressed, but rather government largesse and the "equal right" of every group to demand a piece of the pie. The Greens also have little faith in what Rensenbrink calls the liberal vision of "equality in a uniformized bureaucratic existence dominated by the State." In Rensenbrink's view the words liberty and equality must be restored to their original meanings. At the same time, however, the Greens appreciate traditional, old-timey conservative ideas about personal initiative and social responsibility, and traditional old-timey liberal ideas about personal freedom and social equality. The way ahead, however, is to decentralize both politics and economics. Give political power back to local governments and simply eliminate "big government," bureaucracy, and red tape altogether. Give economic power back to local communities and simply eliminate "big business," corporate indifference, and exploitation altogether. In the immortal word of Ed Abbey, "Forward!" □

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