

Is Left Biocentrism Relevant to Green Parties?

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The following is taken from notes for the talk that David Orton gave at the Green Party of Canada Convention in Ottawa, on August 6, 2000. There are slight differences from the actual speech given, however, the main points and arguments are retained. Orton's talk was to have concluded with a discussion of Aboriginal issues, however, time constraints prevented it. Some of the talk was drawn from the four My Path to Left Biocentrism bulletins available at The Green Web site: [<http://fox.nstn.ca/\char126\relaxgreenweb/>], but additional material was used in the preparation. An audio version of the actual talk is available on the Green Party web site: <http://Ottawa2000.flora.org> . (Day Three speakers), along with other speeches and coverage of the convention.

One's ethics in environmental, green, and social issues are based on how one sees reality. My task is to try to show you the left biocentric vision. There are other names used by other people for this emerging vision, such as "radical ecocentrism" associated with Andrew McLaughlin. Some of you will know his 1993 book, *Regarding Nature: Industrialism and Deep Ecology*. Another name is "deep green theory," associated with the work of the late Australian forestry activist and deep ecologist Richard Sylvan. The late Judi Bari, who died of cancer, used the name "revolutionary ecology," and Andrew Dobson in England speaks of "ecologism." All these people, and myself, basically accept deep ecology and are, at the same time, exploring what a left focus means within this philosophy.

I start with two presuppositions. Most of us will agree that our culture has become the enemy of life on this planet. Also, it is up to you to decide, not myself, whether or not left biocentrism is relevant to green political parties.

My bio

I am 66 years old and live with my partner, Helga Hoffman, who has been a part of my work for 20 years, and who is an environmental activist in her own right, with particular interests in environmental health. We live on an old hill farm of about 130 acres in Nova Scotia with our 17-year-old daughter Karen (after Karen Silkwood). It is a paradise surrounded by the ravages of industrial forestry.

I was born in 1934 in the industrial city of Portsmouth in England. Portsmouth is a naval port. I attended a technical school which prepared students for industrial apprenticeships. I hated the school but still remember with fondness

the name of the teacher who led the field club. I left school at 15 and entered a five-year apprenticeship as a shipwright in Portsmouth dockyard. I had a brief period of one year at Durham University studying naval architecture, but I failed all my courses. We had national service (18-months required army service) at the time. I foolishly signed on as a regular for three years. But the army did not like me, nor I the army. I insisted on a discharge as a regular and went to Canada to avoid being called up again to finish the rest of the national service time. So you could say being a draft dodger was the reason I came to Canada.

I was 23 when I immigrated. I took part in social justice and anti-war issues in this country. Through mature matriculation, I became a student at Sir George Williams University in Montreal (now Concordia) and graduated in 1963. When I graduated I received a letter from the Vice-Principal, saying that I would “go far.” I went to the New School for Social Research in New York City for graduate studies in sociology from 1963 to 1967. I was given the MA prize in sociology. Sir George offered me a teaching job. After seeing my proposed reading lists for my students, which included large introductory courses, two things happened. I was visited by what I called at that time “house Marxists” — who were alleged leftist teachers at Sir George. I was told to learn German, read Marx in that language, and to stop trying to organize in the classroom. Also, the sociology department conveyed a special meeting before the university term started. The department said that I did not “share the consensus of the discipline of sociology.” I was removed from teaching the introductory classes. That anti-consensus charge against me, turned out to be a motif for my life.

The '60s were turbulent and exciting times. On February 11, 1969, 79 students were arrested at Sir George for a computer occupation which had come out of a struggle against racism within the university. Some received long prison sentences. I was blacklisted and could not obtain another teaching job after my two-year contract expired.

I was part of the Marxist-Leninist movement from 1968 to 1975. I became vice chair of the organization. I ran twice for parliament in Montreal. On November 7, 1972, I was sentenced to 40 days or a \$400 fine for my role in opposing a Keep Canada White meeting in Toronto, organized by a fascist group called the Western Guard. I did the time.

In 1977, I became involved in environmental work in British Columbia, working with the BC Federation of Naturalists. We moved to Nova Scotia in 1979. On July 23, 1983, in Halifax, at an anti-cruise missile rally, I first publicly stated in a five-minute speech that I defined myself politically as a green: “We need a new kind of politics and we believe the green movement, which stresses a new type of environmentally conscious society, is the way ahead.”

In 1984 we bought our place in the countryside — not that I believe in private property.

By 1985, I had come to accept the philosophy of deep ecology and began promoting it and applying this philosophy to environmental issues in the Maritimes. Perhaps I should mention in this gathering, that in January, 1990, we hosted the Nova Scotia leg of a tour of North America by Per Gahrton, the Swedish Green MP. (See for a report of this tour, Green Web Bulletin #21, "Greens in North America," April 1990, a seventeen-page report by Swedish Green Per Gahrton.)

The purpose of this bio is not self-promotion but to convey that, because of my background, I feel and write as part of several movements: the left, the environmental, the green, and the deep ecology movements. However, because of the views I have expressed on the greens, the working class, and on aboriginal issues, I have been made to feel quite isolated within the Canadian left.

Introduction to Deep Ecology

Human discourse has expanded regarding the communication to other humans, yet it has also narrowed in that it has come to exclude the rest of Nature from human consciousness.

Coming to an appreciation of deep ecology was an evolutionary (not an instant) conversion process for me. An appreciation for the philosophy of deep ecology may, for many forestry, biocide and wildlife activists, have come by travelling a similar path as myself — that is, by starting on a personal journey through various environmental struggles and by identifying with the natural world. It is often only much later that one discovers that there is the actual philosophy of deep ecology, first sketched out in the 1973 article "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary" by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, who is now in his late '80s. Shallow, here, means thinking that the major ecological problems can be resolved within and with the continuation of industrial capitalist society. Deep means to ask deeper questions and not stay on the surface. This deep orientation understands that industrial society has caused the Earth-threatening ecological crisis. For the best introduction to the ideas of Arne Naess read his book *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*.

The eight-point Platform of the deep ecology movement, worked out in 1984 by Arne Naess and the U.S. philosopher George Sessions, has received widespread acceptance within the deep ecology movement, as representing the most general and basic views that supporters of this movement have in common. How to change this Platform, so that it can evolve and yet keep movement legitimacy, is an issue in itself! The Platform does not prescribe what to do in concrete situations, but requires activists to think this through for themselves.

Let me make some additional points about deep ecology:

a. Naess, as well as outlining the basic ideas has, because of personal example, established a tone for handling contradictions within the deep ecology movement. There is a slogan from Naess, “the front is long” which seems to help against any form of sectarianism. This tone is to be contrasted with the bitterness often exhibited between the pro and anti Murray Bookchin sides in social ecology. The negative side of the “the front is long” slogan, at least for me, in the past has been a reluctance to confront stupid statements or ideas which can then be hung around the necks of deep-ecology supporters.

b. In some ways the realo/fundi split in the German greens is now being reflected within deep ecology. The use of the terms left biocentrism/ecocentrism versus right ecocentrism, perhaps conveys this. Can deep ecology be implemented in opposition to industrial capitalism or as complementary to it? New Dimensions Radio, out of California, which brought us the radio tape series “Deep Ecology for the 21st Century” in 1999, now has a new “Bioneers” radio program dealing with, among others, Paul Hawken and Amory and Hunter Lovins and their 1999 book *Natural Capitalism: Creating The Next Industrial Revolution*. The “Bioneers” program apparently claims that, with Natural Capitalism, “profits and zero emissions” is “Deep Ecology applied!”

c. For me, the great contribution of deep ecology is its assertion that there has to be a fundamental change in consciousness for humans, in how they relate to the natural world. This requires a change from a human-centered (anthropocentric) to an ecocentric perspective, meaning humans as a species have no superior status in Nature. All other species have a right to exist irrespective of their usefulness to the human species or human societies. Humans cannot presume dominance over all non-human life forms and see Nature as a resource for human and corporate utilization.

d. All of us must be involved at some level in changing the existing situation. Part of this change is for activists who can accept the general orientation of deep ecology, to popularize it and then apply it, through detailed work, to actual ecological issues such as forestry, agriculture, biocides, wildlands, oceans, energy, population, etc., so that concrete alternative paths forward can be demonstrated.

e. One problem is that deep ecology does not address sufficiently the “use” of Nature by humans. How ought we to use the world? What percentage for humans? What lifestyle? How many humans?

f. Another problem is that deep ecology does not give a view on the type of economy, or how we should relate to each other in the human social world.

g. There is a contention of ideas within deep ecology, and what its final social or economic or political evolution will be, is yet to be determined.

Looking back at my twenty years of involvement in the environmental move-

ment, it seems that a primary concern has been to raise alternative visions as a contribution to the public debate taking place around particular environmental issues. Deep ecology has helped me with this. While such visions need a detailed knowledge of an issue, to develop an alternative vision means going beyond the practical knowledge, on which the Earth destroyers often have had a monopoly. It is these alternative visions, which reject the existing taken-for-granted industrial order, that are so threatening to corporations, governments and the “wise use” groups. Naess has spoken of how we need to force fact-dependent experts who underpin environmental decisions, to have discussions regarding values and priorities.

For a recent example of an alternative vision, look at the article, “Marine Protected Areas: A Human-Centric Concept” on our literature list. (See the *Earth First! Journal*, December 1999/January, 2000.) Under the 1996 *Oceans Act*, the government claims the following assumptions, all of which I oppose, as guiding marine protected areas: the claim of ownership over the seas; support for sustainable development; that marine creatures are resources; that stakeholders all represent anthropocentric interests; and the view that aboriginal treaty rights must be upheld in such marine protected areas, which means to place social policy above ecology. Raising alternative ecological and social visions to those peddled by industrial society, is of fundamental importance. Circulating such visions within society, in any public way, is extremely difficult.

Deep ecology has become enormously influential (and bitterly attacked) in a relatively short period of time. This philosophy is not only about changing personal consciousness away from human-centeredness or anthropocentrism, it is also about voluntary simplicity (activists have to live the talk) and a needed spiritual change. To exit global industrial society, which destroys nature and communities everywhere, we humans have to share our identities, like past animistic societies, with other animals, plants, peoples and nature itself. Then, destroying other species and their habitats would be unthinkable from a moral or ethical viewpoint.

A challenge to create a deep ecological revolutionary movement is to outline a sweeping program of social change with alternative social, political, and economic visions. Front-line activists need to apply deep ecology to specific issues and struggles, no matter how socially sensitive, for example, population reduction, aboriginal issues, and workers’ struggles. Change through individual consciousness-raising, a major focus of much of deep ecology, is important, but not enough.

One of the interesting developments within deep ecology over the last few years is the emergence of the left tendency that I have spoken of. Its supporters see that paying attention to social questions (justice and questions of class and corporate power, but within an ecocentric framework), is a necessary part of a human mobilization towards a deep ecology world. Deep ecology can only be implemented in fundamental opposition to industrial capitalism and not within

it, this left tendency believes.

A fundamental dilemma facing activists

As a green, the life and work of Rudolf Bahro (1935 – 1997) has illustrated the dilemma we all face about whether or not we believe industrial capitalism is here to stay and that we must work with it, or we must oppose it, even if there is not yet any viable alternative. This fundamental dilemma goes back to the shallow/deep distinction made by Naess in 1972. How we resolve this dilemma determines what kind of ecological politics we can pursue.

Bahro, a founding member of the West German ‘Die Gruenen,’ was elected to the Federal Executive in 1980. For him, green politics was about capturing people’s consciousness, not accumulating votes. By 1985 he had resigned from the party. His resignation statement noted how the Greens did not want to get out of the industrial system: “Instead of spreading consciousness they are obscuring it all along the line.” Bahro particularly repudiated the continuing justification of animal experimentation by the green party.

For Bahro, industrialized nations needed to reduce their impact on the Earth to one tenth of what it was. Development was finished. Like the Norwegian deep-ecology philosopher Arne Naess, Bahro had a biocentric, not human-centered world view. Unlike Naess, Bahro was steeped in the culture of the left. Another important contribution of Bahro was that he came to see the necessary link between environmental and green politics and spiritual transformation, although he lost his way on this path. (For an evaluation of Bahro, critique, and defense of his contributions, see the section on him in *Green Web Bulletin #68*, “Ecofascism: What is It? A Left Biocentric Analysis.”)

Within the environmental movement, the resolution of this dilemma can result in two different paths: managerial or radical environmentalism. Reforms that shore up industrial capitalist society or reforms that subvert this society. If we stand as environmentalists or greens in opposition to industrial capitalist society, then we cannot accept status awards from that society such as environmentalists accepting awards from provincial or federal departments of the environment. In any environmental issue I have been involved with, such departments work with the Earth destroyers, not defenders. We who oppose industrial capitalism, seek to promote a totally different kind of social recognition.

Natural capitalism

One way of prolonging the life of industrial society was through the propagation and acceptance of the concept of sustainable development. Helga and I went to the 1st Planetary Meeting of Green Parties in Rio, May 30/31, 1992, as observers, and the statement coming out of that meeting endorsed sustainable development. But sustainable development is now old hat. The latest offering, to encourage activists to continue working with, and not in fundamental opposition to, this society, is to be found in the 1999 book *Natural Capitalism*, by Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter Lovins. This book, by its title, suggests that capitalism is natural, and that Nature can be treated within a capitalist framework. The authors see the solutions to the environmental crisis as bringing Nature within this accounting framework. This assumes that forests, seas, wild animals, etc. have prices, not, as in deep ecology, intrinsic values. Also, that the inherent growth/profit/consume-oriented capitalist economic model should be worked with, and not opposed as fundamentally anti-ecological. The authors aim to show through their many examples that resources (I do not myself use this term) can be saved, more profits can be made, growth can continue, and employment can increase if we start costing Nature. This is the ultimate anthropocentrism!

There are lots of interesting examples in this book of waste being eliminated and more profits being made. The book also speaks of “human capitalism”, although this is a secondary focus, where “responsible government” is combined with “vital entrepreneurship.” Curitiba in Brazil, is used as an example of this human capitalism. *Natural Capitalism* acknowledges that natural capital is rapidly declining and becoming a limiting factor on continued growth. Increasing population is taken for granted by the authors. Generally in this book, there is a much more progressive view of capitalism, in alleged harmony with Nature and with a social conscience. So this is against Thatcherism or Reaganism. But the fundamental questions remain for the activists’ dilemma. Can one reform capitalism? Is it here forever? Or do we work from the position that we must create an alternative?

I just finished reading Naomi Klein’s book which came out this year, *No Logo: Taking Aim At the Brand Bullies*. She takes a stand on a fundamental dilemma that I am concerned with. Her book shows how branding works — the loss of public space, secure work, etc. and the current fight-back by activists around the world. I recommend her book although her focus is much more on the social justice side than the environment. Also, she ultimately accepts globalization and capitalism. Klein argues that activists should “embrace globalization but seek to wrest it from the grasp of the multinationals.” I myself cannot accept this, even though there is at present no alternative economic model.

Right ecocentrism

Within deep ecology, there is a position I have called right ecocentrism, that is, resolving the fundamental dilemma in the direction of working within the industrial capitalist system, and accepting the market economy. I know a number of right ecocentrists and we cooperate on activist, mutual-interest work. Right ecocentrists agree with left biocentrists on the ecological and ethical side, but seem to believe that an ecocentric society can be implemented within the existing society. Hence one sees a kind of retreatism, that is, a movement away from the radical and subversive essence of deep ecology to an acceptance of capitalism, private property, and an economic growth framework. Appeals are often directed to decision makers within the system. An example of a deep ecology philosopher who I would characterize as a right ecocentrist would be Michael Zimmerman. He accepts the market economy, and has importance because he is the senior editor in an anthology of environmental philosophy essays which is now in its third edition.

Val Plumwood has noted, “the danger from deep ecology’s political naivete comes from capture by the liberal right.” But Plumwood also points out that deep ecology “has the potential to develop more radical answers.” Val Plumwood was the original Crocodile Dundee who Hollywood turned into a man. Her very interesting essay is called “Deep Ecology, Deep Pockets and Deep Problems: A Feminist Ecosocialist Analysis” and is in a book which just came out, called *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology*, edited by Katz, Light, and Rothenberg. Of the 14 essays in this book, two are excellent and two others are worthwhile to read. To me, a major problem is that deep ecology academics too often appear to write and publish for themselves and not for the radical ecology movement.

The “left” in left biocentrism

“Left” as used in left biocentrism means anti-industrial and anti-capitalist, but not necessarily socialist. Thus, some left biocentrists consider themselves socialists, as I do myself, while others do not. All left biocentrists address, and are concerned with, social justice issues in society. They do, however, place such issues within a context of ecosystem values.

Some left biocentrists question, as I continue to do myself, the use of the term left in left biocentrism. But left has retained the symbolism of a concern for social justice, the great contribution of the socialist and communist movements, and still very much needed today.

In the book *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, Naess comes through as sympathetic to socialism. This is at present the best single book introduction to

the ideas of Arne Naess. Naess considers class restriction as limitations for the possibilities of self-realization by individuals. Self-realization is an important concept in deep ecology. Naess points out that Green politics wants the elimination of class differences locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.

However, in the main, deep ecology writers, including Naess, have paid little attention to defining a relationship to the left. This has been part of the work taken up by left biocentrism. Writers like Rudolf Bahro and Andrew McLaughlin have made important theoretical contributions to understanding this relationship. (Bahro wrote to me two years before his death saying, that he agreed with the essential points of left biocentrism.)

The usual assumption on the Left is that there is a convergence between the Left and the Green. For example, one speaks of a Left-Green person or journal, or a Red-Green alliance. It is not my view that there is a convergence between the Green and the Red.

Here is an attempt to outline the relationship to the Left for left biocentrism:

Positive ideas

1. A basic idea within the socialist and communist tradition is that society should control the economy, and not the economy control the society, as is the situation under industrial capitalism. If the economy is controlling the society, is it not possible to have an economy which accepts operating within general ecological limits, as each corporation maximizes its own economic interests. It is easier to visualize an economy operating within ecological limits if it is controlled by society. Social control of the economy does not have to be centralized, it could be decentralized in a bioregional economy.
2. Sense of collective responsibility for all members of a society. It is not acceptable that a few live in luxury and others in poverty. This is the social justice contribution of the Left. It means income redistribution nationally and internationally. A radical ecological politics must take account of the interests of the human species for political success.
3. Class awareness, being aware that not all are equal, although all may vote; that the press is free to those who own it in a capitalist democracy. Environmental, economic, and social issues always have a class dimension, if one looks beneath the surface of industrial capitalist society.
4. The Left has a concern for others and accepts the self-sacrifice of the individual interest for the collective well-being of the society. This is in opposition to the cult of individualism/selfishness under capitalism.

Negative ideas

1. The Left has a human-centered world view, and cannot accept a bio-centric/ecocentric outlook, that says animals and plants and the general ecosystem have to be treated on the same moral plane as humans. In any conflict situation, animals and plants and the physical Earth are defeated. Social justice is for humans, and is predominantly at the expense of the ecology.
2. The Left says that capitalism, not industrialism, is the problem. Implicit in this view is that it is the ownership of wealth, which is fundamental. Left biocentrism sees industrial society as the main problem. It can have a capitalist or socialist face. This industrial view also accepts a class analysis.
3. The labour theory of value from Marxism implies that Nature has no value or worth unless humans transform it through their labour. For deep ecology, Nature has value in itself. Greens see Nature, not labour power, as the principal source of human wealth.
4. The assumption that humans can own Nature, and that collective ownership is best. Yet, if Nature is being destroyed, human ownership of Nature is irrelevant, whether individual, communal or state.
5. Hostility to population reduction as a priority for an ecocentric world. For the Left, humans are essentially the only species that have value. The habitat needs of other life forms are not important, particularly when this means impacting on the human species.
6. The assumption from Marxism that freedom comes from the development of the productive forces, that is, the industrial base, which will generate the needed wealth for communist society. Consumerism becomes part of this. Left Biocentrism opposes more economic growth and, following Rudolf Bahro, popularizes that industrialized nations need to reduce their impact upon the Earth to one tenth of what it presently is, for long-term sustainability.
7. The Marxist position that capitalism “feters” the forces of production is wrong. Capitalism massively expands these forces of production and destroys Nature in the process. There is no conception within Marxism of limits to growth, or the necessity for a contracting economy for an ecologically-sustainable society.
8. The Left has a materialist outlook and a culture which is quite hostile to expressions of spirituality, religion being the opium of the people. Left biocentrism holds that individual and collective spiritual/psychological transformation is important to bring about major social change and to break

with industrial society. We need inward spiritual/psychological transformation so that the interests of all species overrides the self-interest of the individual, the family, the community, and the nation. Animism from indigenous societies has much to teach us.

9. The Left promotes the working class as the instrument for social transformation to a more egalitarian society. Left biocentrism, like Bahro, sees the trade unions as united with their employers in defending industrial society and privilege. Environmental and green politics recruits across class, although there is a class component to such politics. It has been my experience, for example in issues such as uranium exploration/mining and open pit coal mining, the killing of seals, pulpmill pollution, the spraying of biocides and destruction of forests, and the Sable gas project, that the unions involved or which stand to economically benefit, have had the same anti-ecological positions as their employers. This is the same in many other industries. Both unions and employers have an economic interest in the continuation of industrial society and speak with similar anti-ecological voices. In the main (of course there are exceptions) trade unions are generally environmental enemies, not allies, of the environmental and green movements.
10. The Left has no alternative economic model to that of the global, market economy. For example, the social democratic Left in Canada (the New Democratic Party) and in other countries, ends up adapting to the capitalist economic growth model, with its endless consumerism and the environmental destruction by trans-national corporations. A bioregional economic model not based on continuous growth, that will respect ecological limits and that serves social justice, could be an alternative model.
11. The Left minimizes individual responsibility for destructive social or ecological actions. For example, the logger is forced to clearcut to feed his family and pay the mortgage. Although the primary locus of blame is the destructiveness of industrial capitalist society, this position is a denial of personal responsibility. Individuals must take responsibility for their actions and be socially accountable. Part of being individually responsible is to practice voluntary simplicity, so as to minimize one's own impact upon the Earth.

There are two key ideas for the left in left biocentrism. One idea comes from ecocentrism and deep ecology. This is the basic idea that humans cannot own the Earth. As Bahro said, "The earth can belong to no one." Ownership is a social fiction, whether state, communal, or individual. How can we have the arrogance to say that we own other species and their habitats? We have to move to usufruct use — the right of use, providing we are responsible to a wider community of life forms. This right of use would revert back to such a community on a person's death. These ideas have started to be outlined for the

inshore fishery and small woodlot owners in the Maritimes by left biocentrists. A second basic idea is the sense of equity or social justice, as part of the left in left biocentrism. In order to achieve social peace, we need a redistribution of human wealth, nationally and internationally.

Consciousness or awareness has expanded from Marxist times. Open-mindedness to new ideas does not seem to be part of the Left any more. So there is no convergence between the green and the red, or the red and the green. The needed path must be from Red to Green. The positive ideas listed from the Left tradition, have to be part of a left biocentric synthesis.

Handling contradictions

The analysis and discussion of contradictions draws heavily on discussions in the internet discussion group, “Left Bio,” which have extended over a three-year period. Left Bio is a group which activists join if they are interested in exploring together what socially-conscious ecocentric philosophy means. People in the group are, to the most extent, self-selected and are drawn from the environmental, green and, to a lesser extent, the animal rights movements and also include some academics. The movements have much in common but also have some philosophical contradictions. Admission to left bio is by invitation. New members need to be in general agreement with the ten-point Left Biocentrism Primer, and there are some netiquette guidelines.

Primary and secondary contradictions

One of the distinctions among ecocentrists of various hues, is what they see as the “primary contradiction” in society. The central issue which binds left biocentrists together are the ideas which are summarized in the Left Biocentrism Primer, as well as support for deep ecology. Left biocentrism supporters see some contradictions as primary, and others as secondary. From this perspective, the primary contradiction is with industrial capitalist society and its Earth-destructive anthropocentric world view and practices. Secondary contradictions are differences which are firmly held beliefs on various other issues. Some secondary contradictions are: vegetarianism or non-vegetarianism; non-violence as an intrinsic part of deep ecology; love or anger as key motivating factors for radical ecocentric activists; whether the terms “biocentrism” or “ecocentrism” are most appropriate in deep ecology; hunting versus non-hunting; whether or not intrusive wildlife research is acceptable in conservation biology; whether/how to work with mainstream or radical environmentalists; the place of ecotage in environmental activism; the role of patriarchy and spirituality in deep ecology, etc. If there is no consensus reached on these positions, then the differences are

lived with, for the sake of the larger unity against the primary contradiction.

Perhaps the sharpest discussions on secondary contradictions within left bio arose around the issue of vegetarianism. Participants in this discussion eventually came to accept that if the discussion group was to continue, then the position had to be lived with that a supporter of deep ecology could be either an omnivore or a vegetarian. This reflects the reality of the support for these two positions within deep ecology, and hence inside and outside of the discussion group. Naess himself has said in his essay “Deep Ecology & Lifestyle” that supporters of deep ecology tend to “Vegetarianism, total or partial.” Both vegetarian and omnivore deep ecology supporters on left bio share a belief in an organic bioregional food policy. For many, vegetarianism is an ultimate value and this has to be acknowledged and respected.

Providing we accept a basic ecocentric world view, and if we are trying to outline a general philosophical tendency like left biocentrism which has to mobilize a constituency, then many differences have to be accepted as secondary. If one is an organizer, which is an explicit requirement for supporters of deep ecology, then there can be no interest in pyrrhic victories. It cannot be a question of scoring points such as “Who is the simplest, the deepest deep ecologist of us all?”

Animal rights/liberation

Both the animal rights and deep ecology movements are helping to change consciousness, away from human-centeredness and the automatic assumptions of “resource rights” to exploit wildlife and the natural world. There are many areas in common between their supporters, but there are also some contradictions. I think the general attitude towards Nature and wildlife in these two movements is to be contrasted with the “use” orientation towards Nature and wildlife to be found for example, in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, in which wildlife is seen as a resource.

The Royal Commission, in its extensive five-volume report, did not mention deep ecology once but did find time to attack the animal rights movement. Both the animal rights and the deep ecology movements pose major threats to the status quo. Yet activists from both movements are sometimes at odds with each other, although some identify with both movements — perhaps more so on the deep ecology side. (There is an extended discussion of this topic in the article on our web page: “Deep Ecology and Animal Rights: A Discussion Paper.”)

Ecofeminism

This is another hot topic. Ecofeminism sees the way nature is subjugated and exploited directly related to the oppression of women in society. Yet sexual identity should not convey a leadership role, as for example the film by Shelley Wine “Fury For The Sound: The Women At Clayoquot” asserts. Her otherwise excellent film makes the struggle to save the ancient forests of Clayoquot Sound on the West Coast of Vancouver Island basically a women’s struggle, and thus creates disunity within the environmental movement.

I believe that the creation of an ecofeminism has, unfortunately, drawn many women away from the deep ecology movement. It created a commonplace but erroneous view that the philosophy of deep ecology is somehow intrinsically male. While this is not true, one has to acknowledge that there is a male bias in published writings by deep ecology theorists. The fundamental left biocentric critique of ecofeminism, which has a number of faces, is its human, female gender exclusiveness, and hence its splitting character for a general philosophical theory. Ecofeminism sees itself as an ALTERNATIVE theoretical framework or philosophy to deep ecology.

Patriarchy is very real, but we should try to sort it out within the deep ecology approach, where we have some basis of unity, and not in opposition to deep ecology.

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Citation Format

Orton, David (2000) Is Left Biocentrism Relevant to Green Parties? . *The Trumpeter*: 16, 1.
<http://www.icaap.org/iuicode?6.16.1.4>