

Raymond Williams

Raymond Williams, Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, has published widely, straddling politics, literature and culture. His studies include Culture and Society (1958), The Long Revolution (1961), The Country and the City (1973) and Problems in Materialism and Culture (1980).

Professor Williams addressed a recent meeting of the Socialist Environment and Resources Association of which he is Vice-President on the Subject of Socialism and Ecology. This pamphlet is based on that talk.

It traces the history of the socialist ecology movement and exposes the failure of unlimited production as a solution to poverty. It pinpoints the need for ecological socialism as the basis for a healthy, peaceful planet where resources are carefully used and evenly divided.

SOCIALISM AND ECOLOGY

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Introduction

In recent years some of us have been talking about ecological socialism—though it's a bit of a mouthful. But in many countries and at a growing pace there is an attempt to run together two kinds of thinking which are obviously very important in the contemporary world; yet the attempt to run them together is by no means simple. There are a number of questions which we have to look at both in practical contemporary terms and also in the way in which the different bodies of ideas have developed.

It's ironic, actually, that the inventor of the concept of ecology was the German biologist Haeckel, in the 1860s, and that Haeckel had a significant influence on the socialist movement throughout Europe around the turn of the century. Indeed Lenin referred to the influence of Haeckel as at one time having been enormous. But it was not at all the kind of influence which would now be represented by the concept of ecology, although that was Haeckel's invention. His work was influential because it was a materialist account of the natural world and among other things a physiological account of the soul. This found its place in the fierce debate about the relation between socialism and religion and other ethical systems, which was central in the socialist movement of that period. So that although at that time there was a relation between a version of ecology and a problem in socialism it is not one of much contemporary significance.

Yet if we go back beyond the particular name—ecology—and look at the kinds of issues which it now in a broad way represents, we can find a very complicated relation earlier in the nineteenth century and particularly from the period of the Industrial Revolution. The relations of that kind of thinking to socialist thinking have been and remain important, contentious and complicated.

The Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution dramatised the effects of human intervention in the natural world in ways which—although at first the effects were rather scattered, rather specialised—were bound to come within the attention of any serious observer. I say dramatised the effects because it was one of the common errors of that period—and it remains a common error—that substantial interference with the natural environment began only with the *industrial* revolution. Still, quite clearly, when you had the major extractive industries, the developing iron and steel and chemical industries, and then concentration of production in factories with quite new problems of aggregated housing and pollution because people hadn't been used to building towns in that way, there were effects of a quite extraordinary kind which it is still impossible to over-emphasise. The world was being physically changed wherever any of these valuable substances could be found in the earth. Understandably, there was an extraordinary response, in terms, normally, of a natural order which was being disturbed by reckless human intervention. This was said by the most surprising people—not just by rural or literary people at some distance from it. One of the most remarkable accounts is by James Nasmyth, the inventor of the steam hammer, who was right there in the centre of the new industrial processes. His account of the iron workings at Coalbrookdale, around 1830, is a classical text of environmental devastation. 'The grass had been parched and killed by the vapours of sulphureous acid thrown out by the chimneys; and every herbaceous object was of a ghastly grey—the emblem of vegetable death in its saddest aspect. Vulcan had driven out Ceres.' The effects were *so* dramatic. And the ordinary terms in which they were described centred on an idea of the 'natural' which had been disturbed, driven out, by this kind of industrial intervention.

Now this kind of thinking, which is still too little known, remains a crucial part of modern social thought. I say too little known because I was very surprised by one passage in an interesting article on the relations between ecology and socialism by the important German writer Hans-Magnus Enzensberger. It was in *New Left Review* 84, in 1974. He tried to make a point against the modern ecological movement by recalling that, especially 'in the English factories and pits', industrialisation 'made whole towns and areas of the countryside uninhabitable as long as a hundred and fifty years ago', yet that 'it occurred to no one to draw pessimistic conclusions about the future of industrialisation

from these facts'. It was only, he continued, when the effects reached the districts where the bourgeoisie was living that we had environmentalist arguments.

Now this is simply untrue. From Blake and Southey and Cobbett, in the early decades of industrialisation, through to Carlyle, Ruskin, Dickens and William Morris, there were constant observations and arguments of just this kind. I analysed many of them in *Culture and Society*. It remains a curiosity that this whole body of social observation and argument, which arose very early in Britain for the obvious reason that the most spectacular industrialisation was taking place here, is often not known at all by educated continental socialists, who can then build a wholly misleading history of the ideas. And after all it was a German observer, Engels, in Manchester in the 1840s, who provided one of the most devastating though by no means the earliest accounts of the dreadful living conditions in the new and explosively expanding industrial towns.

Variations of Response

That body of thinking is varied in tendency, from those who rejected industrialisation altogether, through those who wanted to mitigate its effects or humanise its conditions, to those others, and they were many, some of them socialists, who wanted to change its social and economic relations, which were seen as causing the greatest damage. Yet there was undoubtedly a very general tendency to see industrialism as the disturbance of a 'natural order'. In the early stages people were too near to a pre-industrial order to make the grosser errors of later periods. It eventually happened that people idealised the pre-industrial order and supposed, for example, that there had been no significant and destructive intervention in the natural environment before industrialism. In fact of course—and this probably goes back to neolithic times—certain methods of farming, over-grazing, destruction of forests, had produced natural physical disasters on an enormous scale. Many of the great deserts were created or enlarged in those periods, and many local climatic alterations. We shall get nowhere in thinking about these problems if we think that it is only the distinctive forms of modern industrial production that represent the problems of living well and sensibly on the earth.

Yet this emphasis, this foreshortening of history, had important intellectual effects. In a large part of the ecological movement as it developed—using that term to describe all such tendencies before the specific adjective was attached—there was an in-built tendency to contrast the damaging industrial order with the undamaging, natural, pre-industrial order.

Now, although there are important differences of degree, and some of the new processes caused more serious damage and destruction than any of the earlier processes, that is a false contrast. And this is particularly important for socialists to realise. For it allows us to distinguish the real history and therefore a possible future from what is otherwise a very weak version of the environmental case, which is that we should revert from industrial society to the pre-industrial order which didn't do this kind of damage. In its false contrast of physical conditions, and its characteristic evasion of social and economic conditions, this weak but popular case altogether misses the point.

I must make it clear that I say this as one who believes that the rural economy has been cheated and marginalised, in many places but quite especially in this country. I was born and bred in a rural economy, and I still find most of my priorities in it. But it is no use talking historically as if there can be that kind of simple contrast or reversion. Much of the worst damage, to people and to the land, happened in the rural economy from the rural economy. For one of the best recorded cases of that kind of damage we can go back to Thomas More and the expansion of the wool trade in the sixteenth century when, as he rightly said, the sheep were eating the men. Grazing sheep can be beautiful, very different from 'sulphureous vapours' though actually in Britain no more natural. It is the whole effect that matters, and that uncontrolled commercial exploitation of land and animals, reckless of its effects on other people, is what has really to be focussed. If you only pick up the physical appearances, you are likely to miss all the central social and economic questions, which is where ecological thinking and social thinking necessarily converge.

On the other hand there can be simplification the other way round. As socialism, from around the middle of the nineteenth century, began to distinguish itself from a whole body of associated and overlapping movements, there was a tendency to make a quite different emphasis: to say that the central problem of modern society was poverty, and that the solution to poverty was production, and more production. Although there would be incidental costs of this production, including changing and perhaps to some extent damaging the immediate environ-

ment, nevertheless poverty was the worst evil. Poverty had to be cured by more production as well as by the more specific policy of changing social and economic relations. Thus socialists for three or four generations, with only occasional exceptions—and this we still find to be the main tendency within socialism today—made the case that production is an absolute human priority, and that those who object to its effects are simply sentimentalists or worse; moreover that they are people who speak in bad faith, from their own comfort and privilege, about the effects of reducing poverty in the lives of others.

'The Conquest of Nature'

This had an extra effect when it was associated with that central idea of nineteenth century society, which you can still hear, encapsulated in such phrases as 'the conquest of nature', 'the mastery of nature'; attitudes which you can find as far back as Bacon's *The New Atlantis*. Indeed, if you compare More's *Utopia* and the *New Atlantis* you find these two contrasting positions very early in the history of the argument. Modern scientific production was the one necessary way of increasing wealth, decreasing poverty, extending man's dominion over nature. You keep hearing these phrases 'conquest of nature', 'mastery of nature', not only in the dominant bourgeois thought but also all through socialist and Marxist writing in the second half of the nineteenth century. You'll even find them quite centrally in Engels' *Dialectics of Nature*, although at a certain point he suddenly realised what he was saying, what this metaphor of conquest implied. Because of course these attitudes of mastering and conquering had from the beginning been associated not just with mastering the earth, or natural substances, or making water do what you wanted, but with pushing other people around, with going wherever there were things which you wanted, and subjugating and conquering. That's where the metaphors of conquest and mastery came from. They were a classic rationale of imperialism in just that expanding phase. They form the whole internal ethic of an expanding capitalism: to master nature, to conquer it, to shift it around to do what you want with it. Engels went along with that and then suddenly remembered where the metaphor came from and said, quite correctly: we shall never understand this if we fail to remember that we are ourselves part of nature, and that what is involved in this mastery

and conquest is going to have its effects on us; we can't just arrive and depart as a foreign conqueror. But even then he shifted back, under the influence of this very strong nineteenth-century triumphalism about nature, and took up the metaphors again. And still today we read these triumphalist arguments about production. They are a bit less confident now, but if you read the typical case for socialism, as it became standard between the wars in the dominant tendency, it is all in terms of mastering nature, setting new human horizons, creating plenty as the answer to poverty.

Now we have to take that case seriously. It is a very important case and there are many hypocrisies, many false positions, to root out if there is to be an honest and serious argument about socialism and ecology in our own time. But under the spell of the notion of conquest and mastery, with its mystique of overcoming all obstacles, of there being nothing too big for men to tackle, socialism in fact lost its own most important emphasis. It did not really look at what was visibly happening in the most developed and civilised societies in the world, at what was happening in England, this wealthy advanced industrial country which was still full of aggregated poverty and unbelievable disorder and squalor. For it is a capitalist response to say that if you produce more, these things will put themselves right. The essential socialist case is that the wealth and the poverty, the order and the disorder, the production and the damage, are all parts of the same process. In any honest account you have to see that they are connected, and that doing more of one kind of thing does not necessarily mean that you'll have less of the other.

That central socialist case was always put; there is not a generation in which somebody has not been seriously putting it. Yet under capitalist and imperialist influence, and especially since 1945 under North American influence, the majority position amongst socialists has been that the answer to poverty, the sufficient and only answer, is to increase production. This is in spite of the fact that a century and a half of dramatically increased production, though it has transformed and in general improved our conditions, has not abolished poverty, and has even created new kinds of poverty, just as certain kinds of development create under-development in other societies. It is that which is now the central question for socialists.

William Morris

The writer who began to unite these diverse traditions, in British social thought, was William Morris. He was at once, especially in his later years, a socialist—indeed a revolutionary socialist—and a man who, from direct practice, from the use of his own hands, from the observation of natural processes, was deeply aware of what work on physical objects really means. He knew that you can produce ugliness quite as easily as you can create beauty. He knew that you can produce the useless or the damaging as easily as the useful. He could see how many kinds of work seemed specifically designed to create ugliness and damage, in their making and in their use. He thought about this not only in general ways but from his own practice as a craftsman. His critique of the abstract idea of production was one of the most decisive interventions in the socialist argument. Instead of the simple capitalist *quantum* of production, he began asking questions about what *kinds* of production. In this, in fact, he was following Ruskin, who argued much the same case—who insisted that human production, unless governed by general human standards, rather than by mere profit or convenience, could lead to 'Illth' as readily as to 'Wealth'. But Ruskin did not have Morris's explicitly socialist affiliations.

Morris said: 'Have nothing in your home which you do not either believe to be beautiful or know to be useful'. It sounds a trite recommendation. But it goes to the centre of the problem, and to take it seriously, still today, would lead to a pretty extraordinary clear-out. And it's not just in the home. Suppose we said: 'Have nothing in your shops but what you believe to be beautiful or know to be useful'. That is a criterion of production which instead of a simple quantitative reckoning is relating production to human need. Moreover it sees human need as something more than consumption, that incredibly popular idea of our own time, which from the dominance of capitalist marketing and advertising tries to reduce all human need and desire to consumption. It is an extraordinary word, 'consumer'. It is a way of seeing people as though they are either stomachs or furnaces. 'And what sort of effect will this have on the consumer?', politicians ask, the consumer then being a very specialised variety of human being with no brain, no eyes, no senses, but who can gulp. Moreover if you have a notion of production which is to supply that kind of consumption you can only think in quantitative terms. You can never really ask: 'do we have to accept certain losses, certain local damage, because we need this

production?' You cannot ask whether we need this or that production because of need or beauty. Production becomes insensibly an end in itself, as in ordinary capitalist thinking, but also within this strain of socialist thinking—weak socialist thinking—in which it is seen as in itself and as such the answer to poverty.

So when Morris brought these questions together, and campaigned over so many issues, he was making the kind of junction of two different traditions which ought to have come earlier, ought to have been better sustained after Morris, and ought to be much clearer and stronger than it is even today. One reason, however, why it was not immediately sustained and followed up after Morris's day was that he too was a victim of that delusion which I described as being very general earlier in the century. I mean the delusion that before factory production, before industrial and mechanical production, there had been a natural, clean, simple order. For Morris it was located, as for so many nineteenth century radicals and socialists, in the Middle Ages. Thus a notion that the future, the socialist future, would be some kind of reconstitution of the medieval world, established itself deeply in his thought, although it always worried him. He conceded that if a machine would save us from boring work, so that we could use our time on other things, then we should use it. But the main tendency was always towards the reconstitution of an essentially simple peasant and craftsman order.

Now I don't have to tell you how strong that kind of thinking still is within the ecological movement. It is still seen by many good people as the only way of saving the world. It is seen by others as something which they would themselves prefer to do, dropping out from modern industrial society and taking a different course which gives them more satisfaction. It is even seen—and this is a harder case to sustain although it may be morally stronger—as a possible future for still densely populated countries.

But for everyone else Morris seems easy to dismiss, because in that world he imagined in the twenty-first century, after the socialist revolution of 1952 (which, I don't need to remind you, was a bit off the date) in that world of the twenty-first century you've got a small clean London in which more or less everything happens easily and naturally. If you feel like doing something then you do it, because in any case there's enough. Yet this sufficiency all happens somewhere mysteriously off stage. And back by the river there is only the visual beauty, the sensitivity of friendship and comradeship. There is a pervading sense of leisure and space and peace, where all the human values can be sustained and developed. But that's it. It is a sweet, spacious, clean little

world, where the problems of production have not just been questioned, as in that earlier, necessary intervention—‘don’t tell me that it is needed for production, tell me production for what and who needs it?’—but now as problems of production, of human sustenance, have been pushed out of sight. Actually Morris was right to observe, towards the end of his life, that he probably thought and imagined in that way because he was himself born rich by inheritance and was always able, as a marvellous craftsman, to earn a good living by doing the kind of satisfying work that other people actually wanted done. Rich people, incidentally, were the only customers who could afford to buy craftsmanship of his quality. He said that all this probably coloured his views.

Well, yes it did. It is an honest admission. It is one of the tangles that we have to sort out. The association of that notion of deliberate simplification, even regression, with the idea of a socialist solution to the ugliness, the squalor and the waste of capitalist society has been very damaging. All it leads to, really, is a number of individual and small group solutions, such as the arts and crafts movement, or people like Edward Carpenter and a whole succession of good, plain-living, honest and honourable people who have found this way of coping with and living through the twentieth century, damaging nobody, helping many. But in general they have fostered the notion that somehow this would solve the problem of the whole social order, in effect by cancellation of all the other things that have happened. And if you associate that with a certain kind of socialism, you must expect people to say: ‘well look, it’s just not on in a twentieth century world. It’s all gone too far, there are too many of us. The problems have to be solved in modern terms or they won’t in practice be solved at all.’

That is indeed my own position, for all my respect for Morris and the others. It is from this position that I recognise the importance of the ecological movement in our own period, still making its necessary advances, especially among the most intelligent young, and yet its true complex relationship with socialism. Let us first notice that a lot of general ecology is, as they say, ‘non-political’. It is a quite common response among many serious people now: that politics is a superficial business, it is just the in and out of competing parties, the old Left-Right see saw, and is anyway just reconstituting the same damaging and boring old order. We have to strike out, they say, on a different route, and we want nothing to do with what you call politics; we’re tackling the social problems at a deeper level.

Non-political Ecology

This is a serious position. But it is not an adequate one, if only because, as anyone knows who's knocked around in politics, 'no politics' is also politics, and having no political position is a form of political position, and often a very effective one. What happens in practice is that you get a kind of movement (it is very strong in certain countries, particularly the United States) to find small group solutions or individual solutions, family solutions, in which people can begin living *at once* in a different way. That, I think, is the most sustainable position intellectually. It is a very different matter when you come to the more general non-political ecological case, in which a group of people, often highly informed, well-qualified to speak of what they are speaking about—the problem of food in relation to growing populations, problems of energy, problems of industrial pollution, problems of nuclear power—issue manifestos and warnings, usually addressed to the leaders of the world, saying that there must be immediate crash programmes, that in the next five years we must reduce energy consumption by x per cent, that we must outlaw certain harmful manufacturing processes, and so on. These are lists of objectives which I'd sign now, and which most of us would sign. But the special character of these pronouncements is revealed when you look at who they are addressed to. Having reached such conclusions, where in fact do you go next? If the pronouncements are directed towards specific public opinion, that is a reasonable procedure, because then people who need to know about the problems, to be concerned about them, are informed and encouraged. But that is not commonly what is done. Characteristically, this non-political approach calls upon generalised public opinion or upon 'the world'. But in the latter case, they are calling upon the leaders of the precise social orders which have created the devastation to reverse their own processes. They are calling upon them to go against the precise interests, the precise social relationships, which have produced their leadership. Moreover, at a certain point, although the actual pronouncements are honest and important, the political position can be worse than merely mistaken, because it creates and supports the notion that the leaders can solve these problems. Of course the leaders can at once say: 'well, we'd love to proceed and have a really serious cutting back on certain kinds of harmful production, but it wouldn't be popular with the electorate. We'd love to do it, but who'd vote for it?' This is at least what the more enlightened ruling-class people say under pressure: it would be unpopular.

it would be too difficult to do. Increasingly, meanwhile, the really effective ruling class dismisses the whole case as sentimental nonsense, which simply limits or delays production and national power.

At this point it is not enough to go on issuing these general warnings, which as they multiply (I get weary of the dates, for some of the five year crash programmes are now at least twenty years old) focus the problem quite wrongly. I am not mocking the defeated, because everybody on the left is defeated, we've all been defeated. I am not criticising these pronouncements because they haven't succeeded. I'm just saying we must take a long look at where the movement gets to, when it issues pronouncements to the leaders of the world or to unspecific public opinion. For the facts are, as I read them, that the necessary changes really do involve substantial social and economic dislocations as well as mere changes. There would, in my judgement, be major disturbances in any serious programme for resource saving, resource management and above all in the diminution of radical poverty in the poorest parts of the world. This is not an argument against the programmes, but if it is the case we must say so openly, and see what positive forces can be assembled to support them. And it is here that we come back to the relation with socialism, which I see as crucial.

Socialist Alternatives

Let us look at this first in the developed industrial countries, which by in a sense ignoring the kinds of consideration to which ecology now draws attention, have become rich overall and, whatever inequalities there still are within the societies, have produced kinds of work, standards of living, habitual uses of resources, which clearly people now assume and expect. These can only ever be equitably negotiated out of. They can never be argued out of, they can never be converted out of, they can only be very carefully *negotiated* out of. It is no use simply saying to South Wales miners that all around them is an ecological disaster. They already know. They live in it. They have lived in it for generations. They carry it in their lungs. It happens now that coal might be one of the more desirable energy alternatives, although the costs of that kind of mining can never be forgotten. But you cannot just say to people who have committed their lives and their communities to certain kinds of production that this has all got to be changed. You can't just

say: 'come out of the harmful industries, come out of the dangerous industries, let us do something better'. Everything will have to be done by negotiation, by equitable negotiation, and it will have to be taken steadily along the way. Otherwise you will find, as in all too many environmental cases and planning enquiries in this country—on a new airport, for example, or on some new industrial development in a previously non-industrial region—that there is a middle-class environmental group protesting against the damage and there's a trade union group supporting the coming of the work. Now for socialists this is a terrible conflict to get into. Because if each group does not really listen to what the other is saying, there will be a sterile conflict which will postpone any real solutions, at a time when it is already a matter for argument whether there is still time for the solutions.

I believe that only socialists can make the necessary junction. Because we are not going to be the people—at least I hope we are not going to be the people—who simply say 'keep this piece clear, keep this threatened species alive, at all costs'. The case of a threatened species is a good general illustration. You can have a kind of animal which is damaging to local cultivation, and then you have the sort of problem that occurs again and again in environmental issues. You will get the eminences of the world flying in and saying: 'you must save this beautiful wild creature'. That it may kill the occasional villager, that it tramples their crops, is unfortunate. But it is a beautiful creature and it must be saved. Such people are the friends of nobody, and to think that they are allies in the ecological movement is an extraordinary delusion. It is like the country-house industrialist or banker in Britain, often an occasional supporter of the environment or what he calls 'our heritage', who makes money all week from the muck and the spoil, and then—because this is the English pattern—he changes his clothes and goes down to the country for the weekend; he is spiritually refreshed by this place, which he's very keen to keep unspoiled—until he can go back, refreshed, back into the making of the smoke and the spoil, which is the precise resource for his escape. If—and I don't think that it is going to happen, because there are too many people coming in from the other side—but if that is the kind of case that environmentalists are going to make, then I hope socialists are against it, because it is the sort of thing with which we can have no truck at all.

The Fact of Material Limits

On the other hand it is perfectly clear that at a certain level, in the major ecological issues, it is not really a matter of choice. This is the case that socialists can begin to make: that it is not really a matter of choice whether we can go on with certain existing patterns and conditions of production, with all their actual looting of the resources of the earth and with all their damage to life and health. Or even when they are not damaging, there is the certainty that many of the resources at their present levels of use are going to run out. That is the case which any socialist should recognise: the fact of real material limits to the existing mode of production and to the social conditions which it is also producing.

One of the disadvantages of some of the most publicised ecology is that it has been very free in projections about when these various limits and failures will happen. The truth is—and every honest worker in the field knows it—that most of the projections are at best guesses. But they are serious guesses. That the notion of some limits is real, somewhere along the line, is, I suppose, beyond question. And if this is so, then even at the simplest material level the notion of an indefinite expansion of certain kinds of production, but even more of certain kinds of consumption, is going to have to be abandoned. It is interesting to remember that it is only ten years or so since we were having those projections of the two-car family by 1982 and the three-car family by 1988, and heaven knows how many cars there could have been, on one of those extrapolating lines, by the year 2000. We've now learned the answer to that! The idea that the unit electricity consumption of a North American family could become a standard of living for the world—or at least for the industrialised world—can now be clearly seen to be a fantasy. It is this kind of rational assessment, on the best evidence and on the changing evidence, that underlines the fact of material limits, and that should now force our societies to the most important kind of rethinking we have ever had to do.

It is here that genuine socialism can make a contemporary connection with the rational assessments of ecology. We have to build on the socialist argument that productive growth, as such, is not the abolition of poverty. What matters, always, is the way production is organised, the way the products are distributed. It is also, and now crucially, the way in which priorities between *different forms of production* are decided. And it is then the social and economic relations between men

and classes, which emerge from such decisions, which determine whether more production will reduce or eliminate poverty or will simply create new kinds of poverty as well as new kinds of damage and destruction.

Poverty and the 'National Cake'

In that context the question becomes more than national, although it is a very important component of a redefinition of socialism within countries like our own. It's always been a running argument within the Labour Party, especially since 1945: whether we're going to get equality, and what are usually referred to as 'the things we all want'—schools and hospitals are usually the first to be named—when we've got the economy right, when we've produced enough, enlarged the national cake and so on; or whether equality and the priority of human needs require, as their first and necessary condition, fundamental changes in our social and economic institutions and relationships. I think we now have to see that argument as settled. The usual 'national cake' position, the soft political option, can be seen to rest on a basic fallacy, which the United States has demonstrated to the world—and no society is ever going to be relatively richer in gross indiscriminate production than that one—that by getting to a certain level of production you solve the problems of poverty and inequality. Tell them that in the slums, the inner cities, of rich America! All socialists are then forced to recognise that we have to intervene on quite a different basis. We have to say, as Tawney said sixty years ago, that no society is too poor to afford a right order of life. And no society is so rich that it can afford to dispense with a right order, or hope to get it merely by becoming rich. This is in my view the central socialist position. We can never accept so-called solutions to our social and economic problems which are based on the usual crash programmes of indiscriminate production, *after* which we shall get 'the things we all want'. By the ways in which we produce, and the ways in which we organise production and its priorities—including, most notably, the inherent capitalist priority of *profit*—we create social relations which then determine how we distribute the production and how people actually live.

North and South

This is at a national level. But it is even more true at the international level. For we are bound to notice—and the people from the poorest parts of the world do increasingly notice—that the world economy is now organised and dominated by the interests of the patterns of production and consumption of the highly industrialised countries, which are also in a strict sense, through all the different political forms, the imperialist powers. This is shown most dramatically at the moment in the case of oil. But it is true also over a very wide range of necessary metals, of certain strategically important minerals and in certain cases even in food. We can now reasonably say that the central issues of world history over the next twenty or thirty years are going to be the distribution and use of these resources, which are at once necessary for a contemporary pattern of human life but which are also *unequally* necessary in the present distribution of economic power. Already the struggles over the supply and price of oil, and of other commodities, determine not only the functioning of the world economy but the key political relations between states.

This is where the problem of a reformulated and practical socialist economic programme, within old industrial countries like Britain, and the rapidly developing problems of the world economy, can be seen to interlock. Because it is possible to look forward—yet that is quite the wrong phrase, because no-one who has taken a true measure of the problem could look forward to it—to see ahead a situation in which the shortage of certain key raw materials and commodities, which are necessary to maintain existing patterns of production and existing high levels of consumption, will create such tensions within societies which have got used to these patterns that they could in majority be prepared to resort to every kind of pressure—not only political and sub-military, but openly military—to assure what they see as the supplies necessary to the maintenance of their order of life. This is already a dangerous current of opinion in the United States. We can all see, as the shortages and costs come through, the danger of this happening. We can see also the possibility of recruiting wide areas of public opinion to cast as enemies the poor countries which have been assigned the role of supplying the raw materials, the oil, the whole range of basic commodities, at prices which are convenient to the functioning, in received terms, of the older industrial economies.

There are other dangers of war, in the rivalry and the arms race of the superpowers and in the filth of the export and import trade in armaments. In fact even there the economic issues are deeply involved in the political and military rivalries. But more generally there is the virtual certainty of a conflict over scarce resources and the prices of scarce resources becoming an attempt to dominate in new ways in the world economy. And this will be initiated by the advanced industrial societies which of course, by the nature of their development, dispose of the technologically developed weapons of war and subjugation, including nuclear weapons, which is where all the issues now come together. So this is one answer when people ask: how are we to argue the case for a sensible use of resources within our kind of society and economy, when this will involve changes—in some cases reductions—in existing patterns of use? How are we going to persuade people to accept this? It goes so much against their own self-interest that as a political programme it doesn't even begin. Well, there are the other ways we've already looked at, in facing the fact that there are material limits to the kinds of production and consumption to which we have specialised ourselves. There is also the case, which is winning significant support, of the development of other kinds of production, notably the renewed interest in agriculture and forestry, in new forms of energy production and of transport, and in various kinds of more locally-based, non-exploitative and also renewable and non-obsolescent kinds of work. But it is clear that however strongly this alternative current develops, it will not be sufficient, in any immediate period, to solve the problems of the whole existing economy. And then will come the crisis point, when there is a profound challenge to the existing ways of life. The problem of resources—the pressure point on the whole existing capitalist mode of production—will become the problem of war or peace. This problem will be presented, through all the powerful resources of modern communications, as a problem of hostile foreigners who are exercising a stranglehold over our necessary supplies. Opinion will be mobilised for what will be called 'peacekeeping': in fact wars and raids and threatening interventions to ensure supplies or to keep down prices.

Ecology and the Peace Movement

Thus the continuation of existing patterns of unequal consumption of the earth's resources will lead us inevitably into various kinds of war, of different scales and extent. And then the case for changing our present way of life has to be argued not only in terms of local damage or waste or pollution, but in terms of whether we are to have the possibility of peace and friendly relations, or the near certainty of destructive wars because we are not willing to change the inequalities of the present world economy.

If the issue is put in this way, if we are able to look clearly at what a standard of *life* really is, we ought to be able to reach more people with the argument that a crucial component of any rational definition of a standard of life is the maintenance of peace. Of the many causes of war, this is the one which seems to me likely in the next half century to be central. Thus the link to wider political agencies, which must be the object of search of all who are now seriously concerned with environmental problems, is in a sense given to us by the nature of the argument. We can properly link the argument about resources, about their equal distribution and their caring renewal, with the argument about the avoidance of war. Ironically, in that, we may even find friends in some of the most innocent supporters of a consumer society, for of course that happy and thoughtless consumption depends on peaceful production, without major interruptions, or without priority being given to rearmament and the militarised state. There could even be an argument for the maintenance of peace which could connect with some of the deepest habits and assumptions of a consumer society, because nobody will want that kind of interruption. Yet it could still happen, by a kind of inertia. The more consumption is abstracted from all the real processes of the world, the more we are likely to find ourselves in these dangerous war and pre-war situations. All the attractions of desirable consumption could push us, in contradictory ways, towards war, towards a chauvinism of the old rich countries, towards a slandering of the leaders of movements and peoples of the poor countries who are striving to redress these major and unforgiveable inequalities.

A New Politics

For any ecologist this is a special challenge. It is too easy, in the rich industrial north, to say that we have had our industrial revolution, we have had our advanced industrial and urban development, and we have known some of its undesirable effects, and so we are in a position to warn the poor countries against going down that same road. We have indeed to try to share that whole experience of indiscriminate production. But we must do it in a kind of good faith which is in fact rare. It must not become an argument for keeping the poor countries in a state of radical underdevelopment, with their economies in fact shaped to keep supplying the existing rich countries. It must not become an argument against the kind of sensible industrialisation which will enable them, in more balanced ways, to use and develop their own resources, and to overcome their often appalling problems of poverty. The case, that is to say, has to be made from a position of genuinely shared experience and from a deep belief in human equality, rather than from the overt or, even more dangerous, covert prejudices of the developed northern societies.

Bringing these issues together, then, we can see that in local, national and international terms there are already kinds of thinking which can become the elements of an ecologically conscious socialism. We can begin to think of a new kind of social analysis in which ecology and economics will become, as they always should be, a single science. We can see the outline of political bearings which can be related to material realities in ways that give us practical hope for a shared future.

Yet none of it is going to be easy. Deep changes of belief will be necessary, not just conveniently, where they are in fact impossible, among the existing power elites and the rich classes of the world, but in all of us who are now practically embedded in this general situation. We are bound to encounter the usual human reluctance to change, and we must accept the fact that the changes will be very considerable and will have to be negotiated rather than imposed. But the case for this new kind of enlightened, materially-conscious, international socialism is potentially very strong, and I think we are now in the beginning—the difficult negotiating beginning—of constructing from it a new kind of politics.

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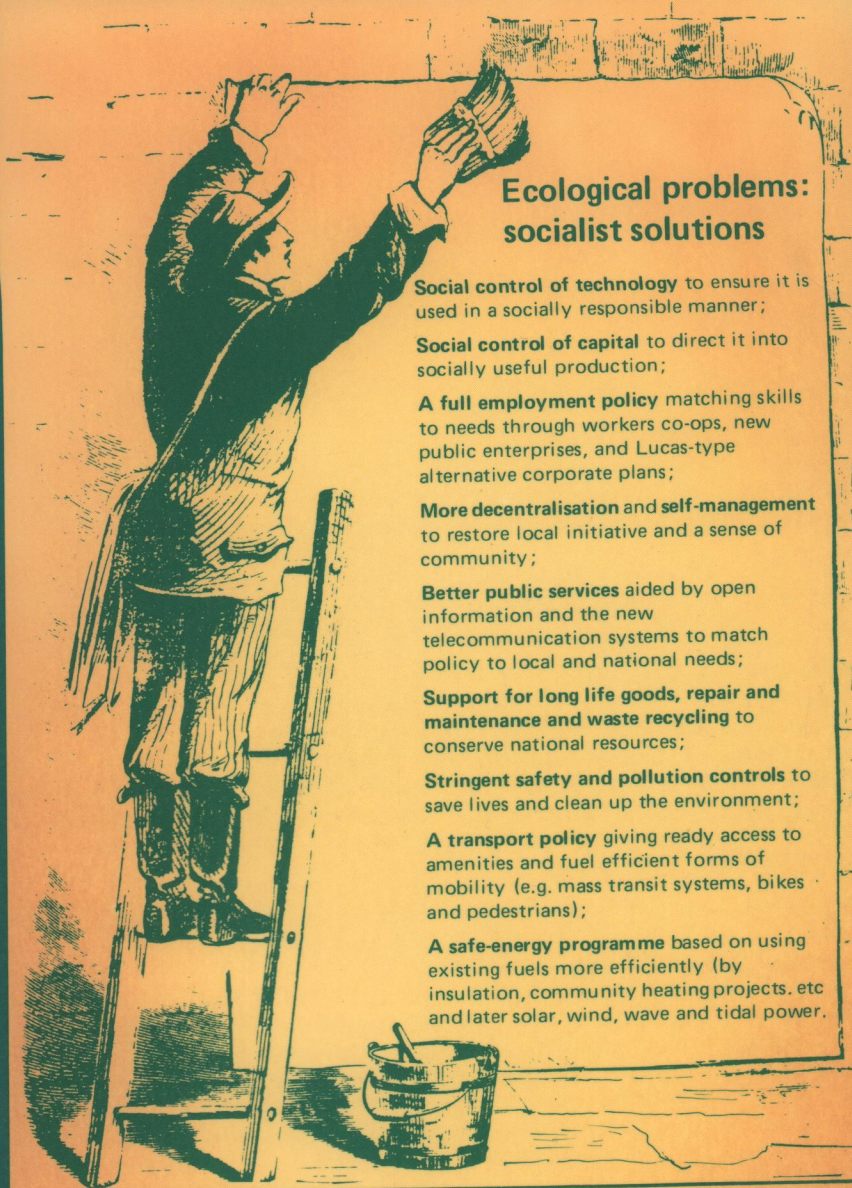
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