

What on earth is to be done?

A red-green dialogue

published 1995

Red-Green Study Group

In memory of Dave Cook

Contents

[Original imprint details](#)

[The Red-Green Study Group: an introduction](#)

[Biographical details](#)

[Preface](#)

[I Foundations](#)

[II Elaborations and themes](#)

[III Principles of political and economic organisation](#)

[IV Towards a red-green future: principles for transition](#)

[V Where next? Seeking political forms](#)

[Appendix: Reasons to be cheerful/Dave Cook](#)

Original imprint details

An earlier draft of this publication appeared in a limited photocopied edition in October 1994.

This revised version first published May 1995.

Published by the Red-Green Study Group
c/o Pat Devine, 2 Hamilton Road, Whitefield, Manchester M45 6QW

All rights reserved. Permission to reprint extracts from this work must be sought in writing from the publisher at the above address. It will normally be given without charge to any non-profit organisation interested in furthering a red-green dialogue.

Copyright © 1995 Red-Green Study Group

ISBN 0 9525784 0 9

Cover design by Lucy Morton

We are grateful to the Lipman Trust for its consistent support for the work of the Study Group, in particular for its financial help, together with the Amiel and Melburn Trust, in mounting the October 1994 conference and for the additional grant made to help with the promotion of this publication.

Printed in England by the Cromwell Press, Melksham, Wiltshire

The Red-Green Study Group: an introduction

This document by the Red-Green Study Group outlines a possible basis for a green socialism. It is not a manifesto, nor do we believe that all socialists and all greens will agree with everything it contains. However, we hope you will find it a useful contribution to the most important debate on the left today.

The Red-Green Study Group was formed in the spring of 1992 and first met in the wake of the Tories' unprecedented fourth successive general election victory. Both the left and the green movement were demoralised, fragmented and in disarray. The socialist project appeared all but collapsed, and many had turned their backs on it. The hope offered by green politics only a few years earlier had rapidly faded.

The group started from a presumption that green socialism offers the best, possibly the only, way forward and that no existing party reflects that vision. The starting point was a commitment to a society qualitatively different from capitalism, and an openness to the possibility of creating a new formation with a red-green perspective.

This document, written collectively but reflecting differences of style and emphasis, sets out the thinking of the group so far. It explores the principles and processes on which a green socialist perspective might be based. These are not presented as the only possible form a green socialism might take. Many other forms have been proposed, each variously influenced by different interpretations of Marxism, anarchism and feminism. This is our version.

The discussions leading up to the formation of the Red-Green Study Group were initiated by Dave Cook and Pat Devine. A determined effort was made to identify and invite people with a broad range of political backgrounds and experiences.

The group met regularly, approximately every two months. Since the aim was to explore common ground, and to develop dialogue around areas of difference, an atmosphere of mutual respect was essential. Individuals took turn at writing drafts for our discussion of each topic, and detailed notes of the discussions were taken and circulated. This in itself encouraged careful attention to what others were saying.

In the course of time these working practices brought with them a sufficiently strong sense of group identity around the project to sustain us in our work for more than two years, despite (or even because of?) continuing differences of view. In retrospect many of us came to feel that we had learned as much from this experience of collaboration as from the substantive content of the discussions.

However, we were and are acutely aware of our limitations, both individually and as a group. We wanted to have the ideas we had developed tested and corrected in a wider, but hopefully still sympathetic, forum. To this end we produced a complete draft out of our working papers, and convened a small conference. This was held in London in October 1994, and was attended by about 40 people.

The version now published has been revised in ways which should meet some (though not all) of the criticisms made at the conference. Some of those criticisms that will not be met were felt to reflect real differences of view between its authors and critics, while meeting others would have required rewriting on a scale that would seriously delay the revised version's appearance.

Of the thirteen authors, most, but not all work in higher education; all are activists, having been involved in progressive social movements and campaigns throughout their lives. The majority are men, but three of the most active contributors are women. All thirteen are white. Most, but again not all, are past or present members of political groups or parties. The document reflects both the strengths and limitations of those political and life experiences; these are elaborated a little in the brief biographical details of the authors which follow this introduction.

If this discussion document is found to be of interest to a wider group of people, the next stage might be to open up discussions among those willing to consider coming together in a closer association. Any new political formation that emerged would then be able to consider specific policies, which are not addressed in the document.

Biographical details

Ted Benton: Member (still!) of the Labour Party, as well as of FOE, SERA, Red-Green Network, etc.; teaches sociology at the University of Essex; author of *Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism*, *Natural Relations: Ecology, Animal Rights and Social Justice*, and other works; natural history writer and photographer.

Pat Devine: Member of the CPGB, until it disbanded, and of the Socialist Society; student, CND and AUT activist at various times; teaches economics at the University of Manchester; author of *Democracy and Economic Planning*, and other works; rock climber and hillwalker.

***Nick Gotts:** Active member of the Red-Green network since its inception; pressure group activist (CND, FOE, Earth First!) at various times; researcher into artificial intelligence at Leeds University; about to become a father.

Paul Hoggett: A Trot in the 1970s; New Urban Leftist in the 1980s; pronounced anarchistic leanings in the 1990s; Group Relations Consultant; lifelong worshipper of the unconscious; Professor of Politics at the University of the West of England.

Richard Kuper: Member of the International Socialists 1964-76; 1960s student activist; 1970s ATTI/NATFHE rank- and-filer; 1980s Socialist Society and a Socialist Conference/ Movement organiser; lecturer then full-time publisher (Pluto Press) until 1986; now lecturing again (in politics at the University of Hertfordshire). Makes his allotment grow and dreams of ecofarming in France.

Elena Lieven: Feminist, peace, trade union and university politics activist since the 1970s; not keen on political parties, either bourgeois or revolutionary; has written on feminist theory and peace education; teaches developmental psychology at the University of Manchester; researches on early child language; committed to her alternative family of children, older people and other friends.

Tony Martin: Member of the Green Party; has worked for END and European Dialogue (part of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly); an unashamed European Federalist; qualified as a youth and community worker at Sunderland University and has worked in the voluntary sector since as a practitioner; currently working in the area of reminiscence therapy with both the elderly and the young.

John Morrissey: Member of the Green Party since 1980; served on its Policy Committee 1987-94; Chair of Green Party Executive 1994-95; joint editor of *The Way Ahead*; physician in a Midlands hospital specialising in diabetes and endoscopy.

Caroline New: Ex-member of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain (Marxist-Leninist); veteran of CND, the Women's Movement, the National Childcare Campaign, and the Anti Poll Tax League; teaches sociology at Bath College of Higher Education; a mother, co-counsellor, and trades unionist.

Mike Prior: A member of the Labour Party since 1981 and of SERA since the mid-1970s; works as a freelance consultant economist, mainly on issues related to energy and the environment.

David Purdy: Active on the left for 30 years; economist now employed in the Department of Social Policy, University of Manchester, and working on Citizenship and Basic Income; single parent, pragmatic idealist, soulful atheist and creative writer manque.

Roger Simon: Trade union researcher; past member of the CPGB and now of Democratic Left; author of *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction*; secretary of the Green Socialist Network.

Duncan Thompson: Member of Green Party and Democratic Left; most closely involved in local community/cooperative projects; a drop-out at heart, keeping chickens and two allotments; belatedly and accidentally fallen into academic research work (doctoral thesis on the history of the *New Left Review*) to temporarily avoid being unemployable.

Hilary Wainwright: Books include *Beyond the Fragments* (with Sheila Rowbotham and Lynne Segal), *The Lucas Plan: a New Trade Unionism in the Making* (with D. Elliott), *Labour: A Tale of Two Parties*, and most recently *Arguments for a New Left: Answering the Free Market Right*; founded and co-ordinated the Popular Planning Unit at the Greater London Council; at present a Research Fellow at the University of Manchester's Centre for Labour Studies and Political Editor of *Red Pepper*.

* Joined Group at October 1994 conference.

Preface

We believe that human society can be improved without further harm to other species and damage to the environment. As we approach the millennium, the general mood, at any rate in the developed countries of the West, is one of profound uncertainty, insecurity and foreboding. And with good reason. Depletion of the ozone layer, deforestation, global warming and the effects of pollution pose major threats to human and non-human life. The ending of the Cold War may have reduced the threat of global nuclear holocaust and helped to bring down apartheid, but it has also unhinged international relations. In a world awash with armaments, the scourge of war has spread from the Third World to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. And whilst the United States and its allies were ready enough to launch Operation Desert Storm, the international community's response to the various secessionist and ethnic conflicts unleashed by the collapse of the self-styled Communist states has signally failed to safeguard even the most elementary human rights, let alone secure peace.

The world economy is similarly adrift. Transnational corporations, free trade, hot money and neo-liberal theology have eroded the power of national governments to manage the economies over which they preside, while simultaneously inhibiting the development of supranational forms of regulation and politics. To be sure, the triumph of capitalism has established a truly global economy for the first time in history. But human beings are not designed for an economic system based on the unlimited pursuit of private profit by enterprises competing in a global free market; nor is the planet they inhabit. The system is already undermining the social and environmental foundations of our civilisation. Without radical change, life on Earth will be hell. For many it already is.

New movements of resistance have emerged. However, a major intellectual problem remains to be overcome before this prospect offers more grounds for hope than for despair. For since the demise of the Soviet model, the very notion that there could be life beyond capitalism has been thrown into doubt. At most, conventional wisdom now insists, there are different varieties of capitalist society – more or less profligate, more or less noxious, more or less hierarchical. One of the primary tasks of green socialists is to contest this view and provide reasons to believe that an ecologically sustainable, post-capitalist world is not only desirable, but also possible. And whilst this task calls for academic expertise, it is of far more than academic interest. The self-confidence with which social movements and political formations fight for their values depends critically on the coherence and depth of their beliefs.

I: Foundations

Preamble

The fragmentation of radical politics

Out of the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s came a renewal of utopian thinking, and a re-vitalisation of diverse social and political struggles. New movements emerged, and campaigned on such issues as gender-roles, sexuality, peace and war, race, ethnicity and cultural difference, medicine and health, and, in the context of increasing evidence of environmental destruction, our relation to the natural world. The labour and socialist movements appeared to be in deep trouble by the end of the 1970s, and this was combined with the rise of the new right. In this changed context the 'new' social movements came to play a much more central role in the culture and politics of opposition during the 1980s.

Innumerable aspects of personal frustration, cultural exclusion, and social oppression, hitherto subordinated to the central priorities of class power and economic change, were exposed to view, explored, and resisted. However, no shared vision or coordinated strategy emerged to take radical politics 'beyond the fragments'. Many people on the left do not think that such a shared vision and strategy is either necessary or desirable. However, those of us who have participated in these discussions, through all our differences of political orientation and personal biography, have felt a need for some wider popular movement to challenge the massive concentrations of power which now dominate our world.

The rise of ecological politics

Since the early days of industrialisation in the west there have been successive waves of popular and elite protest at the environmental destruction which it has wrought. Romantics, utopian socialists, environmental health reformers, commons preservationists and many others all played their part in a rich history linking together radical social visions and concern for the fate of the non-human world.

From the 1960s onwards, however, concern about the environment has acquired a new urgency, and is more widely shared than ever before. In earlier phases of industrialisation ecological destruction was more localised, or concentrated in its impact on working class families and neighbourhoods. Today, modern food production pollutes the whole human food chain with additives and residues, whilst replacing a 'green and pleasant land' with a hostile industrialised monoculture. Whole areas of our towns and cities fall into social and environmental decay. Dependence on the private car destroys conviviality in our urban spaces, pollutes the air we breathe, and immobilises the many who are excluded from the car-owning 'democracy'. The sheer scale of global economic activity, together with the more insidious forms of environmental threat implicit in new chemical, nuclear and biological technologies, combine with these more localised processes to produce an intertwined web of environmental threats which no group, however wealthy or privileged, can hope to avoid.

These changes have called forth environmental and green social movements whose public appeal is unprecedented. In Britain alone it is estimated that more than four million people belong to environmental organisations. It is true that some of these seek to preserve the life-styles of a privileged few, whilst others are content to support quick fixes which temporarily patch up the existing system. But there are many more among

the new environmental activists who see ecological destruction as the symptom of a whole way of organising social life which exploits and destroys whatever it touches – human and non-human alike. For these new social movements ecological destruction provides the starting point for a qualitatively new vision of how humans should live together with each other and with the planet.

Grounds for hope: beyond the fragments

Although many campaigns and struggles have been fought out on a single-issue basis, it is important to recognise that there are also many examples of widely different groups making common cause over important objectives (the recent coalition to fight the Criminal Justice Bill/Act is an example of this). Activists often shift in the course of time between different movements, and there are many shared sympathies and common experiences.

One source of hope has been the rise to prominence in some countries of political groupings which have brought together activists from the environmental, women's and peace movements, as well as many individuals disillusioned with the mainstream parties. Of these groupings, it was perhaps the German Green Party which initially did most to fire imagination and rekindle hope for the possibility of a radically new way of living. But green politics has, like the politics of the socialist left, been so far unable to resolve two persistent difficulties of radical politics. First, how is it possible to compete effectively in the existing political system whilst remaining true in policy and practice to a radical vision? Second, how can a rich and diverse oppositional culture and practice be held together without damaging splits, conflicts and rivalries?

Opportunities and dangers

For all the demoralising defeats of the last decade and a half, there are nevertheless strong grounds for hope. The collapse of the state bureaucracies of eastern Europe did not signal the 'end of history'. The shock therapy of market reform has generated resistance, the outcome of which remains uncertain. Meanwhile, in the west, prolonged recession, persistently high levels of unemployment, social disintegration, rising levels of crime and the dismantling of public services have led to widespread disillusionment with the programmes of the new right. Science and technology, once widely seen as liberating forces, are now perceived by many to be threatening and inhuman. The manifest danger in all of this, of course, is that, in the absence of a confident and plausible popular movement of the left, the extreme right will continue to make gains with its promise of social discipline and national security. This gives redoubled urgency to our project.

Oppositional culture and politics have many sources: socialist and working class movements; feminism and movements of sexual liberation; anti-racism and the self-organisation of ethnic minorities; and the green movement in various forms. For many women on the left, feminism has been their main source of insights and energy for rethinking left politics. What has come to be called 'green politics' – encompassing much more than the politics of protecting the natural environment – has drawn on, or arrived at, many of the same themes as feminism regarding, for instance, the break-up of existing economic and political hierarchies and the need for new participatory forms of democracy both as ends and as means.

Moreover, as far as comprehensive political programmes and parties are concerned – in Europe at any rate – it is green or red politics, or more usually a convergence of the two, that has provided the ideological framework for new left thinking. And both of these

political focal points have been significantly influenced, indeed in recent years shaped by, feminism.

In Britain, however, red and green movements are both internally fragmented and divided from one another. Independently of one another they have both so far failed to provide either the visions or the organisational forms to enable or give direction to that great mass of people who are deeply disaffected from 'politics as usual'.

The need for dialogue

But even in this we can find some crumbs of comfort. None but the most unthinking dogmatists can now believe that any of the existing radical traditions, unaided and unreformed, has all the answers. Both red and green politics are in poor enough shape to recognise the need for critical self-renewal, for dialogue and collaboration. We know that this process is going on in numerous other networks and groupings, and we offer what follows as a contribution to this wider process which we hope will result in a renewed, revitalised, broadly based and diverse popular movement of the green left.

Red and green: a creative tension

We start with a review of the 'common ground' between red and green. This is necessary if we are to be convinced of the value of the dialogue itself. We then go on to analyse sources of suspicion and mistrust between the two groups of traditions. These are obstacles to dialogue and cooperation, and we need to know how much of this bad blood is due to misunderstanding and misrepresentations, and how much to real differences of analysis and values. It is only at this point that our work of renewal seriously begins.

We have hoped, and, in general, we have discovered, that a mutual exploration of differences leads to a deepening of understanding. Everyone has learned by the process, and what has emerged is a shared agenda for further exploration and policy development. This does not mean that differences have been overcome, but, rather, that they have come to be seen as what they are: as continuing sources of creative tension, and as desirable, permanent features of any genuinely emancipatory social project.

Common ground

At the outset, it is necessary to recognise the great diversity within both red and green traditions. Already, for example, some socialists will have more in common with some greens than they do with rival socialist traditions. So, what follows necessarily draws selectively from within both red and green politics in our search for common themes and values.

Against a profit-oriented society

Reds and greens object to many of the same aspects and consequences of existing societies. Both object to a society governed mainly by monetary calculation and profit maximisation. For both traditions, this puts greed and profit above people and their needs. People are subject to exploitation, and estranged from one another as community solidarities are destroyed and shared identities are undermined. Commercial priorities and concentrations of wealth and power also lead to the destruction of local, regional and global environments.

A radically different type of society is needed

Both reds and radical greens understand these processes as interrelated aspects of whole

ways of life, and are inclined to see a need for a qualitative break with existing social systems. Both are committed to some vision of a future way of life radically different from the present.

Not a national but a local and global focus

Often for quite different reasons, neither reds nor greens are content to focus political action at the level of the nation-state. Both have a vision of participatory democracy such that grass-roots local action is seen as being of vital importance, whilst at the same time the global reach of the issues they address demands international coordination and solidarity.

Core values

Underlying each of the above commonalities are a few core value-perspectives: a commitment to the intrinsic worth of humans as ends in themselves, not means; an understanding of the importance of the environment to human well-being; a positive valuation of communal solidarity; the right of people to be actively involved in the shaping of their own lives; and, finally, a commitment to human equality and against all forms of oppression, whether based on class, ethnicity, gender or any other line of social division.

Divergences

Green objections to socialism

Greens have often been opposed to socialism because they have identified it exclusively with either the statist socialism of eastern Europe and elsewhere, or with Labourist social-democratic politics in the western liberal democracies. The former model has been dismissed on green principles as hierarchical, centralist, non-participatory, and as a form of 'productivism' or 'industrialism' at least as environmentally destructive as western capitalism. Social-democratic socialism has been rejected as a prime culprit in stoking up economic growth and ecologically unsustainable consumerism in the name of higher living standards for workers. Where environmentally damaging development is proposed, trade unions have put jobs and wages before the environment.

For many greens, the dynamics of industrialism are reckoned to be at the heart of ecological destruction: the socialist debate about whether capitalists or the state run the system is considered an irrelevance. Science and technology, which many socialists have praised as freeing people from ignorance and drudgery, are seen as reductionist, dehumanising and elitist. In addition, socialist concern with the material living standards of workers is seen by many greens as neglecting the importance of spiritual and cultural questions, and sidelining the problems of other disadvantaged and oppressed groups in society.

Red suspicions of environmentalism

Some socialists have been opposed to greens because they feel that in a conflict between jobs and living standards, on the one hand, and the environment, on the other, it is human well-being that should be put first: greens have the wrong priorities, and, in some cases, are deeply anti-human in their approach. For many socialists, these green priorities derive from the middle-class, relatively privileged social position of the greens. Environmental concern, it is argued, is a 'quality of life' issue which only becomes important to you when you have enough to eat, a roof over your head, and basic security for the future. While millions in the west, let alone the absolute majority of the global

population, lack these basics, surely it is a callous distraction to divert resources to environmental protection?

The widespread green tendency to talk of a universal human interest in environmental sustainability is seen by many socialists as yet another mystification. It disguises the fact that powerful economic and political interests are at work in environmental destruction, and will resist attempts to stop them. It also distracts attention from the fact that environmental harm is not suffered equally by all, either within individual countries, or globally. Class division and the existence of a global capitalist economic (dis)order are hidden from view by green talk of universal human interests, and of industrialism rather than capitalism. Many socialists would also charge greens with utopianism in that their vision of the future is not linked to the action of any clear collective agency (such as the working class) in bringing it about.

Finally, the greens' tendency to idealise 'nature' can easily play into the hands of a backward-looking cultural conservatism.

Towards a meeting of minds?

The aim of our dialogue is not to find some 'lowest common denominator'. Instead, we hope to develop a creative exchange which will renew and revitalise both red and green approaches.

Anthropocentrism and ecocentrism: both needed

Most socialists and greens affirm the intrinsic value of human beings and the importance of their welfare. However, there are disagreements over the moral status of the non-human world. These disagreements are often represented by the labels 'ecocentrism' and 'anthropocentrism'. Ecocentrics recognise intrinsic value not only in human individuals and communities but also in animals, plants, ecosystems and landscapes. This new moral vision has a good claim to represent what is distinctive in the green movement, and it has provided much of the energy behind the current direct action campaigns against live animal exports, the road-building programme, the nuclear industry and other issues. For the ecocentrics, any emancipatory project must aim at the flourishing of both human and non-human nature, as interconnected aspects of a single whole. Ecocentrics reject anthropocentrism as the dominant western value-system, because it recognises only humans as intrinsically valuable: the rest of nature has value only to the extent that it serves human interests. In general, ecocentrics accuse anthropocentrics of having an 'instrumental' relationship to nature.

Socialists and others on the left have been rightly alarmed by some expressions of ecocentric beliefs. Some of these have been deeply anti-human, such as the much-publicised statements, apparently welcoming the AIDS epidemic, attributed to the US 'Earth First!' group in its early days. Also some versions of ecocentric 'deep ecology' are committed to regenerating forms of religious worship which many on the left would reject as reactionary and irrational. However, the relationships between philosophical beliefs and practical politics are often very complicated. In fact, the most influential statements of deep ecology and ecocentrism have rejected anti-humanism. In their opposition to profit-driven destructive 'development', many ecocentrics have much in common with ecologically oriented socialists.

Just as ecocentric beliefs may be used to justify a variety of different practical policies, so anthropocentrism comes in several different varieties. At one extreme are those

approaches to ‘development’ in which nature is recklessly exploited to serve immediate human purposes. But, as it has increasingly become accepted by those in power that the world’s resources and its capacity to absorb pollutants are finite, this has given rise to active attempts to manage resources and control pollution. This is a more sober and far-sighted approach to nature, but it is still a form of anthropocentrism.

Many thinkers on the left, especially among the so-called ‘utopian’ socialists, have gone well beyond this view. They have recognised that the environment is not merely a resource for human production and a sink for its wastes. It also provides us with things which cannot be measured, and in ways which we do not wholly understand. To be fully human we need an aesthetic and spiritual relationship with the non-human world which is both challenging and rewarding. This deeper interpretation of ‘sustainability’ demands that we nurture and develop that relationship and guarantee our descendants the opportunity to do the same.

Some ecocentrics would see even this as anthropocentric: it still derives its concern for non-human nature from its commitment to a vision of human fulfilment. However we think it is more helpful to see this development of a green socialism as a meeting point between anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives. When green socialists point out that humans need an aesthetic and spiritual relationship with nature, this implies that they value and respect it for what it is. This cannot be criticised as an ‘instrumental’ attitude to nature, and it is difficult to see that it is significantly different from the ecocentrics’ recognition of ‘intrinsic’ value in nature.

The authors of this document do not seek to choose between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, not least because their policy consequences are not necessarily different. If we are to fulfil all our obligations to future generations, anthropocentrism will have to adopt attitudes to non-human nature more characteristic of ecocentrism. If ‘deep greens’ are to avoid the pitfalls of misanthropy and ecological authoritarianism, they must accept that the moral claims of human beings are at least equal to those of the environment. On that basis we can agree on the importance and the practicalities of environmental conservation and sustainability, whilst disagreeing about the precise moral justification for that project.

Social justice and environmental degradation: the links

Some in the green movement are so convinced of the imminence of ecological catastrophe that they are prepared to give it priority over all other issues – possibly at the expense of social justice, liberty and democracy. We do not accept this view for two reasons

One is that social inequalities and oppression are among the causes of ecological degradation. For example:

- in some parts of the underdeveloped world poverty is a cause of people over-exploiting fragile environments;
- the domination of the world economy by the interests of a small number of economically advanced countries, and by transnational companies, is clearly linked with the degradation of the global environment;
- the oppression of women is a third such link. Women, especially in the poorer countries, suffer more directly than men from the effects of environmental destruction, yet have far less influence on policy making. Women may be forced to

increase their unpaid work to compensate for ecological damage, partially masking its effects on the population;

- the lack of civil liberties was among the causes of environmental destruction in eastern Europe; and
- in the ‘advanced’ capitalist countries, competition for ‘positional goods’ – goods that can be enjoyed only to the extent that other people do not have them – is one of the engines of consumerism.

Considerations of social justice across the generations, too, demand that we, the present generation, do not ruin the conditions of life for our descendants. In all these different ways, social and ecological issues are inseparably mixed up, and have to be addressed together.

The second reason why we favour linking together social and environmental issues is that we do not support ‘survival at all costs’. As a matter of principle, environmental problems should not be ‘solved’ (even if this were possible) by off-loading their costs onto the poor, or by authoritarian imposition. We wish to see a society which is free, fair and democratic, as well as sustainable.

The state versus decentralisation: small-scale democratic communities and collective decision-making

We accept the argument of many radical greens that small-scale local communities with democratic decision-making powers would be likely to behave responsibly in relation to their local environments. Ecological sustainability and participatory democracy both point in the direction of a decentralisation of power. However, questions of social justice in access to resources, individual and group liberties, as well as the geographical spread of ecological problems, all indicate the necessity of centres of decision-making, coordination and rule-enforcement across and between communities, up to and including the global scale.

It would therefore still be necessary to address the problem of maintaining democratic accountability at these wider levels of decision-making and enforcement. Global and local sustainability and social justice will continue to be central objectives in any future society. This means that, contrary to some socialist and anarchist visions, collective decision-making institutions will still be needed to regulate our impact on the environment and ensure fair distribution of goods.

Universal principles and respect for diversity

Many greens and other adherents of new social movements claim that both liberalism and socialism advocate and impose universal principles in a way which fails to respect diversity, whether this takes the form of ethnic, gender, religious or cultural difference. We do not accept that equality of access to resources, equal political rights and equality of respect are incompatible with respect for diversity. On the contrary, they are necessary conditions for diversity to flourish.

Our guiding principle would be: all differences are to be welcomed except where they threaten the equal rights of others to liberty of expression and self-respect. Of course, it is true that conflicts can always arise between universal principles and some particular cultural practices – for example, universalistic public education, versus demands by some religious groups for segregation. There are no easy solutions to such complex problems. They need to be worked through, on the basis of principle, in a way which

does not discriminate between groups.

The working class and new social movements

Much is made of the end of class politics and the rise of diverse social movements as an aspect of our post-modern condition. In our view this is a false opposition. Many social movement issues such as equal opportunities, the rights of sexual minorities, and anti-racism have been taken up within and by trade unions and the wider labour movement. At the same time many social movement activists have backgrounds in the labour movement, and would see no conflict between their work within the labour movement and in the wider society. So far as environmental issues are concerned, there have been many advances in the greening of trade unions in recent years, whilst traditional union concerns such as health and safety at work are themselves a crucial part of environmental politics.

It is important to recognise, however, that many of the concerns of the newer social movements lie outside the labour process – they often focus on the needs of groups who have been either excluded from the labour process (e.g. black people in metropolitan countries) or groups such as travellers, New Agers, and other late twentieth-century counter culturalists who have rejected wage labour. There may, therefore, be a tension between those who reject life within the existing labour process and those who seek to enter it or transform it. And of course, as we note later, historically there have been many sources of social inequality that cannot be reduced to socio-economic class, even though they are shaped by it, and most of these continue to resonate in the present.

Capitalism, sustainability and the future society

Many greens believe that the basic cause of environmental destruction and social injustice is industrialism, the ideology of which has been embraced equally by both capitalism and socialism. Against this we would make two points: first, that people had already caused serious environmental destruction before the age of industrialism began; second, and of the greatest importance, we believe that the primary problem in the world is precisely the unregulated, expansionary and profit-oriented character of modern international capitalism.

Some efforts are now being made, through consumer pressure, scientific monitoring and modelling, technological innovation, fiscal measures, state regulation and international agreements to control private capital's impact on the environment. Unfortunately, these well-meaning efforts are undermined by such factors as the influence of economic interests within the state, the relatively weak powers of consumers, the international mobility of capital, and the search for inward investment on the part of many poor (and not so poor) countries.

In the long-run, it seems deeply implausible that such reforms will stave off growing environmental destruction and human suffering on a global scale. In fact, environmental controls from above could well be used to justify increasingly authoritarian regimes and global militarisation.

To resist such developments as these, there is a desperate need to create new visions of a future, alternative society and new forms of social, economic and political organisation which would:

- orient social and economic activity to the meeting of present and future human

needs in ways which also enable the flourishing of non-human nature;

- give priority to meeting the housing, health, nutritional and developmental (nurturing, learning etc.) needs of all, on the basis of sharing by men and women of equal rights and responsibilities;
- democratise control over what is produced, how it is produced and how the product is disposed of;
- oppose all hierarchies of power, culturally imposed roles and identities, and ways of dividing up socially necessary work which unjustly exclude or oppress women, people with disabilities, racial, ethnic, cultural or religious minorities;
- preserve and extend individual liberties in such areas as sexual orientation, cultural difference, religious belief and ethnic identity;
- create opportunities for individuals and groups to seek their fulfilment in life in ways not defined by consumer capitalism or imposed by a political elite.

These are, of course, very broad principles. They do not even begin the crucial job of sketching out the kinds of institutional framework which would be needed to carry them out in practice. For this, we offer some ideas in later sections and seek a more broadly-based dialogue among the many currents of radical and progressive thinking.

II: Elaborations and themes

Humanity and nature

Despite great changes which have occurred over historical time, and the important differences between human cultures, there remain certain features which all humans share: birth and death, prolonged and dependent infancy, sexual difference, and dependence on non-human nature for meeting our most basic as well as some of our most distinctive needs. Emotionally, intellectually and physically, humans are shaped by culture, but they are not infinitely malleable. We are aiming for forms of social organisation which encourage the best in human nature to flourish. At the same time we recognise that human antagonisms, destructiveness, and selfishness are unlikely to be eliminated in any future society; they must be faced, and ways found to channel or contain them.

There are certainly differences between humans and non-human animals. At the individual level, this is probably seen most clearly in the fact that we humans can conceive of the future, and of our death. Socially it is probably most evident at the level of culture and of human-made artefacts leading to massive environmental impact, for good and ill. None of this, logically or ethically, licences humans to treat either inanimate nature or the rest of the animal world just as they please. The spiritual nourishment we receive from nature helps form our sense of self and our place in the universe. It also helps us to attend to the difference between quality of life and materially defined standard of living.

Culturally and historically humans have used the natural world to their own ends, though with more or less respect and with more or less devastating consequences. Modern capitalism and state socialism have, in recent decades, transformed humanity's relationship to nature both qualitatively and quantitatively. New technologies, developed and applied for purposes of profit, growth, exploitation and military domination, have devastated local environments for many tens of millions of the world's poor, and are transforming the global environment with potentially catastrophic consequences for all humans and other life forms.

In gathering together to resist these changes, diverse social movements and organisations are beginning to show that our relationship to the non-human world can be self-consciously and politically regulated. How exactly this can be achieved, for the benefit of both human and non-human nature, is only now beginning to be addressed. What is clear, however, is that it must involve some degree of economic and social planning. As green socialists we are committed to practices of empowerment and participation in planning, as opposed to authoritarian imposition from above. In the process of moving towards these we believe that human motivation, behaviour and perceptions of need will evolve.

Human needs

Green socialists cannot be satisfied with an idea of human needs confined to biological survival. Individuals also have a range of needs associated with the ability to be autonomous, sometimes thought of as higher needs, notably the development of their aesthetic, moral, intellectual and practical capacities. All such needs are a precondition for any conception of the good life. Achieving these is a matter not only of physical requirements like clean air and water but also, for instance, of emotional security and education. How these needs are met is culturally and socially variable but this does not detract from their universal nature. What is clear is that the conditions for meeting some or all of these needs are lacking in many parts of the world.

The conditions for meeting universalisable human needs will require the provision of increased material resources to poorer countries. To do this in an ecologically sustainable way will require a reduction in the use of the earth's resources, which will in turn require a change in the way that needs are seen under capitalism as being only satisfiable by the purchasing of commodities. Much more work is clearly needed on the political implications of the widespread changes in values and socio-economic organisation this requires in the richer countries.

Politics, inequality and sustainability

Our concept of 'politics' is much wider than what goes by that name in contemporary capitalist society – a peculiarly narrow notion which works to keep people powerless. The exclusion of all but parties and parliaments from the sphere of politics, conventionally understood, hides the fact that wherever people seek to make or influence rules and decisions that regulate their lives, they are acting politically and developing the expertise to do so. The feminist slogan 'the personal is political' was an early recognition of the need to redefine and reappropriate the notion of the political.

While all social formations evolve and change, there is no guarantee that this will be in a positive direction. But nor, for that matter, is it certain that it will be in a negative direction (otherwise we might as well not be involved in this project!). The political implication of this is that people can consciously take part in constructing their own future, though there is no guarantee that they will succeed and the future when/if it comes will have been shaped by far more than the conscious will of people.

The current global form of capital accumulation is highly unstable, both economically and ecologically. It is subject to continuing crises that are likely to get worse and which provide a space for other forms of social organisation. Green socialists should be trying to prefigure these and to contribute to structuring them. Our project is to unite with as many people as possible in constructing social formations that will meet human needs in a way respectful of the ecological bases of human life.

Equality is likely to be a necessary condition for sustainability. Material inequality is itself a source of environmental destruction, in that both poverty and the attempt to overcome it through capitalist development are destructive. However, as a matter of political principle we are in any case equally committed to both equality and sustainability. Without equality between people, within and between societies, environmental 'bads' will continue to be off-loaded onto those with less power.

All known social formations involve relations of domination by relatively privileged groups, resulting in systematic inequalities in the distribution of income, work, and social esteem. Historically, the main bases of oppression have been class; gender; citizenship; race, caste and ethnicity; sexuality; disability; and age. How salient these are and how much weight they carry depends on the particular community. In most communities, social divisions are complex. They don't coincide with each other in a simple way. Although it is common for significant numbers of people to be multiply oppressed, no single pattern of social inequality, cultural identity or distributive conflict dominates the rest. But they are all nevertheless connected, in ways that are structured by the prevailing social formation. The political implication of this is that while there is no simple identity of interests between people from different groups, inequality of some sort is an issue that affects everyone.

Decisions about how to arrive at sustainability are only likely to be successful in the long run if there is full consensual participation in making them. Even to define exactly what we mean by sustainability requires a social process of debate and discussion in which conflicts of interest (and indeed vested interests) can be openly and publicly scrutinised. In any case, green socialists are opposed as a matter of principle to sustainable solutions being arrived at through authoritarian imposition.

A red-green politics must develop the idea of cultural pluralism, but within a notion of common citizenship. What constitutes common citizenship will be always be contested, but there are some basic rights and freedoms which have become part of the definition of citizenship in democratic societies and must not be abandoned. Law, however, is only a reflection of this and, in use, is a very blunt instrument. Winning consent to the inclusion of these rights and freedoms in the definition of citizenship will be a continuing process of negotiation, discussion and argument. The institutional arrangements for doing this are highly unsatisfactory at the moment, with major groups in society being effectively excluded from involvement in law and policy making. This results in marginalisation, alienation, lack of consent and unworkable laws. A red-green perspective will have to pay serious attention to the kinds of institutional structures required to address these issues.

The claim by western capitalist democracies to have established a universal perspective on definitions of human rights, the need for personal autonomy and relations with the natural world, can easily slip into and/or be seen as cultural imperialism or forms of male domination. But this does not mean that universal principles of rights and freedom of any kind should be abandoned. Rather we must, in developing these ideas, ensure that we enter into dialogue on equal terms with people from as many different groups and backgrounds, with different perspectives and experiences, as we can possibly reach.

Science and technology

We reject views of scientific and technological innovation as either quasi-divine or quasi-demonic forces: they are distinctively human social activities, developing partly in the service of social, economic and political interests, partly through their own internal dynamics of question, answer, and further question.

Creating a just and sustainable replacement for global capitalism will surely require decades. Over such a period of time, scientific research and technological innovation are likely to proceed apace. This will create new dangers, but also new opportunities, for those working against oppression and exploitation. There are sure to be discoveries and new technologies we cannot predict, but some areas where profound change is almost certain can be identified. The two most obvious of these are information technology and biotechnology. These are briefly discussed here as examples of the complex political issues science and technology raise.

In the information sector, the merging of communication, broadcasting and computer technologies is already underway. Some of the dangers are obvious: surveillance has already become a part of daily life in the great Temples of Mammon (shopping malls) of our cities. Within a few years, advances in artificial intelligence will make it possible to automate the identification of individuals on surveillance videos and the monitoring of telephone conversations. Government and big business will be able to gather, store, and use ever greater quantities of information about their subjects, workers and customers. The propaganda power of broadcasters may be further enhanced. A growing divide between the 'information rich' and the 'information poor' may exacerbate existing inequalities.

On the other hand, new information technologies do make it possible for individuals and groups outside the centres of power to gain access to far more information than has hitherto been feasible, and to exchange ideas and coordinate action at long distance. Organisations such as GreenNet in Britain, and the international federation of which it is a part, the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), are already active in this way. The Internet, the global network of computers through which millions of people work, play and argue with each other, is itself a social phenomenon of great interest: decentralised, outside the control of governments and companies, maintained to a large extent by voluntary and cooperative work by its users. It is also, at present, largely a toy of the privileged.

The choices for red-greens are to oppose information technology root and branch, to use it in a marginal fashion, or to attempt to steer it in egalitarian and democratic directions. We favour the last of these choices while also stressing the urgency of continuing to expose and oppose its oppressive manifestations.

Two scientific developments closely associated with the advance of information technology are also worth attention. The first is the increasing availability of environmental data, and the ability to analyse it. Early warning of developments such as changes in atmospheric composition, weather, and vegetation patterns will be vital if we are to mitigate the worst effects of industry and intensive agriculture. (Although many greens reject modern science and technology root and branch as the cause of our environmental ills, science and technology have played a key part in showing that there is an environmental crisis in the first place.) The second is the growing interest in studying and modelling complex systems which cannot be understood reductively: organisms, ecosystems and human societies among others.

Biotechnology perhaps presents even greater dangers, and fewer opportunities. Leaving aside the worst nightmares, such as the accidental or deliberate unleashing of bioengineered plagues, it threatens to concentrate power and wealth even further in the hands of large companies in the agribusiness and pharmaceutical areas, particularly at the expense of small farmers and traditional medical practitioners. Plant varieties and traditional knowledge are being appropriated by the agents of transnational companies, modified, and then patented, forcing members of cultures where most of the real research was done to buy them at extortionate cost.

The human genome project, while it may produce medical benefits, threatens to make discrimination on the grounds of 'bad genes' possible and to enhance governments' ability to keep tabs on us. It is also widely resented by the members of the small and often threatened ethnic groups whose genetic material scientists particularly prize. Members of such groups have objected to being treated as raw material for genetic studies rather than as human beings with a right to preserve and develop their ways of life as they choose.

Divisions I: International

The current situation in the world is one in which a handful of countries use the lion's share of the world's resources, with gross international disparities in consumption levels and living standards. In the global capitalist system trans-national firms, nation states, and regions are involved in an endless competitive struggle to survive and thrive, and this has been intensified in the present epoch by the continuing integration of the world economy, the collapse of state socialism in the east, and aggressive deregulation in the west. Once established, international disparities in power and competitive strength tend to reproduce themselves. The countries with the biggest share of world output, trade, consumption, and resource use are, in general, the same today as they were fifty years ago.

Nevertheless, there have been important changes in the global economy since the Second World War. The hegemony of the United States has given way to trilateral rivalry between North America, the European Union and East Asia – with the USA, Germany and Japan having emerged as the dominant nations. The strategic importance of oil has altered the balance of power between the advanced capitalist states and the underdeveloped oil-producing countries, particularly in the Gulf. In South East Asia, powerful new sources of competition have emerged. Since the 1960s the four ‘tigers’ – Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea – have experienced spectacular rates of export-led growth which have resulted in material living standards broadly comparable with those in the west. More recently, a number of other Asian and Pacific Rim countries have embarked on a similar process of trade-oriented capitalist industrialisation. China, in particular, once described as ‘the sleeping giant’, is rapidly emerging as an active player, with one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

At the other end of the scale, the majority of African and Latin American countries went backwards in the 1980s, with the label ‘developing country’ having become a sick joke as international indebtedness rose and investment and living standards declined. The historically evolved position of these countries in the international division of labour renders them vulnerable to fluctuations in world trade, primary commodity prices and financial markets. Internal factors such as powerful local elites, authoritarian governments, endemic corruption and civil wars have also been important contributory factors. These underlying problems were intensified in the 1980s by the ‘structural adjustment’ policies imposed by the IMF and the World Bank as a condition for financial assistance to deal with mounting international indebtedness. These policies are designed to promote privatisation and deregulation and to open up the economy to greater internal and international competition. They have had the effect of widening income inequalities, reversing previous improvements in health and education, damaging rather than enhancing the performance of the national economy, and degrading local environments.

Thus, within the ‘third world’ there is a combination of rampant industrialisation and abject immiserisation. Although the north talks about greater democracy in the south, it asserts and attempts to maintain its global dominance through the IMF, the World Bank and GATT, seeking to open up the south to greater competition and exploitation, while resorting to protectionism itself where this suits it. This pattern is neither socially just nor ecologically sound. The effect of these international relations of exploitation and dominance, together with the associated ideology of racism and its divisive and debilitating effect on all the peoples of the world, is to create a demand in poorer countries for the sorts of priorities and policies which, in the richer nations, have already done enormous damage to the environment.

Global equality cannot be achieved unless levels of resource use in rich countries are reduced. But this does not have to imply a reduction in the quality of life; indeed it would be compatible with an increase in the satisfaction of both basic and higher human needs if the logic of production were shifted away from its present capitalist, waste generating, forms of commodity production and international trade towards a more consciously, socially planned system of production and international exchange. The problem for green socialists is to work out which forms of international interdependence contribute to human well being and which do not. While increased self-sufficiency for all countries should be an aim, autarchy should not. We need to create forms of international interdependence which replace domination, rivalry and growthism by reciprocity, cooperation and sustainability.

The ‘overdeveloped’ world, and its globalising economic, cultural and political institutions,

is the major cause of the problems – human and environmental – of the ‘developing’ world. Aid from the richer countries, given without strings, geared to the requirements of the poor and under their democratic control, will be necessary to redress this imbalance. However, the most significant help the rich nations can give is to put an end to the monstrous global arrangements which currently transfer wealth and resources from the poor to the already rich on a massive scale, at the same time as they distort the priorities and ruin the environment of the poorest countries. International solutions are crucial to global inequality and this implies the need for new international organisations. Contemporary institutions such as the World Bank and even the United Nations serve primarily to maintain existing relations of global inequality. Whilst some of these may be amenable to reform from below some clearly have to be attacked head on with a view to their eventual replacement.

Many questions exist with regard to the organisation of global equality, in particular the issue of which political functions have to be carried out at which level. What is clear is that this cannot be decided by discussions which take place solely within a ‘developed’ world context.

Divisions II: ‘Race’ and ethnicity

Like many other bases for social inequality racism long predates the emergence of capitalism. But the social relations of capitalism have exploited latent ethnic divisions, incorporating, developing and racialising them on a global and local scale with a thoroughness far beyond any previous mode of production. Whilst it is true that we increasingly live in a global and multi-cultural universe, wherever you look – Los Angeles, Birmingham or Rwanda – people are oppressed or excluded by racist priorities and institutions.

The progressive destruction rather than development of the economies of most of the south raises the prospect of mass migration and the attempt by those in the north to police their frontiers in order to keep out the victims of their so-called development policies. Meanwhile those other beneficiaries of western economic wisdom, the former communist countries of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, hover on the brink of third world status. As a consequence we can envisage that the three emerging global power blocs – North America, the European Union and East Asia – will increasingly resemble fortresses within which supra-national communities seek defence from the displaced migrants of the devastated regions which surround them.

Within the nations constituting the new power blocs the flexibilisation of production is leading to the creation of a pronounced ‘underclass’ of semi-citizens who are almost permanently excluded from labour markets or engaged in them on the most insecure and super-exploited basis. The same Africans, Latinos, Bangladeshis, Turks, Slavs who face the impenetrable frontier controls at the boundaries of the new blocs also constitute the core of the new underclass in the countries which comprise these blocs. We see therefore a direct link between the struggle for racial equality within the state and the struggle for global racial equality between the ‘white’ north and the ‘black’ south.

Racism is a powerful and pernicious organising force for inequality and oppression. It contributes to the social tensions that make for ecological and environmental degradation. The struggle against racism must be central to any green socialist perspective.

Divisions III: Gender

Gender is a social construction which is built upon a biological difference, exaggerating and

oversimplifying it in the process. In many, if not all, societies, dimensions of gender, identity and sexuality are dichotomised as if they were determined by biological sex differences.

These supposedly natural differences are used to justify the oppression of women in its many forms. All known societies, past and present, have had a gendered division of labour. As a result of the way the division of the public and private spheres has been structured, the gendered division of labour is oppressive to women. On various pretexts women's citizenship is restricted, they have limited and conditional access to positions of power and, when employed, are paid on average considerably less than men. The unpaid work they do, including their economically and socially vital reproductive work, is unacknowledged as work and its compulsory nature is denied. In the private sphere, they are subjected to male domination, often enforced by violence, which is sometimes tacitly accepted or even actually legitimised by widely publicised legal judgements.

Like all oppressions, the oppression of women conflicts with the green socialist principles of equality of citizenship and meeting universalisable human needs. In addition, the 'masculinist' ideology used to justify it sees power as inevitably about dominating, controlling and using others. There are parallels – many ecofeminists would claim there is a causal relationship – between the way this ideology shapes relations between humans on the one hand, and relations between humans and the non-human world on the other.

Although men (as things are) have a material interest in maintaining male privilege, there are respects in which they are damaged by patriarchy and can be enlisted as allies against it. Most obviously, the treatment of men as unimportant and disposable in war and some forms of dangerous paid work is linked to and parallels the treatment of women as objects. Men's role in the private sphere has costs as well as benefits for them, and the culture of male domination keeps men as well as women in thrall to narrow, politically and personally limiting ideas of appropriate behaviour.

Women's structurally distinct role in the relations of reproduction, production and consumption has a significant effect on the forms taken by population growth, subsistence agriculture and domestic labour. Gender must be a central category for green socialist planning, which will challenge all notions of the sexual division of labour as 'natural', and undermine the rigid distinction between 'public' and 'private' spheres.

With its principle of treating all human beings with respect as having inherent value, green socialism implies an implacable hostility to the oppression of women.

Divisions IV: Class

Race and gender interact with other social divisions, notably those associated with socio-economic class. Class divisions are central to capitalist economies, which constantly reproduce them, both on a global scale and within nations. Unsurprisingly, therefore, despite the undoubted decline (in industrialised capitalist countries) of traditional forms of class consciousness, class inequalities have not diminished. Indeed, in Britain and the United States the distribution of income has become less not more equal in recent years.

The dominant ideology at the moment defines social class differences as differences in levels of consumption, rather than in economic and social power, with the way forward being presented as upward social mobility. Conservatism offers this individually. Social democracy has traditionally offered it collectively. Despite this difference, both conceive the overcoming of social class divisions in terms of higher levels of consumption and economic growth rather than in terms of changed social relations.

Equality of access to resources and power is a fundamental principle. However, resources have to be seen as more than material goods. We need to explore ways of shaping resistance to inequality, oppression and exploitation around the organising principles of a new concept of human need based on quality of life, participatory democracy and global sustainability.

Conclusion

In order to change global society in a green socialist direction we need to build alliances with groups seeking various kinds of equality, of which only some of the most obvious have been discussed above. This means we must act in ways that promote the empowerment of people and enable them to change the social relations that disempower them. We are concerned to build societies that meet human needs sustainably, in a way which takes care of the needs of present and future generations of both human and non-human beings.

Such societies will have to be democratic. We recognise that democracy cannot be understood as operating just at the point at which a decision is made but needs to apply to the whole process of arriving at and implementing decisions. Above all, green socialists need to find ways in which people who disagree about what it is good to be, to do, or to have, can reach higher order agreement about the terms on which they are willing to live together on the same planet.

III: Principles of political and economic organisation

We have seen how contemporary globalising capitalism generates and reinforces inequalities between regions of the world, between rich and poor within each country, between ‘racialised’ social groups, and between men and women. We have seen how global military and economic institutions combine these social evils with massive and escalating destruction of planetary ‘life-support’ systems.

Currently the most influential ‘establishment’ approaches to environmental sustainability see the main problem in terms of too little capitalism: environmental ‘goods’ such as material resources, clean air and water, and a beautiful countryside are being destroyed because they are treated as ‘free’ goods. For such environmental reformers, the answer is to put a market price on these goods by either privatising them, or using taxation as a way of building their cost into the decision-making of capitalist firms.

As we have seen with the recent battle over VAT on fuel, these methods usually dump the cost of capitalist environmental destruction on the poor and needy. But they are also objectionable for other reasons. They imply that all value is equivalent to money value, and so remove environmental issues from the sphere of public democratic decision-making, leaving them, instead, to the vagaries of market forces.

But, even more importantly, they scratch at the symptoms, while preserving the real causes of the problem. Modern capitalism is an inherently expansionist system, beyond the reach of regulation by nation states, in which the continued pursuit of profit rests on two pillars. The first is consumerism: the ideology that human happiness depends absolutely and exclusively on the consumption of commodities. The second is the mobilisation of scientific research and technological innovation in the service of commodity production. Both these pillars of contemporary capitalism are profoundly destructive of ecosystems on a global scale.

If this diagnosis is right, any hope there is for a future in which global environments are preserved and restored, and in which human needs are sustainably met, will depend on resisting, overcoming, and creating alternatives to the capitalist domination of economic, social and biological life. It is our belief that this requires three kinds of political strategy:

- anti-capitalist and anti-productivist struggles linking producers, consumers and communities at local, regional, national and global levels;
- the thorough-going expansion of the scope and depth of democracy in both state and civil society; and
- the continued creation and extension of non-capitalist economic, social and cultural forms.

Sections IV and V below deal with issues of transition. What follows in this section is an attempt to put some flesh on the bare bones of the principles of a future social organisation. As will become clear, it is not just a matter of democratising the existing institutions of capitalist society. A series of qualitative transformations is required. We recognise that the framework we develop is both controversial and open-ended, posing more questions than it answers. The intention is to put down some markers to stimulate thought, enquiry, debate and experiment – we do not pretend to provide an ‘authoritative’ solution.

Democracy, participation and representation

We recognise the need to develop a much more differentiated, multi-layered conception of democracy than has so far been achieved in liberal-democratic practice. It must be based on a recognition of the following principles:

- Democratic participation is a value in itself; thus decision-making arrangements should be so structured as to facilitate, encourage and enable such participation.
- This is best achieved by bringing decisions about all living and working arrangements as close to people as possible. The kind of participation which is possible in a school or a workplace, say, is qualitatively different from that possible over a wide geographical area.
- Nonetheless, there are many decisions where issues of number or scale preclude the direct participation of all; here participation is still the watchword and people's participation as representatives must be facilitated, encouraged and enabled (by lot as well as by various other measures).
- All groups affected by any decision have a right to be represented in that decision-making process.
- The realm of the political extends well beyond that of the formal representative institutions of liberal democracy. Democracy has to be embodied as least as much within the institutions of civil society and the economy as in those of the state; it is in the former that people live out their lives day by day and in which exploitation, oppression and powerlessness are experienced directly and immediately. Our goal is to expand the democratic opportunities and to increase the democratic spaces at the level of the state, the economy and civil society.
- Decisions are made and unmade at every stage in the process of policy formulation and implementation; effective access at all these stages is as important as participation at 'the vote'.
- There is no such thing as 'democracy' as a once-and-for-all achievement; we should think rather in terms of an ongoing process of 'democratisation'.

Citizenship, pluralism and mutual respect

Any green socialist conception of democracy must recognise the possible tensions between the demands of the ideal of universality and the commitment to autonomy, plurality and diversity. On the one hand, universal rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship may interfere with the autonomy, values and practices of some communities. On the other hand, such values and practices may be incompatible with the rights of individuals or minorities within communities. We are agreed that these tensions are real and can only be resolved through a democratic process of continuing argument, conflict and debate and by institutions which promote cultural pluralism within a framework of common citizenship.

Some universal principles are necessary: decentralised practices, while desirable in themselves, are not acceptable if, for example, they are environmentally destructive or work to perpetuate sexist or racist structures of discrimination. Similarly, in a world where natural and technological resources are unequally distributed, existing inequities will persist and even grow unless there are democratically accountable centres with substantial redistributive powers. But equally, people have a right to be left alone, to make decisions which others may disagree with, to live their lives as they see fit without interference from above – within the broad framework set by agreed principles of social and ecological organisation and the demands of universal need satisfaction.

Organisational forms need to be developed which, while allowing a maximum of decentralisation of decision making and participation, not only discourage a fragmentation of society into a multiplicity of local and particular interest groups, but positively enlarge the arena of common concerns. However, democratic discourse between decentralised groups can only realise its full potential in promoting common concerns and mutual respect if the fundamental processes of production and reproduction in society are also pulling in that direction. When these processes, in the family or the workplace, are divisive – driven by profit, competitiveness and a desire for domination – democratic political institutions can at best only mitigate some of the worst effects of these wider societal institutions.

Attempts to reconcile this tension (between the ideals of universality and autonomy) include not just a recognition of the right of exploited and oppressed groups to organise, but also a variety of measures to facilitate, encourage and enable this organisation. Methods which have been experimented with or suggested include: quotas; trigger mechanisms; reserved places; a guaranteed voice in the processes of democratic discussion; selecting representatives from more than one kind of constituency; allocation by lot; and veto rights over issues of central concern to the group in question (e.g. aboriginals over certain land rights issues, women over the regulation of abortion).

The traditional liberal way of resolving this tension is with a Bill of Rights and our perspective on this approach is one of critical support. Bills of Rights are normally framed in terms of a narrowly defined conception of political rights which in our view needs to be extended to the socio-economic sphere. It would be foolish not to recognise that, in the absence of wider social and economic reform, the effects of some types of constitutional reform might be regressive. For example, it would not be beyond the bounds of possibility for a democratically unassailable constitutional court to establish the priority of the individual's right to work over the (non-existent) right to strike, or of 'the right to life' over a woman's right to choose, or of the tobacco corporations' right to freedom of speech (in the form of advertising) over the individual's – or society's – right to health.

Another tension identified in our discussions is that between the importance of extending the domain of collective democratic decision-making and the recognition that the existence of a private domain is also important. While fully accepting the problematic nature of 'the private domain' as currently constituted, and recognising it as a major site for the oppression of women, we believe it is important to defend the notion of social spaces that are free from totalitarian and 'expert' attempts to control people's private lives.

Social structures are inherently diverse, existing by virtue of the daily actions of individuals and groups who reproduce or (potentially) transform them. Movements of resistance (to the wide range of exploitative, racist, patriarchal, and otherwise oppressive practices of our society) develop their own capacities and knowledges of the particular possibilities for transformation in the specific situations they face. They are almost infinitely diverse, with their needs patterned by the specific circumstances in which they emerge. The aim of a green socialist political strategy is not to substitute for these movements, but to respond to their diversity in ways which contribute to the development of their autonomy and their emancipatory potential.

This involves finding ways of democratising representative political structures so that these movements can pursue their goals more effectively. And at the same time, it is necessary for generalised democratic practices to be drawn from the diverse experience of these movements, so that the interdependent relationship between their concerns and struggles becomes more fully understood. In the end, conflicts of interest can only be resolved

democratically, with people being willing to live together even if they still disagree, on the basis of some shared values.

Communities: self-organisation and representative government

If we are committed to self-governing communities, two questions arise. First, how are communities to be defined? And second, what are the institutions through which the members of communities, once they have been defined, can exercise self-government?

Two sorts of community exist: those associated with common interests and identities; and communities of place which constitute the constituencies from which the different levels of representative government are elected and gain their legitimacy.

Communities associated with common interests and identities generate movements, struggles and institutions which both organise their activities and, when felt necessary, press their case through the political process. The institutions generated by these communities have been referred to as ‘associational’ organisations and are the basis of civil society, of effective participatory self-government. Although participation is typically direct, it usually also involves indirect representation. These communities are the basis of grass-roots action and, potentially, bottom-up democracy. However, they frequently lack the resources to mediate internal conflicts and for effective self-organisation and participation in the political process. They are also often undemocratic (‘the tyranny of structurelessness’) and dominated by small groups of activists. The self-organisation, empowerment and democratisation of civil society must be the starting point for any green socialist strategy for transformation.

Within any given territory (with which a definite citizenship is associated) there will be a variety of communities of interests and identities, in varying degrees of cooperation and conflict with one another. These differences of interest are mediated/balanced/resolved (which at present generally means being weighted more or less heavily in favour of one group rather than another) through the mechanisms of representative government.

Representative government thus has two principal functions: to determine the rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship; and to (re)distribute resources in order to make those rights and responsibilities real rather than just formal. The territories on which representative government is or might be based can be defined at different levels: local authority; regional or state (the German Land, the US State); nation state; supranational regional grouping (the European Union); global (the UN). This raises the question of the level at which citizenship should be defined and distribution should be determined.

In the long run a green socialist perspective must envisage global rights and responsibilities being exercised on the basis of equal access to resources at a sustainable level by all citizens of the planet. At the same time, we are agreed that the concept of subsidiarity, appropriately defined, is the best basis for deciding which decisions should be taken at which level – with a bias towards the lowest, smallest, most local level that makes sense. There remains the question of how these issues of competence or jurisdiction are to be settled: confederally (bottom-up), federally (top-down), or some other way?

The domain of representative democracy and representative government is where the public good is determined, with different political parties offering differing conceptions. However, representative democracy is everywhere discredited, with an increasing crisis of representation and sense of alienation as people feel more and more powerless in the face of unresponsive states, unaccountable transnational corporations and uncontrollable market forces.

Capitalist democracy embodies a separation of the political, the economic and the social. This effectively privatises decisions about what to produce and how to produce it, and the profit motive dominates. The strategy of democratising both state and civil society in and of itself does not alter the separation; the boundaries between them have to be made more permeable. This requires a reversal of the process by which both economy and state have grown at the expense of civil society during the last one hundred-and-fifty years or so. The political and the economic should serve society not dominate it.

What is needed is a strategy for promoting the participation of the institutions of civil society, concerned primarily with particular interests and identities, in the decision-making processes and activities of the state and the economy. This needs to be within an institutional and value framework set by a revived representative political process and reflecting the prevailing democratically arrived at concept of the common good (in terms of both values and priorities).

The state

For some transitional period we assume we will have to settle for something short of universal citizenship. The dominant, indeed the overwhelming, form of 'sovereign' territorial organisation in our epoch is the nation-state (or at least the state, which creates as much as it 'embodies' the nation). Within these states there are dominant and subordinate class and other interests which identify with them. The consequence of this form of organisation is the provision of a certain level of welfare and security to citizens, the exclusion from full citizenship of large numbers of people, the definition of still vaster numbers of others as foreigners and aliens, and a coercive apparatus to police this internally and defend it externally. What is to be done about this state?

There would appear to be two different emphases in basic approaches: a red one, which, with whatever degrees of autonomy, sees the existing state as closely geared to maintaining the conditions of reproduction of capitalism; and a green one, which sees the state as a force in its own independent – and parasitic – right.

The green perception of the present situation is of a system of mutually competing states locked into a self-reinforcing 'environmentally hazardous dynamic' quite independently of the dynamic of capital accumulation. In response to this, the green perspective for the future is of a stateless, self-regulating world order, a loose federation of decentralised communities. The state – any state – stands in the way of this. Thus greens are not particularly concerned to democratise the state, whether through reform or revolutionary replacement. At the same time, greens clearly identify a range of ecological issues which will require coordination at a higher level than the local community, or even than the (present-day) state, though they have been rather weaker at saying what kinds of institutions would do this work of coordination.

The Marxist tradition certainly offers a vision of a society in which the state has withered away, but it is probably true that few reds today envisage this in the foreseeable future, and some clearly regard the very notion as misleading. The state performs/coordinates many functions, some of which are regarded as both necessary and desirable in any complex society. For all practical purposes, most reds effectively envisage a future in which 'the public power' loses its class but not its political character and endorse Marx's formulation in which he foresaw the conversion of the state 'from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it'. This can perhaps be specified a little more precisely as a view which envisages the state as exhibiting two aspects in any red-green transition: strong and constraining in relation to capital and in setting the framework for ecological policy; enabling, supportive and empowering with regard to society at large.

It would be silly to deny these differences between red and green approaches. But we can perhaps work around some of them, finding common ground in three factors:

- Our common commitments to grass-roots democracy, to activism at the base, to enlarging the scope for democratic participation at all levels of society.
- Our conviction of the possibility of a qualitatively different society. Perhaps the problem is not that we are too utopian but, rather, insufficiently visionary. Instead of just reshuffling the boxes marked 'states' or 'communities', we must explore a range of alternative forms of possible organisation, e.g. the informal networks of international coordination of women workers, alternative trading schemes, and the like.
- This review will be aided by our recognition that the form of the problem is changing. The logic of modern capitalist development is both reducing the economic powers of the state and increasingly forcing issues of transnational regulation onto the agenda. Whilst we don't set this agenda, it is as well to remember that existing states don't really set it either, or indeed know how to preserve their accumulated powers and privileges in this new context. We may well be entering an era in which populist appeals to nationalism are no longer adequate to underwrite the existence of nation states.

The economy

The way in which productive activity is undertaken structures people's life experiences and has ecological consequences. The economy can best be analysed in terms of three sectors: the formal sector, the informal sector and the household sector, with the relative sizes of the sectors and the relationships between them differing in different types of society. In all existing societies production is generally organised on the basis of a more or less rigid social and sexual division of labour which both reflects and reproduces hierarchy, inequality and oppression. In capitalist societies, what counts as productive work is defined in terms of what can be given a market value and is undertaken overwhelmingly in the formal sector (which tends to be defined as the economy).

In a red-green society the social and sexual division of labour would be dissolved, with the different types of work needed for the maintenance and reproduction of the social formation being shared equally by men and women. Some green socialists have argued that this would mean the abolition of any distinction between the political and the economic spheres and between the formal, informal and household sectors. We do not accept this view. Some activities are best undertaken or coordinated at the global or regional, not the local, level; self-management here has to take place within a framework of democratic planning.

But we do share the view that the formal economy plays far too large a part in people's lives, with adverse consequences for their relationship with other people and with the environment. The economic basis for a vastly shorter working week now exists but its realisation depends upon the radical redistribution of working time and the fight against the constantly expanded horizons of production and consumption. In a green socialist society we expect the formal economy to become relatively less prominent.

We thus envisage a society which recognises and values appropriately the productive activity undertaken in all three sectors: the formal economy, run on the basis of some form of democratic planning; the informal economy, consisting of networks of autonomous community-based production and exchange relations; and the household economy. The three economies would be linked and complementary, with people working in one, two or all three

sectors at any point of time and moving freely among them in the course of their lives as they share in both the different types of socially necessary work and the different satisfactions associated with each.

For example, at the moment caring work is undertaken in all three sectors, although it is becoming increasingly commodified. It is usually done by women and is systematically undervalued. When undertaken in the formal or informal sectors it is often the lowest paid work with few rights and little security. In a green socialist society with the gendered division of labour having been dissolved, the activities involved in caring for the young, the old, the sick and for one another, would be shared by all. Whether as part of the daily fabric of their lives, or at different stages in their life cycles, people would take part in the organised social provision of care in the formal sector, in informal mutually supporting networks, and in caring activities in the household. The life-enhancing potential of overcoming the alienation, atomisation and commercialisation associated with these activities in capitalist societies cannot be overestimated.

The household economy

All known societies have had a sexual division of labour built around the household economy, though how rigid and extensive this division is, and the extent to which they are associated with the devaluation of women and their work differs greatly. While in advanced capitalist countries there have been some changes in the ideology surrounding men's participation in domestic activities, the brute fact is that women continue to carry the responsibility and labour of the household economy, while also increasing their participation in the paid labour force in the formal economy.

A red-green economy would need to develop organising principles, institutions and indicators for these activities. A basic, or citizens', income could clearly play a part in this since it would be paid to every individual, young and old, working or not. But the fundamental question that green socialists have to answer in this area is how existing gendered divisions of labour would be transformed. Changes in the ethic of productivism, increases in leisure time and more flexible working hours and life cycles should all be actively worked for and promoted. Equally important is the transformation of the rigid gender roles which shape our experience of self. A red-green economics would define as productive all work that contributes to the maintenance and reproduction of the social formation.

A return to a situation in which the household is the basic unit of production is neither feasible nor desirable. Nevertheless, we would envisage a larger proportion of productive activity taking place in the household than is the case for those employed in the formal sector at present. The consumerist life styles associated with late capitalism, based on convenience foods, disposable products, consumer durables with built-in obsolescence, and endless commuting, are double edged. By comparison with past drudgery, parochialism and poverty, they are in some respects liberating. At the same time they are dehumanising and ecologically and environmentally destructive. For the household economy to flourish in a life-enhancing way, it will need to draw on the products of a formal economy based on scientific and technical advance shaped to the requirements of an increasingly integrated yet decentralised global economy and society.

The informal economy

The informal, or 'rainbow', economy is the resolutely non-capitalist sector which has always existed but which has flourished in recent years: housing co-ops and the more progressive

housing associations; local exchange trade schemes (LETS); credit unions; self-help welfare organisations; community-supported agriculture groups; most organised leisure, from soccer and sub-aqua clubs to the Caravaning & Camping Club of Great Britain and allotment societies; and many other forms of cooperative activity. This sector can be thought of as an interlocking set of grass-roots networks of autonomous or spontaneous community production, distribution and exchange. At its best it represents the creation of new socio-economic relationships – forms of production, distribution and exchange not based on commodification.

It has been argued that as the amount of labour required in the formal economy diminishes, and what remains is more evenly shared, the informal economy will continue to grow and with it the possibility of more self-sufficient, self-governing communities. One generally agreed policy, coming from both the green and the red sides, is citizens' income, both to nurture the informal economy and to underpin the concept of citizenship. Citizens' income would enable people to choose their own life styles, adopt more flexible working patterns, and develop home- and community-based enterprises. This would contribute to the emergence of sustainable local economic development, enabling communities to meet an increasing proportion of their own needs from local resources.

The place of the informal economy in a green socialist perspective is currently ambiguous. It has been enlarged by the impact of deindustrialisation, long-term unemployment, and the relative growth of part-time employment. It is the site of self-exploitation and suffers from the absence of health and safety regulation and national insurance provision. But it is at the same time the site of satisfying and creative productive activity, non-hierarchical social relations, community initiatives and bottom-up participatory action. We believe that participatory democracy must be founded on grassroots activity and organisation and that the progressive sides of the informal economy should be nurtured. This is likely to involve the development of links between the formal and informal economies, and can be assisted by enabling and resourcing policies put in place through a democratised state.

The formal economy

The formal market economy is the heartland of capital and commodity production. It follows that the power of the formal economy over people's lives cannot be diminished unless the power of industrial and finance capital is diminished. This implies fighting against capital, working towards various forms of social ownership, and creating forms of life beyond the immediate reach of capital (i.e. the expansion of the household and informal sectors).

Ultimately, given the kind of society we seek, capital must be tamed. At the level of the formal economy, the first key question is thus how is to wrest control from the private (or state) owners, not least the transnationals, and to democratise it. The organising principle here is that of 'stakeholding' (green) or social ownership (red). This involves the commitment to establishing for all those with a stake or interest in the decisions of any enterprise a right to informed participation in the processes leading to those decisions. Social ownership is useful as a concept because it enables us to differentiate what we advocate from the more traditional concepts of either private or government ownership (variously referred to as state ownership, nationalisation, or public ownership). Social ownership is ownership by those interests affected by or having a stake in the use of the enterprise's assets and resources. The precise groups involved as social owners and therefore the precise forms of social ownership will vary according to the way in which the principle is applied in the contingent circumstances of each case.

This provides a framework for intervention in policy debates (e.g. the Cadbury report on corporate governance, proposing to widen the interests to which companies are accountable) and for grass-roots activism (community and environmental campaigns for wider corporate accountability). It is in tune with a growing acceptance of the argument that the stakeholders in an enterprise include its workers, the communities in which it operates and future generations, not just its capital-owning shareholders. It provides a bridge between current preoccupations and the longer term green socialist vision in which there is no place for private capital ownership.

The second key question is the relationship of economic activity to the market, and here a model of democratic planning with a maximum of decentralisation (in contradistinction to state planning, free marketism, or market socialism) is broadly advocated.

In the first instance, all the constraints that shape the environment within which enterprises operate must be democratised. In an ecosocialist economy these would be set by a democratised enabling state, or by other democratically accountable public agencies. This process would involve the participation of all those associations and groups of civil society with an interest in the decisions. At the moment these decisions are taken by the capitalist state or its agencies. Four areas can be distinguished: legal framework; infrastructure provision; economic, social and environmental policy; and the social distribution of purchasing power.

In relation to all these, the question of democratic control arises over how the decisions are taken, by whom, on the basis of what consultation and information, subject to what sort of accountability, etc. There is clearly endless scope here for a variety of forms of intervention seeking to open up the decision-making processes and influence the objectives, priorities and values that inform these decisions. Indeed, this is the stuff of political debate, pressure group activity and grass-roots movements. But such changes, while affecting the outcome of market forces, would not in themselves alter the processes through which market forces operate to allocate resources.

In our discussions about how to deal with the problem of allocating resources a number of different emphases and approaches emerged. The one outlined here was the most thoroughly developed and was accepted by the group as a helpful basis for discussion. It stresses the desirability of distinguishing market forces from market exchange.

Market exchange is the process of buying and selling what already exists or what can be produced by using existing productive capacity. It is likely to be present to a greater or lesser extent in any modern economy, mediating exchange and generating information about what people wish to make use of to satisfy their needs.

The operation of market forces – what Adam Smith called the ‘invisible hand’ – is, in contrast, the process through which the investment decisions of firms, taken independently of one another and not coordinated in advance, result in changes in the size, structure and location of productive capacity. The outcome is arbitrary and uncontrollable in its effects on individuals, communities and ecosystems. It promotes fragmentation and alienation. It generates a dynamic of unstable and unsustainable expansion and consumerism.

The democratic control we envisage over the economy means the ability to take conscious decisions over the use and distribution of society’s productive resources. So market forces cannot be the predominant mechanism for allocating those resources as it is under capitalism. We advocate instead a system in which resources are allocated through a process

of decentralised democratic planning in which users nevertheless generally are able to choose among socially-owned suppliers – in effect a system in which market exchange is retained, to an extent yet to be determined, but market forces are replaced by negotiated coordination.

Such a system would politicise the economic sphere, introducing into the process of coordinating economic activity the specific interests of those affected and the wider consequences anticipated for the environment. It would enable people together to shape their environment, within the possibilities open to them, on the basis of priorities that reflect the fundamental red green values of sustainability and equality. The potential of this way of coordinating economic activity is perhaps most evident when thinking about the reshaping of production, consumption and life styles that is likely to result from the combined imperatives of global redistribution and ecological sustainability.

We need to develop visions and models which are prefigurative, which anticipate a society in which people increasingly wish to act in the social interest, but which recognise that people will have different views of what that is. The social interest is not unproblematic and cannot be known in advance. As an operational concept it has to emerge from negotiations among those at each level of society whose interests are involved. Indeed, it probably makes more sense to speak of social interests, in the plural, for we all have many interests and differing priorities and will never, even in principle, find an unproblematic way of reaching a final agreement.

Outcomes at each stage of the process of negotiated coordination need to be assessed and serve as inputs into the next round. We envisage a process in which the representatives of different interests would be faced with the challenge of arriving at an outcome all could live with, narrow self-interest would be minimised and contained, and a genuine collective interest in finding an agreed and equitable outcome would be created. The institutional framework developed must be one which fosters this kind of process with these kinds of outcomes.

While we currently advocate some form of participatory democratic planning for the formal sector, we recognise that most socialist economists advocate some form of market socialism, or managed social market capitalism, and that most greens are hostile to any form of centralised planning. The method of resource allocation in a green socialist society is clearly an area for ongoing discussion.

Conclusion

To repeat what we said at the start of this section on the economy, we are envisaging a society which recognises and values appropriately the productive activity undertaken in all three sectors looked at above. These three economies would be linked and complementary, with people working in one, two or all three sectors at any point of time and moving freely among them in the course of their lives as they share in both the different types of socially necessary work and the different satisfactions (and frustrations) associated with each.

IV: Towards a red-green future: principles for transition

In previous sections we have given an account of how contemporary capitalism is responsible for both ecological destruction and deepening social division and inequality. The equal, democratic and sustainable global society we seek will necessarily be post-capitalist. We believe such a post-capitalist world is not an impossible dream; it is both desirable and achievable. Drawing upon and combining elements of socialism and green politics, we have outlined in broad terms some of the principles on which such a society could be organised. We need now to address the question of how green socialists can facilitate the transition from where we are now to where we want to be.

This section proposes an orientation from which such a political strategy could be developed. In section III we noted that three kinds of political strategy are needed:

- struggles against capitalist economic relations at local, regional, national and global levels;
- reform of the existing institutions, to extend and deepen democracy throughout both state and civil society; and
- the creation of non-capitalist alternatives.

Traditional political struggle has focused on seizing the power of the state. However, no past attempts, either through revolution or the ballot box, have brought about the hoped-for liberation. Our starting point is that this traditional approach has failed; it was wrong in theory and ineffective in practice. By contrast, our emphasis is on the transformation of society from the bottom up. Our orientation has three components, each necessary but none alone sufficient:

- building from below, supporting existing struggles, facilitating the emergence of new ones and enabling those struggles to draw strength from one another;
- enabling from above, through the democratisation of state and other institutions; and
- the development of a red-green vision to guide our actions.

There is nothing inevitable about a green socialist future. There will be no predetermined march of history towards it. That future is a future we must choose, and working towards it will require struggle and political organisation. Even when we have made advances in that direction we must not regard them as final and irreversible. We will have to continue the struggle to defend them.

As elsewhere in this document, we do not pretend to provide authoritative solutions. This section, too, raises more questions than answers. It is offered as a contribution to the debate on red-green political strategy which we believe is urgently needed.

The starting point

Neither socialists nor greens have thrived in recent years. Despite short-lived successes most of our strategies have failed.

Socialist parties have from time to time succeeded in seizing state power but the results have been uneven and sometimes disastrous. At best that approach yielded a combination of

paternalistic welfare and a drab inefficient bureaucratic state. At worst it provided the opportunities for the pursuit of evil ends by evil means. A fully socialist transformation of society has never been achieved. On the other hand, green parties have so far achieved only limited electoral success and have experienced little more than marginalisation by the system or co-option by it. These frustrations have persuaded many greens to abandon electoralism altogether in favour of direct protest and local community action. Confronting the state on its own terms, attempting to seize state power to exercise it benignly, is no longer a feasible strategy.

Our starting point, therefore, is rejection both of the state as the sole shaper of society and of elitist parties whether of a social-democratic or Leninist kind. Indeed, there is an incipient general crisis of the state, with its legitimacy and ability to sustain social order both increasingly called into question.

Our strategic orientation emphasises that transition must stem from the everyday experiences and struggles of everyday people, not from the dictates of an elitist party. It must be based on activism in our communities, whether communities of place or those associated with common interests and identities. The transformation of society can only take place from the bottom up. However, this process can only succeed if it is facilitated by the progressive democratisation of the institutions of both state and civil society.

Building from below

Human societies are highly complex. They are structured by particular forms of social relationships, not least power relationships, and particular ways of interacting with non-human nature. We can speculate on how societies work and on the nature of the historical processes which form them. We can develop theories and models. But such grand theories are always inadequate to the task, as we have learned to our cost. We simply do not know enough. Much of what we need to know may even in principle be unknowable.

The attempted imposition of large-scale solutions based on inadequate knowledge and understanding has been disastrous. But we do know, albeit incompletely, about those power relationships of which we are immediately part. We do have some understanding, if only partial, of how our own communities and workplaces function. Possessed only by individuals, that knowledge is too fragmentary and incomplete to be of use. But when shared with others, it can be the basis of a movement for social transformation.

People can be enabled to address their immediate situations and act to transform them. These struggles tend to be very specific, based on the experience of people in their everyday lives. What is involved here is not 'empowering the powerless', but enhancing the power people already possess, by providing them with resources. And the most important resource is the knowledge, understanding and experience of other people.

Campaigns of protest and resistance are important, as the direct-action wing of the environment movement has shown. Equally important are constructive initiatives, especially those which build local economic alternatives, e.g. credit unions, cooperatives and LETS. Such developments are a mobilising process. They transform people's attitudes and expectations, thereby creating further opportunities for change. The emergence of a new economic common sense based on practical experience is a powerful and potentially growing challenge to the prevailing capitalist orthodoxy.

Building from below is not just about local community based issues. Local direct action around broader or more general issues, informed by the guiding principles of solidarity and

social responsibility, have been important sources of empowerment and discovery, e.g. the Greenham women and the movements around global issues. The ‘vanguard party’ danger here is the phenomenon of ‘campaign surfing’ – groups with vanguardist aspirations moving from one issue to another seeking to exploit them for their own ends.

Different struggles are complementary. They must be linked, to provide mutual support. But we do not seek to impose the same solution everywhere. Progress to a red-green society is likely to occur differently in different places and at different times, specific to individual localities, communities and situations.

In this way a broad-based radical project, rooted in everyday struggles, action and experience, can be encouraged. Building from below does not need a mass party of the traditional sort, but instead different organisational structures able to mobilise and generalise different sources of power. In turn, higher-level organisational structures will be needed for coordination. But their role must precisely be coordination, networking, and the sharing of knowledge and experience, not control.

Enabling from above

Building from below is not enough in itself. Such local struggles are easily marginalised by those in power, or succeed in marginalising themselves. They may empower a small number of individuals, but usually have little impact on the dominant political processes which shape society as a whole. To be sustained and have lasting effect, local struggles must be complemented by the transformation of state, economic and other institutions, so that they facilitate and enable, not control. Otherwise most creative initiatives from below will perish in a hostile political climate.

To change that climate, red-greens must work to change the prevailing definitions of ‘common sense’, to shift the popular perceptions which inform the decision-making processes in society. Initiatives are needed to create new ‘public spaces’ for theoretical, ideological, political and cultural discussions and exchanges. These need to focus on developing understanding of the structure and policies of the state and other public agencies and elaborating proposals to change them.

What is required is a strategy for challenging the dominant ideology, the set of unquestioned assumptions and guiding principles that organise people’s thoughts and inform their actions. Such an approach recognises that communities are not just local, that differences of interest and identity need to be understood, and that the interests of local and other communities need to be related to one another in terms of the central principles of green socialism – equality and sustainability.

However, if the dominating institutions are to be transformed we also need to be involved in them and in the processes associated with them, both in civil society – for example in local community associations and citizens’ groups, school governing bodies, professional organisations, students’ unions and trade-union branches – and in elected representative bodies at all levels of government.

Building from below must not ignore existing representative democracy, but be complemented by a strategy which takes it seriously. Even at this stage, red-greens must find ways to influence those non-red-green parties which have some regard for environmental conservation and social justice, and which presently exercise power at national or local level.

In the longer term, red-green participation in elections cannot be ruled out. However, the purpose of the latter would not be to insert 'our' people into the existing power structure, in order to exercise power on 'our' behalf. It would be precisely to alter the nature of government itself, to extend democracy and increase the opportunities for participation, to allow building from the bottom to flourish.

Such an approach to public elections could take many forms. Red-greens could stand for election themselves, as individuals or as members of a party or of some other political formation. Or a semi-permanent alliance could be formed with an existing party. Or ad hoc arrangements could be made with individual candidates from different parties identified as more likely to assist the red-green project. Different approaches could also be adopted at different levels of government.

Initial red-green successes are likely to be local, or within networks of common interest. Direct public electoral efforts may focus initially on local elections, because that is where the best prospects for success lie. But such successes are easily marginalised, given our highly centralised state in which local government and other local institutions have little real power. Red-greens need to ally themselves with others in society seeking decentralisation and devolution.

The red-green vision

Although political activity in the form of building from below and enabling from above is necessary to move towards the red-green society we seek, it is not sufficient. Such activity must be shaped and sustained by our shared ideal of a sustainable, democratic and just society. We need theoretical understanding and abstract principles, but we also need a clear vision of what we are seeking to achieve.

We cannot devise a complete blueprint for a red-green society. That would contradict our entire understanding of how that society might come about. But we can imagine what such a society might be like. Such a vision would provide our everyday struggles with moral shape and purpose. It would make our abstract principles more concrete. It will be easier to campaign for, say, 'justice' or 'democracy' when we have a clear mental picture of what a just and democratic society might be.

Without vision, the project may become entirely open-ended, the movement taking no clearly defined position on anything. Worse, there is no guarantee that the forces liberated by such a process will be progressive. Without a clear value framework for action, local and community activism may degenerate into mere populism, even into bigotry and racism.

Our vision must not be a static dogma, but an evolving panorama of a red-green society. It must be perpetually provisional, endlessly renegotiable in the light of new experience and understanding. People may hold different visions, each a different picture of what a red-green society could be like. Whatever the vision, there must be no attempt to impose it on local struggle. On the contrary, the direct experience of local struggle will play a large part in constructing and renegotiating the vision.

Developing our red-green vision is a priority. To be attractive, it must embody a notion of progress. It cannot be based on impending catastrophe and the need for austerity. To be plausible, it must take account of scientific and technological development. We cannot undiscover science or disinvent technologies – not even nuclear ones. To be realistic, it must be based on an understanding of human nature. Human beings are not putty, to be moulded by the state into the service of a grand theory. Neither are they prisoners of unchanging

innate drives or instincts. We must 'go with the grain' of human nature, seeking to understand what is possible and what is not, and imagine a sustainable society which will inhibit or deal constructively with the worst in people, bring out the best, and enable people to change their behaviour when they see the need to do so.

Such utopian thinking is not a substitute for politics, but is a necessary part of it. Utopias provide visions of the future which must be plausible, even if they are not immediately attainable. Our thinking is constrained by the circumstances in which we presently find ourselves. But constructing utopias loosens those constraints. This enables us to speculate on radically different possibilities, to think what is presently unthinkable.

Conclusion

This is not an à la carte strategy. The three components – building from below, enabling from above, a red-green vision – are of equal importance. Without equal emphasis on all three, we will fall into the errors of a futile obsession with the 'parliamentary road' to change, or protesting and making lifestyle gestures on the margins of society, or utopianism in its worst, derogatory sense. Institutional arrangements will be needed to ensure this equal focus. But those are matters of organisation and tactics, not strategy.

V: Where next? Seeking political forms

What kind of political formation do we want to develop? In our discussions up to now, we have reached a considerable amount of agreement.

First, our work has convinced us that an embryonic red-green perspective exists or can be developed which could contribute to providing the intellectual and theoretical basis for policies for a new political formation.

On a global scale, we want a transformed division of labour, abolishing the north-south divide, sustainable global economics, and transformed relations of production, distribution and exchange that meet human needs without producing massive inequalities. We want a political system that allows co-operation globally on healing environmental damage and preventing future damage, and that is participatory, non-exclusive and non-oppressive. We do not yet know or fully agree on the details of what sort of political and economic system could achieve this. We have offered some ideas on this. It will obviously need an international, even a global, dimension.

Second, there is a gap to be filled in the present political line-up, and there are many besides ourselves who would enthusiastically support red-green politics.

Young people, including children, are increasingly concerned about environmental issues, and are actively involved in actions against road building and homelessness. Black people's organisations are very aware of the environmental poverty of the areas in which they are forced to live, and of the relationship between poverty in the third world and the marginal labour market status of immigrants and refugees in western industrialised countries such as the UK. Women's groups have led in exposing many environmental issues, including the situation in the south Pacific, the use of American air bases in this country and so on. There is even a tremendous potential overlap between the anti-materialism of Islam and the red green critique of consumption. On the left itself there is a huge political vacuum (revealed by the anti-Poll Tax campaign) and a significant number of people who have moved, possibly for ever, beyond the Labour Party.

But, third, there is tremendous disillusion, cynicism, defeatism and despair in relation to the existing political system and the parties operating within it. Any new organisation must clearly and convincingly differentiate itself to be able to attract and keep participants/members committed.

It must recognise the importance of culture and process, as opposed to the preoccupation with form and structure that dominated politics in the past. The culture of an organisation or movement is embodied in how it does things. Does it enable people to be heard, is dialogue practised as well as preached, does it build trust rather than distrust, emphasise informality and friendliness, genuinely strive to integrate and respect different voices and experiences, recognise when exclusion occurs even, perhaps especially, when it is not intended? In order to avoid recreating the mistakes of the past and falling into the decadence of present parties, a red-green political formation needs to find non-adversarial, non-splitting ways of dealing with internal disagreement without denying it and without compromising real unity. The personal is the political, but the political is also the personal. It is perhaps when organisations do not acknowledge, let alone meet, the psychological needs of their members that fanaticism or burn-out result. We need to build a movement within which our needs for meaning, fellowship, and conviviality are addressed, and partly met.

Fourth, representative government needs to be transformed into participatory self-government involving both direct and representative democracy.

National political parties can provide increasingly fewer solutions to the problems people experience, and in this sense the material basis for the demise of political parties as we know them may already exist. Western political institutions and the representative parties on which they are based have become exhausted, even decadent. Rather than expressing democratic principles, they have increasingly become limits on them.

All political institutions need to be democratised. Market forces need to be replaced by democratic mechanisms for making decisions. Local politics are essential for building a wide, participatory base, and linking many existing campaigns and struggles. But for green socialism the global dimension of politics and economics is also central. At regional, national, and international levels strong representative co-ordinating mechanisms are required. But with increasing decentralisation, mechanisms of self-management and participatory democracy would represent the main form of government at local and regional levels.

Parties, movements and other formations

It may be useful to counterpose two different ways of approaching the question of organisation. Some people look to build a new political party, and believe that any other formation could only be transitional and second best. Others argue that new politics require new and flexible organisational forms and must avoid formalisation, centralisation and the fetishism of procedures. Below we summarise the arguments on both sides of this debate and suggest a possible third way forward.

The value of a red-green party

Such a party would be both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary. It would target a political niche, develop an attractive set of policies, seek the support of other embryonic political groupings or elements of other established parties, fight for electoral reform, establish an electoral base. It would work in conjunction with forces outside the parliamentary system, which focused primarily upon participatory forms of politics, helped to organise local struggles, facilitated learning from such experiences, linked with other extra-parliamentary political groupings, etc.

A party allows its members to identify with it, with consequent feelings of belonging. It may have relatively clear-cut forms of leadership and mechanisms of accountability. Many would argue that given the power of capital and of the state, a party is the only effective way of mobilising social discontent and confronting the status quo.

The value of a looser form of organisation

We cannot assume that the forms of the past are appropriate answers to the questions posed by the present. There are many forms political leadership can take. It involves expressing values, articulating interests and identities, framing political choices, creatively mediating conflict, sustaining hope and undermining fear, engaging in oppositional struggles and facilitating social, cultural and economic innovation. There is no single organisational form which can perform all these tasks, but an organisation could provide a framework within which new shapes and forms can emerge, using different methods – forums, networks, working groups, federations, representative bodies – for different purposes.

Within such an organisation local groups might engage in raising consciousness through theatre, poetry, art, music; run not-for-profit community businesses; organise direct action;

organise fundraising for humanitarian relief; campaign for legal changes within the existing system; put up local and parliamentary candidates; and encourage people of all ages to share their thinking about how to take charge of their situations. The organisation linking these would consciously see itself as building as well as demanding a new sort of society, creating alternative sites of power and alternative ways of doing things here and now.

Neither party nor movement

One possible solution for the next two or three years is to build linkages between existing groupings and individuals, for common action on the basis of agreement on a limited number of essential green socialist principles and policies. Our Red-Green Study Group would form itself into an association, which people could join, and would become one of the groupings seeking to develop such links. It would also have as its stated aim the promotion of future conferences and discussions with any other relevant groups with whom we could establish guidelines for dialogue. Periodically we would come together nationally to review and revise our draft principles, with the aim of building an ever larger network of groups.

This network would be communicating information and ideas in a mutually enriching way, suggesting common action, etc, within the forum that we would have helped to create. We would need to develop rules for this process and ideas for consensus-seeking discussions and ways of containing without denying disagreement – some of these rules we have already or can formulate fairly easily. After some time, a couple of years perhaps, this network of groups might consider forming a more federal decision-making structure or even a party to facilitate collective action – but that is for another discussion.

Appendix: Reasons to be cheerful

Dave Cook

We are reprinting this contribution by Dave Cook since it was a first attempt to define the space within which our study group was to coalesce.

Dave had worked full-time for the Communist Party for many years. He had come to believe that a convergence of reds and greens held out the best hope for radical renewal and was instrumental in setting up the Red-Green Study Group. He acted as its convenor until his death in February 1993, the result of an accident while cycling around the Mediterranean.

Some had reservations and disagreements with Dave's analysis at the time; no-one would accept it without demur now. We have moved on. But it is a timely reminder of where we were after Labour's surprise defeat in 1992 and, as New Labour shuffles towards the next election almost denuded of radical let alone socialist content, of how much remains to be done.

The main problem of course is not 'the gap', but whether on a terrain strewn with 'first-past-the-post' electoral obstacles, sectarian jealousies, and massive demoralisation and doubt, it can be filled.

A new formation will have to stand for distinctive politics to have any chance of survival. A whole range of groups, from the Greens to the extinct Stalinist volcanoes and still smouldering Trotskyist ones, stretch away to the left. However, one space stands out – unoccupied, and for many people, inspirational – the point of intersection between socialist and environmental concerns.

There is an interesting symmetry between the situations in which many socialists and environmentalists find themselves. Within the socialist tradition both new realist modernisation, and the dogmatic fundamentalism of the 'revolutionary' groups, have less attraction. Witness the dramatic failure of Labour's recent membership drive. Similar developments are unfolding within environmental politics; at one extreme a sectarian 'green fundamentalist' trend is turning its back on industrialisation and modern technology in search of a mythologised Arcadia and 'new age' mysticism, while at the other an exclusive reliance on green consumerism accepts the domination of the market as emphatically as does Labour's right wing. The decline in Green membership, from 18,000 at the high point of the 1989 European elections, to 8,000 in mid 1992, is even more dramatic than Labour's.

However within both traditions a sizeable – and possibly growing – number question both sets of polarities, and recognise that their aspirations increasingly overlap. A section of socialists are going green, and some greens are going red. This is new. The delta formed by the confluence of these two tributaries provides the fertile soil for a distinctive politics.

The concept of replacement of production for profit with socially useful production, and the healthier lifestyles that go with it, is the key 'linking' concept between environmentalism and socialism. It is more profound in its implications than redistributionalist (welfarist) concepts, even though the latter have tended to overshadow it both in Soviet-style regimes and the Western welfare states.

Nor is this just a question of immediate policy. The long term aims of both traditions are dramatically altered by this intermingling. Take the socialist objective of a society of abundance, which Marxists used to argue technological advance had the potential to create – provided that production was planned for peoples needs. What constitutes abundance now has to be rethought in the light of the requirements of sustainable development and ‘new’ ideas – or rather rediscovered ‘old’ ideas – about what counts as the ‘good’ life, and is unrecognisable as the producerist fantasy of much previous socialist rhetoric. Equally, left-moving Greens are accepting that ecology without social justice is meaningless. Three quarters of the world’s working people live in poverty. To get ecological politics onto the agenda means tackling the redistribution of wealth. So into their vision have to go problems of poverty, class inequality and imperialism. They are also finding – East Europe’s appalling environmental record notwithstanding – that capitalism’s inherent dynamics are the greatest obstacle to the rational and humane use of the resources it has itself brought into being.

We should not underestimate how much work remains to be done to achieve a confluence of red/green tributaries. Only a few years ago much of the left was advocating an ‘alternative economic strategy’ in which environmental priorities were at best a footnote, and of course some socialists regard greens as elitist and utopian (in the worst sense). My view is that questions of practice, rather than theoretical differences, lie at the heart of mistrust between the two traditions. In their ‘actually existing practice’ socialists have often gone for bureaucratic solutions, usually unworkable and corrupt. Greens, and of course many socialists, have defined themselves oppositionally to these, although the views of both trends on future practice often remain vague and poorly thought out. Once again there is a key ‘linking’ concept – participatory democracy.

Important strands in the socialist tradition tie socially useful production in with decentralised self-management and workers’ control. Work in the Green tradition links sustainable development with grassroots democracy because control of the development of technological innovation requires widespread participation in its processes.

However difficult the marriage, socialists and radical Greens have much more in common than divides them. Capitalism is committed by its very nature to unlimited growth. Socialism isn’t. All serious Green analyses also revolves around the concept of socially useful production linked to sustainable pattern of development, and these cannot work through the market. They must work against it. The centre of gravity of most of the Green movement remains committed to fundamental structural change on this point. The definition, structure and vision of a democratic ecosocialist society are currently under review, not before time. and although there would be differences, a unifying characteristic of this point of intersection between red and green politics, transformed by feminism and the experiences of minority groups – and an ecosocialist party able to express it – would be a commitment to working for a qualitatively different society.

Emphasising long term socialist/environmental transformation is crucial for establishing a distinctive and inspirational politics. The collapse of the eastern command economies, and the discrediting of bureaucratic forms of public ownership in the west have resulted in an understandable – although not commendable – lowering of sights among radical people. Modernisation, rather than transformation, has become the buzzword for many on the left. Given the desperate backwardness of the British political and economic systems, modernisation is urgently needed, but it is not a distinctive political position. Equally, neither the tombstone truism of socialist fundamentalism, nor ‘clip-on’ environmentalism restricted to the demand side economic policy tools of welfarism (e.g. taxes, transfer payments and investment) measure up to the challenge. Out of the fusion of red and green politics come pointers towards a new vision which avoids the cul-de-sacs of discredited command economies and quasi-religious blind faith

in a society cleaned of all evil by the magic of revolution – able to tap into the surge of feeling among many young people of shared responsibility for the planet.

The mere presentation of the potential for an ecosocialist convergence as a multi-dimensional fusion, rather than a one-dimensional ‘space’ between new realist Labour and the Far Left – rules out the possibility of Marxism being the ideological base for any new formation. ‘Informed by’ – yes; ‘based on’ – no. Leaving aside the question-begging issue of what do we mean by ‘Marxism’, it is not serious politics to envisage a confluence of different traditions, if the ideology of one of them is declared to hold the field before the discussion starts.

Fortunately the potential membership of a new formation is much broader than shell-shocked refugees from internal struggles within the left and green movements. They certainly are not conveniently assembled awaiting a dove-tailing regroupment into an ecosocialist fusion. They are untidily strewn across many different organisations and none, and some are understandably cynical about new dawns, with well founded fears of further fragmentation. Also we operate within a political system legendary in its ability to confine political expression within established parties. However, despite a fourth Conservative election victory, several factors are currently loosening up the hardened arteries of radical British politics. In the context of a recognised ‘space’ for a new party, and a distinctive politics which it could proclaim, this new fluidity could open up important opportunities for realignment.

June 1992