Dialogue on Socialism and Ecology: A debate by James O'Connor and Takis Fotopoulos

*** Editor's note:** As a contribution to the discussion of this issue's theme, we publish the following correspondence between James O'Connor, the editor of C*apitalism, Nature, Socialism*, and Takis Fotopoulos, the editor of *Society and Nature*, which took place between the end of 1991 (when *Society and Nature* was still in the planning stages) and the beginning of 1993. At the time of starting this correspondence, we envisaged only a Greek version of the journal, and we were exploring the possibility of establishing some kind of cooperation agreement with other journals. It was much later that the publication of an international edition of the journal was decided, as a result of the very positive reaction that I received from people like James Robertson and John Clark et al. (when I contacted them requesting their joining the Editorial Board), who expressed their wish to see the journal published in English, on the grounds that it would fill a significant gap. Most of these letters were also published in the *CNS Newsletter* (Nov. 1992 issue), although some important letters were missing from that version. What follows is an edited version containing only the theoretical parts of the exchange and excluding, as far as possible, the "administrative" elements (i.e., those mainly referring to the type of cooperation agreement that would be possible between *CNS* and *Society and Nature*), which would obviously not be of particular interest to our readers. There has also been some editing of punctuation, grammar and spelling.

November 3, 1991

Dear Jim,

I've just returned from Athens and I would like to let you know the outcome of our deliberations about the possibility of publishing a new Greek "sister" journal of *CNS*.

As regards the journal a 3-member editorial committee has been established of which I am a member. We have decided that we would like to include at least 20-25% of the material from CNS — if of course this is acceptable to you — the rest to be covered by Greek articles as well as from translations from other sources. We see

the journal as a forum for the interchange of ideas between ecocialists, social ecologists and other left green movements and our aim is to help in the development of a new "social project" that would constitute a synthesis of the libertarian, socialist and radical green traditions. The journal will be called "Society and Nature" and its style will be something between *CNS* and the *New Left Review.*

In case you agree with the general orientation of the journal — and we hope you do — I would be grateful if you could send us further details as well as any back issues available so that we can choose articles for the first two issues.

Best wishes

Takis Fotopoulos

November 4, 1991

Dear Takis,

Your fax of Nov. 3 is very good news! Barbara Laurence, *CNS* Managing Editor, and myself are happy that you've managed to find the people and resources to publish a "sister journal" in Greece. I've passed on this news to Juan Martinez Alier in Spain (Economics, Universitat Autonoma, Bellaterra, Barcelona) who edits *Ecologia Politica*, Spanish language edition of *CNS*, and Giovanna Ricoveri in Italy (CGIL, Corso d'Italia 25, Rome, 00198, Italy), co-editor of *Capitalismo. Natura. Socialismo*. You might want to get into direct contact with them, asking for back issues of their journals and also contacting them re: a proposed CNS European Editorial Board meeting in Valencia or Barcelona, held two days in the period March 25-27th (dates not yet exactly confirmed), at which we will discuss substantive issues, e.g., the "second contradiction of capitalism," and also do some future planning for our efforts and the like. Of course, you and your two co-editors should definitively come! We'll be speaking English without formal translation facilities.

We are sending you air mail back issues of an CNS (English) — CNS 1-8. CNS 1 and 2 will be in photocopy. The rest in journal format. Also, copies of two pamphlets we're published (we're preparing two more, one on global warming, the other on ecology in Cuba).

May I suggest that you consider publishing in your first issue the original introductions to CNS (short version) as well as the original introductions to CNS (Italy)

and Ecologia Politica (Spain). You'll find the latter two in CNS 8; and the first in CNS 2. Original Italian and Spanish versions of the first two introductions can be had from Juan and Giovanna.

Your effort truly sounds like a "sister journal." May l have permission to make one important suggestion? From here (although perhaps not from Athens), *Society and Nature* is not the strongest title possible. Here (the States) such a title would suggest a liberal not a left or radical journal. You might want to consider calling your journal either Capitalism, Nature, Socialism or Political Ecology (the Italians use the first; in Spain, they use the second; Deleage in France, who is trying to put together a French "sister journal," wants to use the second). I think either of these two titles a) suggests a more radical effort and b) formally creates closer ties with us in terms of public perceptions, than does Society and Nature. Of course, it's your choice. Please regard this as merely a suggestion.

Yes. You can use whatever materials you want to from CNS English. I'm quite sure that Juan Martinez and Giovama will say the same thing. We will have to get formal permission for this from our publisher. But since we have only a handful of subscribers to CNS English in Greece, I'm sure that this will not be a problem.

Finally. To make our effort truly international, or move in this direction in strong ways, it's important for us, i.e. CNS English, to translate materials published in Italy, Spain and now Greece, so that this effort is not a one-way street. I have a standing request to Giovanna and Juan to let me know, what article(s) they publish in their journals — article(s) produced by Italians and Spaniards about Italy and Spain — that we should translate and print in CNS English. This closes the circle, as it were. I ask them to recommend their strongest articles, and the ones (if only one) that would be of most interest to readers from the USA and English speaking countries. Please let me make the same request to you — beginning next summer, when you get your journal going.

Again, your fax is good news, and Barbara Laurence, myself and the group here wish you the best of luck.

Rest wishes,

Jim

London, 18/11/91

Dear Jim,

I would like now to convey the views of the editorial committee with respect to your letter. As regards first the Spanish and Italian editorial groups, we would like to come in contact with them, re: back issues and the meeting in Spain, and we hope to do so soon. Also, we do not have any objection in publishing the introductions to the CNS editions in our first issue.

With reference to the title, we did have long discussions about it and the consensus view is to keep the present title adding subtitles to clarify its nature, as follows:

Society and Nature
Journal of Political Ecology
For autonomy-democracy, social justice and ecological balance.

A text that will introduce the journal will explain our aims and the journal's title (copy enclosed). However, I would like to summarise the views of the Editorial Committee on the matter. The Committee, starting from the principle that the development of a new "social project" would constitute a synthesis of the libertarian, socialist and radical green traditions, decided that the journal should function as a forum for the interchange of ideas between ecosocialists, social ecologists and other left green movements. This, despite the fact that its members may feel closer to one or the other of those tendencies. That implies however that the journal, though in close co-operation with CNS, will keep its full ideological autonomy and it will not be the organ or the branch of any particular international tendency. Of course, the members of the Committee and the Editorial Board are free, as individuals, to associate themselves with any tendency they like.

Finally, as regards your request about recommending Greek articles for CNS we will of course have no objection in doing so. Also, I do not have any objection in being listed as a member of the English CNS editorial board. We also intend to establish an International Advisory Editorial Board and we would like, if you agree, to list your name. At the moment, we plan to ask also, apart from Juan Martinez Alier (Spain) and Giovanna Ricoveri (Italy), Samir Amin, Murray Bookchin and Dan Chodorkoff (USA), James Robertson (UK) and Cornelius Castoriades (France).

Best wishes

Takis

OUR AIMS

Karl Marx, more than a century ago, could reasonably assume that the alternative to socialism would be barbarism. However, at that time, society could at least hope that the crisis was reversible. Today, the situation is more serious. The ecological crisis has made barbarism even more probable. We will either create an ecotopia, based on ecological principles — reviving and adjusting the tradition of the Greek polis to today's conditions — or we will face the barbarism of a society even more technocratic and centralised than the present one and, in the last instance, a totalitarian one, even though, at a formal level, the institutions of representative democracy may continue to function.

In other words, today's dilemma is not between ecotopia and the disappearance of our species (though this possibility can not be excluded altogether) but between two radically different solutions to the ecological problem. The technological solution, pushed energetically by the capitalist system and supported by various environmentalists, seeks (and it is not impossible to achieve) technological ways out of the crisis (nuclear fusion etc). However, technological solutions, which are consistent with the existing social system, require "a very disciplined system of social management that is radically incompatible with democracy and political participation by the people."[1] Alternatively, the eco-democratic solution, seeking the causes of the ecological crisis in a social system that is based on domination of human by human and the implied attempt to dominate Nature, requires a direct, political and economic, democracy and consistent with it technical and economic structures.

The materialisation of the liberating project and the transition from a hierarchical society to an ecological one, that we shall call briefly ecotopia, is meant as the outcome of a dialectical synthesis of three tendencies that are expressed in corresponding political traditions and movements: the autonomous-democratic tradition (that includes the feminist movement), the libertarian socialist and the radical green movements. The subtitle of our journal refers exactly to these tendencies and the implied demands for an ecotopia. For us, ecotopia means the abolition of the unequal distribution of political and economic power and of hierarchical structures (domination of women by men, of the South by the North etc). Politics must therefore cease to be a technique for holding and exercising power and become again the self-management of society by its members. The content and the forms of the direct, political and economic, democracy, as well as of the political

[1] *[1]. Murray Bookchin, Remaking Society (Black Rose, 1989), p. 171.*

strategy in the process of materialising the liberatory project are the main themes to be discussed.

It should be stressed that we do not base our demands for autonomy, social justice and ecological balance on any "objective" truth or teleology but on our own personal and responsible choice between co-existing tendencies and the interpretation that our choice implies. We see the journal as a forum for the interchange of ideas between social ecologists, ecosocialists and other green left movements and we aim towards a synthesis of the democratic, libertarian socialist and radical green traditions.

The journal contains articles by foreign and Greek authors that develop a critique of the existing socio-economic model and/or expand modern thinking about ways to re-organise it. Our criterion is the principle that the Society-Nature relations depend crucially on the form of social organisation. Furthermore, the journal aims to contribute in the development of an alternative theoretical analysis of social phenomena, beyond the "scientism" of both the dominant liberal paradigm as well as of the Marxist one, and it welcomes articles on epistemological issues. Finally, regular book reviews will contribute in the presentation of new currents.

The journal's problematic is differentiated from both the traditional left thought as well as from liberal environmentalism; from the former, because History has shown that the conquest of power and the change of the economic structure do not lead to a change in the social model but to a reproduction of the hierarchical structures; from the latter, because it does not pose the question of social change but, instead, taking the existing system for granted, seeks technocratic solutions to the ecological problem, ignoring the social character of the ecological crisis.

November 20, 1991

Dear Takis,

Received and read your letter of 11/18 and draft of Our Aims. "Our Aims" is more or less straight USA "social ecology" of the Left Greens of Murray Bookchin. This is fine, and you must put out the journal you want to put out. But, in my opinion, you would do better trying to become "sister journal" with the Left Green Network's Regeneration (their "theoretical" journal) than with CNS. I speak of course only for CNS English, not CNS Italy or EP. Giovanna and company and Juan Martinez and

company should and must speak for themselves with respect to the "sister journal" issue.

Let me explain what I mean.

There is no recognition in your document of ecological Marxist positions and tendencies, including CNS (which is not eco-Marxist, although eco-Marxists write for it; I regard myself as a Polanyist-Marxist). What you call the "dominant Marxist paradigm" is almost everywhere dead. And being replaced by ecological or cultural Marxist views (or both together, as I regard my work, defined in part-Polanyi is the other part).

There is no mention of perhaps the most crucial movement of all — feminism and women's movements. This couldn't be an oversight. Nor does Left Green Network make a big deal out of feminism. Yet a non-bourgeois materialist feminism is absolutely crucial to the whole project of survival and emancipation.

No mention is made of oppressed minorities, e.g., blacks in the USA, or of the South, the Third World. Bookchin also plays down these issues. According to Bookchin, the Third World has no tradition of self-government, even though he recognizes the past plunder of the South by the North.

Another clue is your italicised statement that "the principle that the society-nature relations depend crucially on the form of social organization." True, but the opposite is also true. There is a dialectic between the two historically, except in Bookchin's account of world history. The discourse on "ecotopia" is also Bookchinist, although, ironically, he is abandoning it, in part, because of its obvious political irrelevance. In fact, the whole Left Green Network is full of splits that come because of the contradictions of MB's social ecological thought, among other reasons.

Words like "full political and economic democracy" can mean almost anything. In the context of "Our Aims," I assume they mean direct democracy (polis), municipal ownership of industry, and a democratic economy in the sense of a) politics first and b) the citizenry, i.e., municipality, controls material life. Bookchin, trying to adjust for modem conditions, i.e., division of social labour on a global scale, puts in the need for "federations of municipalities" but in our close reading of MB's works, and in discussions with him, this idea is close to an afterthought.*

---

* *[*] Editor's note: This statement is factually untrue. Murray Bookchin's first call for confederalism was made as early as 1972 (Anarchos, No. 4).*

Your "two different solutions," e.g., the capitalist solution and the "eco-democratic solution," neglect the third solution, which CNS English is striving for — i.e., a sublation of local and central; spontaneity and planning; etc., of anarchism and socialism. CNS English does not have any preordained solutions to this great and global problem, nor any useful slogans, in this respect. We are much more open than that, sceptical not only about socialism but also anarchism, and all these two words mean.

You imply that CNS English is or might be an "organ or the branch of some particular international tendency," i.e., you explain your need to keep your distance from CNS in these terms. The fact is that CNS isn't the organ or mouthpiece of any tendency; it tries mightily to resist this, and succeeds. A reading of "Our Aims," however, tells me that *Society and Nature* will be very much a part of the social ecology of the Left Green Network and Bookchin type of politics, and ideology. This we reject, as we must remain totally non-sectarian. To be concrete, we have socialist biocentrics, ecofeminists, eco-Marxists, non-Marxist ecosocialists, left ecological social democrats, and, yes, even a Left Green Network member! And we publish quality materials from all these and many more tendencies, in this age of vast experimentation with alternatives to capitalist and ex-real socialist madness..... One other point, with respect to style or form. Of course, given what I've said above, and given your obviously sincere and deeply held desires and beliefs re: the "aims" of *Society and Nature*, hence the unlikelihood of your journal becoming redefined to make it more resemble CNS's goals, tasks, and missions, I respectfully decline your invitation to join your Editorial Board. I think that this will not come as a surprise, as your expression "we have no objection" to doing this expresses a somewhat less than full acceptance or appreciation for what CNS is doing and what it has done. That's fine, too, as part of me at heart is very "libertarian," but often (in the USA) libertarianism is either a license for doing anything one wants to do, or a code word for the left sectarianism of the social ecologists here!

Takis, speaking frankly, and I wish we knew each other, so I knew better how to approach these issues with you, but knowing that probably the world's future rests on the red-green-feminist struggle in all its varied forms in different countries, my advice is not to publish "Our Aims." But to read and study the "introductions" to CNS Italy and EP Spain, and also the original "introductions" to CNS English, to get a better idea of what direction non-sectarian journals of this type can possibly look like, at least in terms of announced intentions.

Respectfully and sincerely yours,

Jim

December 4, 1991

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your fax of November 20, as well as the back issues of CNS.

As it is obvious that a certain degree of misunderstanding has been created regarding both your view of our journal as well as our original impression of CNS I would try, as far as I can, to clarify our position.

When we asked you for permission to publish a Greek "sister" edition of CNS we had a very limited idea of its orientation since, at that time, I had only seen nos 6 & 7, which I liked very much, and on the basis of which I recommended your journal to the other members of the editorial committee. My impression was that CNS, as its subtitle states, was "a journal of socialist ecology". This — at least for me — could only mean (after the failure of "existing socialism" and social-democracy) going back to pre-Marxist socialist utopias, libertarian socialist traditions and those "non-scientistic" parts of Marxism which are still useful today (e.g. theory of alienation, class theory — adjusted to today's conditions etc). A synthesis of those elements and of a modern conceptualisation of today's ecological destruction could, in my view, renew socialist thinking. My belief is that the Marxist conversion of the socialist project into a "science" (irrespective of the validity of the scientific claim) takes a large part of the blame for the reproduction of new hierarchical structures within the socialist movement and the totalitarian character of the regimes based on Marxist socialism. Although therefore the need for systematic analysis, beyond the Positivist vulgarity of orthodox social science, is acknowledged, I firmly believe in dissociating the liberatory project from any "scientific" basis. It is also my belief that the "state socialist" tradition (i.e. the current within the socialist tradition that sees the materialisation of the socialist project through the conquering or reforming the state rather than through building from the bottom up a confederation of self-relying regions), not only failed in practice, but it also has little relevance to today's conditions. I mean the withering away of the Nation-State and its replacement by a supranational state (the "democratization" of the state through e.g. the enhancement of the European Parliament is, of course, completely irrelevant to the liberatory project).

However, the aim of CNS, as for instance expressed in issue no 2, is to create a "scientific exchange between people within Marxist, neo-Marxist, feminist-Marxist, ecological Marxist and user-friendly post-Marxist discourses" and as such it obviously creates a much narrower scope than the broader forum at which our journal aims. Our aim is still to develop a Greek journal that, as we have put it from the beginning, will promote the interchange of ideas not just between Marxists and sympathisers, but, also, among social-ecologists, feminists and other left movements. Although our orientation is closer to Social Ecology than to other left movements, and this is reflected in OUR AIMS, still we intend to keep our political and ideological autonomy intact. So, although we have our reservations about Marxism, we would like to give a thorough view of eco-Marxism to Greek readers. Let me explain to you briefly the contents of the first 10 issues so that you can get a better idea of how in practice (irrespective of our sympathies) the journal will be totally non-sectarian. Each issue will develop, if possible, a single theme, presented from as many different points of view as possible and will leave readers free to draw their own conclusions.

In more detail: The first issue's theme is "The Polis and Local Economy" (a very topical Greek theme as Greece celebrates the 2,500 years of Cleisthenes reforms and the establishment of the Athenian democracy). It will contain articles by social ecologists, as well as articles from Development Dialogue and the New Economics Foundation's publications and an article of mine on "The relationship between direct and economic democracy in classical Athens and its significance today". Unfortunately, I could not find in CNS any article relevant to this theme to include in the first issue. However, all other issues are planned to include a large proportion of CNS articles. The theme in no.2 is the methodological issue which is planned to include your theoretical introduction to CNS 1 and possibly one of your conference papers as well as Ely's article on Ernst Bloch. Future issues will be on "Socialism and ecology" which will be based, almost entirely, on articles from CNS; on "ecofeminism" which will include the CNS discussion (no 6) and possibly Rao's paper; on "Peripheral development and the environment" which is planned to include Faber's article in no.1 as well as two articles from no.6; on "Technology" with articles from CNS 1, 3 & 5; on "Nature/Culture" with contributions from CNS 2 & 4; on "Environmentalism" (CNS 2 & 6); on "Ecological Economics" (CNS 2 & 3) etc.[*]

---

[*] *[*] Editor's note: In the end, Society and Nature was not in a position to publish all the above planned articles from CNS because of the exorbitant prices charged for the reproduction of each article by the CNS publisher. And, also, because after the publication of the international edition, it was decided that Society and Nature should rely on original articles.*

As it is obvious from the above, the omission from OUR AIMS of feminism and the Third World was due not to any need for consistency with Social ecology, but to our belief that the domination of human being by human being includes the domination of women in hierarchical social structures and of the Third World in a hierarchical world division of labour.

As you see, it was not our intention to diminish the significance of CNS, because, despite our reservations, we think that it plays an important role in the development of Left-Green thinking. We would like therefore to ask you for a co-operation agreement with CNS which will allow us to publish the articles we will choose from CNS, on the lines described above. We would also highly appreciate if you could reconsider your decision not to be included in our International Advisory Board that is intended to include people from many Green left tendencies (New Economics Foundation, TOES, Institute for Social Ecology, Castoriadis et al.)

Best wishes

Takis

December 6, 1991

Dear Takis,

Thanks much for your clarifying FAX of December 4. It's important to try our best to discuss the issues that we've raised even if we can't resolve them to our mutual satisfaction. Important for the two of us to help each other get our theory and practice as sharp as possible; important for any relationship our journals might have. So, here goes....

I definitely agree with you that we must recover what is good and useful in socialist traditions from the past. Just because capital has moved from a formal to a real subsumption of labour in the past century doesn't mean that A) capital on a global scale isn't still "formally subsuming labour," e.g., in many parts of rural India, and in Indian Mexico, where the government is now trying to break up the ejido system, thus creating a landless class, etc.; and B) even in the "developed" capitalist countries, where labour is more or less "really subsumed under capital" (i.e., that individual skills, whether they be high and advanced or low, are more or less useless outside of the framework of capitalist organization, e.g., the corporation is "useless" in the exchange value sense, although not necessarily in the use value sense [a

distinction Marx made only imperfectly]), even in the developed countries, e.g., the USA, social movements around defence of or struggles over the reconstruction of the conditions of production (use of urban space, education, land use patterns in agriculture, etc.) are not "Marxist" in the accepted sense of the word-but rather contain all kinds of practices, utopian and otherwise, which can and, in some cases in the USA, have learned from past radical, libertarian, and socialist traditions. So I have no problem with this issue you raise. "Pluralism" (not in the sense of USA politics — in this respect only ideologues see pluralism where there is only class politics) in the sense of a plurality of alternative models — community co-ops, worker co-ops, private property, i.e. self-earned property, socialized nationalised enterprises, etc., etc,— makes much sense in every way. One dimensional models of any type-whether they be Bookchin-type community ownership and control of the means of production and community direction of labour or, at the other extreme, nationalization of industry on all fronts-make no sense to me.

As for Marxism as a "science," I can say that for me Marxism has been a method of thought, a way of thinking, which permits one to get under or beneath commodity and capital fetishism, alienation from life (i.e., underneath phenomenological forms of life), the fetishism of the market (e.g., as in "free markets" or "market economy"), etc. I've never believed that Marxism is a science in the sense of having predictive powers about anything except the movements of capital — even in this respect, Marxism for me has been an a priori theory (if this, then that). Long ago I wrote about Marx and other 19th century theorists having conditional theories, i.e., Marx — conditions of capitalist accumulation; Weber — conditions of legitimate domination; Durkheim — conditions of social solidarity. Also, I've never believed the party line that revolution is more or less inevitable, that it is workers defined as people in their roles in production that make the revolution, etc. Clearly, the working class, however stratified and diverse, is the majority class in most capitalist countries, or capitalist countries that have been capitalistic for a long time, but this doesn't mean that workers are not also citizens, family people, belonging to status groups (e.g., blacks as oppressed minorities in the USA), etc. Thus the course of social struggle and change, and at the limit revolution, has never allowed what most people would label a "Marxist" path. In Cuba, for example, it was the latent reserve army of labour (poor and oppressed coffee growers) who led the revolution in the relations of production (i.e., were Castro's first social base); then after Castro took power, it was the active reserve army, i.e., urban unemployed, underemployed, etc., that threw their weight into deepening the revolution in the production relations; and, only later, finally, after much struggle, the productive workforce (i.e., fully employed) in the cities that began the revolution in the productive forces (a revolution that has a much more interesting history than standard accounts of Cuba credit it with). Each step along the way,

issues that have little or nothing to do with the workplace, and the socialized labourer', were crucial, especially the land question, health and education, cultural practices, etc. NOT that I'm holding up the Cuban Revolution as a model for other countries. Far from it — I'm simply giving a brief account of the process of revolution in one country with a majority working class, a process which it's very hard to describe using standard Marxist accounts.

The "science" in Marx for me is fundamentally the critique of capitalism, from a theoretical point of view; the practical critique has taken many forms, some with good historical results, some with bad.

So far so good, you must be thinking. So where do we disagree? And how deep goes this disagreement? I think this disagreement pertains to your remarks on the "state socialist tradition." I agree that this "tradition sees the materialization of the socialist project through the conquering ... of the state." No problem. But, and this view I hold strongly, I disagree that the "reform of the state" (at least in the sense I understand this expression), has "failed in practice" and has "little relevance" today. To my knowledge, and this is my favourite political topic, there has never been any social movement in favour of the democratisation of the state, which is what I mean by "reform." In the UK, years ago, Tony Been was Minister of Industries under a Labour government, and was asked what his plans were: he said, "we've nationalized industry, now we need to socialize industry." Quickly, he was kicked upstairs, removed from his post, and made Minister of Energy! This theme of a democratic state makes up a very long discussion, a kind of secret discourse within the left movement. I personally have been part of many struggles to democratise the state; this is my politics. This politics is too radical for the social democrats and not radical enough for the anarchists. So be it. Whether or not you agree or disagree with it (and I respect your views about "building from the bottom-up a confederation of self-relying regions" which I think has much merit), the fact is that my personal political views are not CNS's views, that is, CNS is not an organ of whatever movement there is (largely un-self-conscious of itself as such) to democratise the state in various ways. I mean that CNS cannot be associated with any particular political tendency in the broad red green spectrum. But if I read your last letter correctly, your journal will come down in favour of the confederation of self-relying regions. I mean that this seems not only to be your personal view, but also the view of your journal. If I'm right (and I hope I'm wrong!), then you can see why it's impossible for CNS to be "sister" journal to your journal. To emphasize, the main reason is not that we personally share a different version of what politics is or should be all about, but rather that CNS wants to be open and needs to be open not only to my view but also to yours — not just in terms of occasional contributions and debates, but as a matter of principle. Put

another way, the "correct" political path is a problem that is as yet unsolved, and we must have an ecumenical spirit and practice in this respect.

As for the quote in CNS Issue 2, I would rewrite this today to include various strands of non-bourgeois materialist feminism, including some ecofeminist thought, some anarchist thought to the degree that it is not doctrinaire (as it is, very much, in the USA), some radical social democratic thought, insofar as it confronts the ecology issue squarely, etc., not to speak of the "user friendly post-Marxism" we mentioned in Issue 2. "User friendly," since so much post-Marxism turns out to be another form of dogmatism, this time an idealist dogmatism, and in the case of some "theorists," a pre-Hegelian passive idealism!

Reading on, again in your paragraph 2, it's still unclear to me whether your journal has as its main goal (and of course all of us must prioritise our journal editorial work) the advancement of social ecology, or the main goal of developing the red green project generally, without prejudging results. Takis, my friend, "Our Aims" is simply too close to social ecology for CNS to join you as a "sister" journal. One test I would have for myself is would I be interested in printing "Our Aims" in CNS? The answer, as it stands now, is "no." The reason is not that it is a social ecological document. We want to publish social ecology; we've written outlines of a sympathetic critique of Bookchin's work (much lost in our fire, alas!!!), and Murray has agreed to write a response. Bookchin has given us a blurb for use in publicity. In fact, he's friendlier to CNS than Commoner(!), whom an outsider would expect to be closer to CNS than Bookchin. But Commoner, despite his central importance in the environmental movement here, remains "top down" in theory and practice. CNS is fundamentally bottom-up. Commoner knows this and refuses to give us a publicity blurb; in fact, at least once he has been known to speak against CNS! But we want to publish social ecology not merely as a statement of principles or as a position. Interested parties in the USA can read all the social ecological principles and programmatic statements they want to in Left Green Notes|Newsletter, Cogeneration, and the works of Murray himself. We want to publish a social ecology that enters into the substantive debates of our times, to see what light it can throw on the big issues of our time, to see what power there is in the method of social ecology, etc. "Our Aims" doesn't do this; rather it is programmatic, a document rather than discussion.

So when you say that "our journal will be totally non-sectarian," it is not that I disbelieve you! But only that this is not reflected in "Our Aims." Any thoughtful, experienced, and knowledgeable reader, reading "Our Aims," will associate your

journal with social ecology. It's that good!!! — that good of a statement of the social ecological position!

Pertaining to the outline of your future issues, as expressed in your letter. First, I think your choices are ok. I also think that the Bormida Valley article, translated from CNS Italy, would be ideal for your first issue (assuming "Our Aims" is constructed differently), since it tries to deal with bottom-up self-government, a "new turn" in Italian politics, but not in a doctrinaire social ecological way.

One last point. Whether or not your omission of women and the South from "Our Aims" was due to "any need for consistency with Social Ecology," i.e., independent of intentions or motives, this omission is always made in social ecological political documents, hence the world will identify it with the social ecological position. The difference here is between intentions and effects (unintended and otherwise). For us, it is crucial to be very explicit about the central importance of non-bourgeois materialist feminism as well as struggles in the South, and the fate of the South, where, after all, most people live and work under very bad conditions, generally; hence it's crucial for us to be very explicit about the South's struggles and the fate of the South, where capitalism has really fucked things up.

Hoping to hear from you soon,

Best wishes,

Jim O'Connor

December 9, 1991

Dear Jim,

Thanks a lot for your fax of December 6 that I received yesterday which helped to clarify things further.

Starting first from your last point about the Bormida Valley article, thanks for drawing my attention to it and if the article can be translated on time for the first issue (translation for the other articles of this issue is already well advanced) it will be included in it.

As regards the valuable theoretical points you make I think that important differences still remain between us which, however, should not preclude some form of a useful co-operation between our journals. Briefly:

With reference, first, to the methodological issue, although I agree with the argument you put in your paper "External natural conditions of production, the State and Political Strategy" about the need to bring in political economy when analysing the economic/ ecological crisis, I do not believe that the Marxist economic categories and methodology are the most useful ones for that purpose. I think that what is urgently required is the development of a new "subjectivist" Political Economy, i.e. one where the subject (social classes or groups and the resulting power relations) is at the centre of the analysis. Marxist Political Economy on the other hand, in order to be "scientific" (with its own laws etc) put at the centre of analysis the relations of production, with the result that men became simply the "effects" of different practices (see e.g. Norman Geras in NLR 71). Although your ingenious attempt to "adjust" Marxist political economy to today's conditions covers a lot of ground in the direction of putting social groups at the centre of analysis (particularly when you talk about the politicisation of the conditions of capitalist production — but the "price" you pay is in — determinacy, which makes it questionable whether Marxism could function anymore even as a conditional theory), still, I can't see how one could reconcile the contradiction in the Marxist theory of value (that, e.g. Castoriadis rightly emphasised) between, on the one hand, the role of the subjective element and, on the other, objective factors. Furthermore, any "objectivist/scientistic" type of analysis not only underemphasizes the role of social struggle but it also easily creates divisions within antisystemic movements between "those who know" (avant garde etc) and the rest, with the tragic results we have just seen in Eastern Europe.

As regards the question of political strategy, I see the liberatory project as a process that is materialised in stages. In a transitional therefore stage, I would agree with the objective of the "democratisation of the State," through the sublation of local and central. That would require, as you rightly point out, a plurality of models (community co-ops, worker co-ops etc). However, I do believe that this could only be a transitional phase towards the ultimate objective of the abolition of not just exploitation, but also of domination, of Man and Nature. In other words, to my mind, it is only within the context of the abolition of all types of hierarchical structures (including the State) and the creation of conditions of individual and collective autonomy that we can meaningfully talk about a liberatory project. OUR AIMS sets exactly this ultimate objective in order to define the liberatory project. For us, therefore, this does not represent a "tendency" among others but the very content of this project and that is why we do not identify it with social ecology. Still, many

important issues have been left deliberately open for further discussion and have not therefore been included in OUR AIMS. This applies to the question how we move from here to there (your strategy of democratising the State could be very useful in this context). It also applies to the very question whether the ultimate objective would be materialised through a confederation of self-relying regions or through some other form of social organisation (although personally I am in favour of a confederation) etc.

I agree with your point of making explicit the issues of feminism and the South and OUR AIMS will be amended correspondingly.

As it is obvious from the above, the purpose of OUR AIMS was only to define, broadly, the liberatory project itself, leaving open all issues of political strategy, methodology etc. That is why it is explicitly stated that the materialisation of the liberatory project is seen as the outcome of a synthesis of the autonomous-democratic, the socialist and the radical green traditions. That is also why a conscious effort will be made in each issue to cover every theme from both the ecosocialist and socio-ecological points of view.

I hope to hear from you soon,

Best wishes

Takis

January 1, 1992

Dear Jim,

I am sending you the final draft of OUR AIMS that has just been approved by the Editorial Committee. I would like also to take this opportunity to thank you for your useful comments on the first draft that helped us in drafting the final version.

As I informed you in my last fax the Committee has decided that the journal will not be a "sister" edition of any foreign publication but would like to be in close collaborative relations with CNS, the Institute for Social Ecology, the New Economics Foundation in UK (by the way, James Robetson, of NEF, a well known writer here on radical green economics found the previous draft of OUR AIMS "excellent") and possibly the Left Green Network. Please let us know whether you and Barbara can

participate in our International Advisory Board. In any case, we look forward for a close collaboration in the future.

Best wishes

Takis

OUR AIMS

Karl Marx, more than a century ago, could reasonably assume that the alternative to socialism would be barbarism. However, at that time, society could at least hope that the crisis was reversible. Today, the situation is more serious. The ecological crisis means that in the new millennium we will either create an ecotopia, based on ecological principles — reviving the tradition of the Greek polis and adjusting it to today's conditions — or we will almost certainly face barbarism. At best, barbarism could take the form of a society even more technocratic and centralised than the present one and, in the last instance, a totalitarian one, even though, at a formal level, the institutions of representative democracy may continue to function. At worst, the disappearance of our species cannot be excluded altogether.

Assuming that, even at the very last moment, an attempt will be made to solve the ecological problem, humanity is faced with a crucial choice among two, radically different, proposed solutions. The technocratic solution, pushed energetically by the capitalist system and supported by various environmentalists, seeks technological ways out of the crisis (nuclear fusion etc), which, to be compatible with the existing social system, usually presuppose a high degree of concentration. However, an "ecological technocracy...if it were possible, would require a highly disciplined system of social management that is radically incompatible with democracy and political participation by the people."* Alternatively, the ecodemocratic solution, seeking the causes of the ecological crisis in a social system that is based on institutionalised domination (not only exploitation) of human by human and the implied attempt to dominate Nature, requires forms of social organisation that are based on direct democracy (political and economic) and compatible technical and economic structures. Quite apart, therefore, from the question of feasibility of the former solution, the latter definitely poses the demand for a new liberatory project.

---

* *[1]. Murray Bookchin, Remaking Society (Black Rose, 1989).*

But it is not only the ecological crisis that makes imperative the need to develop a new liberatory project. This is also made necessary by the generalised social and economic crisis as well as the crisis of values than marks the world-wide spread of neoliberal capitalism, after the collapse of the socialist project in its Marxist-Leninist and social-democratic versions. The triumph of the particular over the general interest, expressed by neoliberalism, is inevitably followed by the intensification of class, nationalist, racist and religious conflicts. Indisputable evidence of the crisis is the rapid growth of world poverty and inequality and the parallel enhancement of the dialectic of violence, personal and collective. It is therefore obvious that the new project will have to "go beyond the conventional horizons of capitalism, socialism and the mixed economy."* Already, a new consensus is emerging in the radical left as regards the content of the new project. This consensus is properly reflected in the manifesto of European ecosocialists: "the political reaction to the social and ecological perils should be, above all, a decentralised, participatory and, as far as possible, direct, democracy."*

On the other hand, the traditional left, particularly in Europe (socialist, social-democratic parties, Euro-left) has joined the "neoliberal consensus" of the European Community. The content of this consensus may be reduced to the maximisation of the freedom of market forces at the expense of both the welfare state, that is steadily undermined, and of the state objective to secure full employment, which is irrevocably abandoned. A characteristic symptom of the crisis in the socialist movement is the fact that the collapse of state socialism, instead of leading to a quest for new forms of social organisation compatible with the socialist ideals of equality and social justice, has pushed the traditional left (Old and ex-"New") to adopt even the mass privatisation of the social wealth, which aims the creation of new opportunities for private capital and the continuation of the kind of "development" that has led to the present crisis!

The ecological movement, despite the growing ecological crisis, is also in recession after its "take off" in the last decade. Part of it (especially in Europe) has been integrated into the existing social system and its aims are the "liberal democratization" of the state and environmentalist reforms. The result is its progressive absorption by the traditional political parties (social-democracy, Euro-left etc). Another part (especially in the USA) has adopted either "idealist" or irrational and frequently metaphysical approaches to the ecological problem that are, also, compatible with the reproduction of the social system.

---

* *[2]. James Robertson, Future Wealth (Cassell, 1990).*

* *[3]. Pierre Juquin et al, Pour une alternative verte en Europe (La Decouverte, 1990).*

The inability of the ecological movement to propose an alternative social "vision" is, for us, the basic cause of its crisis and its gradual withering away. That is why this journal differs from the usual ecological journals that concentrate on the symptoms of the ecological crisis (destruction of the environment etc) instead of its social causes. The journal's problematic is differentiated from both the traditional left thought, as well as from liberal environmentalism; from the former, because History has shown that the conquest of power (instead of the negation of institutionalised power) and the change of the economic structure do not lead to a change in the social model but to a reproduction of the hierarchical structures; from the latter, because it does not pose the question of social change but, instead, taking the existing system for granted, seeks technocratic or "patchy" solutions to the ecological problem, ignoring the social character of the ecological crisis.

Our ambition is to initiate an urgently needed dialogue on the crucial question of developing a new liberatory social project, at a moment in History when the Left has abandoned this traditional role. The materialisation of the liberatory project and the transition from a hierarchical society to an ecological one is meant as the outcome of a dialectical synthesis of three tendencies that are expressed in corresponding political traditions and movements: the autonomous-democratic tradition (that includes the feminist movement), the libertarian socialist and the radical green movements. For us, the ecological society implies the abolition of the unequal distribution of political and economic power and of hierarchical structures, either institutionalised (e.g. domination of women by men), or "objective" (e.g. domination of the South by the North in the framework of capitalist division of labour).

Politics must therefore cease to be a technique for holding and exercising power and become again the self-management of society by its members. This implies that "the revival of the democratic movement should come about through the creation of new forms of political organization."* However, though both the liberatory project and the strategy towards its materialisation should be conditioned by the principle of personal and social autonomy, we do not wish to prejudge the concrete content of the ecological society and of the process of its realisation; these issues will constitute the main objects of discussion in this journal. The strategy, therefore, of effecting the transition, from "here" to "there," from the "liberal-oligarchic" state to a libertarian confederation of local communities, from the particular to the general human interest, must be a crucial element of the discussion for the development of a new liberatory project.

---

* *[4]. Cornelius Castoriadis's interview to Roger-Pol Droit, Le Monde (Dec.1991).*

In order to discuss all these issues without any prefabricated answers the journal will function as a forum for the interchange of ideas between social ecologists, ecosocialists and other green left movements in an attempt to reach a synthesis of the democratic, libertarian socialist and radical green traditions. Our aim is therefore the multidimensional discussion of each issue in the attempt to develop a new liberatory project. However, we start this attempt with neither any closed theoretical schemes that are founded on some rationalist "scientism" nor any "idealist," metaphysical and irrationalist systems. For us, the roots of the ecological crisis are at once institutional and ideological, psychological and cultural and that is why any comprehensive interpretation "must avoid both one-sided materialist explanations (identifying economic exploitation or other 'material conditions' as 'the problem') and one-sided idealism (identifying as a system of ideas like anthropocentrism as 'the problem')."* In other words, we do not base our demands for autonomy, social justice and ecological balance on any "objective" or metaphysical truth and teleology but on our own personal and responsible choice between co-existing tendencies and the interpretation that our choice implies.

In the framework of the above problematic the journal publishes:

- articles that develop a critique of the existing socio-economic model and/or expand modern thinking about ways to re-organise it;
- articles that contribute to the development of an alternative theoretical analysis of social phenomena, beyond the "scientism" of not only the dominant liberal paradigm but also of the Marxist one, as well as articles on epistemological issues;
- regular book reviews that contribute to the presentation of new currents.

January 11, 1992

Dear Takis,

This will be short, as I have used too much of my limited time and energy on our correspondence already. Your new "Our Aims" is unacceptable to me. It remains straight Bookchinism, and if I agreed with it, I would go join Bookchin and the Left Green Network here. I don't — because they (and you) are dogmatists. And there is

---

* *[5]. John Clark, "Social Ecology: a philosophy of dialectical naturalism" in Environmental Philosophy, ed by John Clark et al (Prentice-Hall, 1992).*

no room in my work life, or in history, in my opinion, for dogmatists of any stripe. You have prejudged alternatives and solutions. That's fine; I don't have anything at stake; it makes me sad. But I don't want to associate with any effort that does such a prejudging. As I wrote to you, the "line" you represent is already self-destructing in the States. Do your research, and you'll understand what I've been trying to tell you.

I don't appreciate at all the "moves" you make, in your attempt to use my name for your doctrinaire efforts. I mean your remarks about "transition," in which you say that you might support "socialist democratization" if this is consistent with libertarian municipalism (why not say anarcho-communism, which are the real words — Bookchin uses libertarian municipalism as a screen). That's a very big "if." For example, this would mean that you wouldn't support moves within European parliaments and the US Congress against the IMF and IMF ecologies, which are destroying the Third World, because such support would in effect be support for parliamentary democracy. Which to my mind is a totally irresponsible, yes, immoral, position. Bookchin at least says, "no politics above the municipal level." He is consistent, "coherent" (a favourite word of his), which I respect while, of course disagreeing with.

There are many other problems with "Our Aims," but I have spent too much time dealing with this issue. One thing I can't resist saying — in social ecology, "libertarian municipal confederations" do not "contest state power"; the line is that they develop autonomously, hoping state power withers away.

So, politely, and with respect to you, personally, I close down my end of our communications.

Sincerely,

Jim

January 23, 1992

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your letter of Jan 11 that I have just received.

I just like to express my feelings about your letter and, in particular, to answer the accusation of "dogmatism" on our part. As I understand it, all our dogmatism could

be reduced to the fact that, first, we put forward as our objective a form of social organisation that is based on direct democracy (instead of leaving the matter open, i.e. not to offer any new "vision") and, second, that we do not see (unlike you) the state as the main means leading to an ecological society. However, exactly the same positions on these two issues have been adopted by your counterparts in Europe (see the ecosocialist manifesto of P. Juquin et al), a fact that implies that dogmatism may be much more endemic across the Atlantic. Furthermore, I can't see how a Journal could be dogmatic and at the same time declaring that it will devote up to half of its space on CNS articles ! On the other hand, I have not seen many articles from social ecologists, or other trends within the Left Green movement (not akin to your problematic), published in CNS.

As regards the example you give to show that our position is "totally irresponsible, yes, immoral" I think that it reflects a total misconception of OUR AIMS. The insertion in the draft of a paragraph about the transitional phase aimed not to make any "move" towards your position, but to express our doubts on the position that "politics above the municipal level" can be ignored, when such politics affect profoundly not only the every-day life of people in the North and the South but also the very politics at the municipal level we would like to promote. The condition that "we will support socialist democratisation...to the extent that it is compatible with libertarian municipalism" (by the way is anarcho-communism an offending term?) simply means that we will not be able to support a form of democratic state socialism that would, directly or indirectly, rule out alternative forms of social and political organisation. However, to avoid any further misconceptions of the above kind, this paragraph will be omitted from the final draft.

Finally, thank you for the "correction" with respect to the socio-ecological line. However, Bookchin himself defines libertarian municipalism as "a dual power that contests (my emphasis) the legitimacy of the existing state power" (Green Perspectives, Oct.91).

In concluding, I would like to say that despite the fact that I also used too much of my limited time on our correspondence, still, I enjoyed it a lot and I appreciate your contribution to clarifying several issues. I hope that the abrupt way in which you close down your end of our communications does not imply that friendly and collaborative relations between our journals are not possible.

Best wishes

Takis

January 24, 1992

Dear Takis,

Our journals will have friendly relations and collaborate, of course. Not to worry.

It's not true that I reduce your dogmatism to your "putting forward as our objective a form of social organization that is based on direct democracy." You're wrong. Your dogmatism is based on the putting forward of direct democracy without any imminence, i.e., without basing this on actual, factual struggles and movements, which, in fact, are much more directed at democratising the state, whether they are fully aware of this fact or not. If you could show me plausible movements and struggles, with political goals of direct democracy, within urban movements, feminist movements, peace movements, environmental movements, then I would have a different slant on this. But you can't. Even the LGN in the USA is far better at single issue politics and struggles, among membership cadres, than success at any level in realizing their vision of direct democracy.

Direct democracy is tres european, Greek, Greek tradition, which is fine, but has little or nothing to do with, e.g., Papua New Guinea, to take one of hundreds of examples. What do you say to the millions of people living in slums in Mexico City? Talk about Athens??? And what do you say to women who follow the direct democracy line in really existing New England town meetings, who suffer male supremacy ideologies, and blacks in these same meetings snubbed by the "direct democratic" New Englanders? This, my friend, is practice real existing practice.

Putting forward any particular political objective now is dogmatic. If CNS were to devote itself exclusively to the democratic state line, we would be dogmatic, and wouldn't deserve to exist. We have to be very open; no one has any real answers; utopian visions are fine, but they should not cloud the realities of our times. I am for direct democracy, and a democratic state, and I am for law and an independent judiciary (anarchists of course have no use for law); I am for representative democracy, e.g., I would almost give my life if it meant that the IMF was made into an elected body by the UN General Assembly. To speak of direct democracy and no other political forms or objectives is dogmatic.

I do not see the "state as the main means leading to an ecological society." Wrong again. I believe in an autonomous civil society, self-activity and self-organization, collective self-help, etc., etc.. But I don't believe only in this! I also believe in a

democratic state, i.e., democratic contents into state planning and activity. In fact, I believe that these two presuppose each other. For too many reasons to enter into here.

I don't understand why you call P. Juquin my "counterpart."??? He has some good ideas; so do a lot of other people, who disagree with him. I have this feeling that you have a need to pigeon-hole, label, categorize, ultimately reify…

You ask, how could your journal be dogmatic and still declare that it will devote up to half its space to CNS articles? Simple. We publish first-rate social science and social theoretical work which exposes, analyses, theorizes, how and why world capitalism screws up the world and nature and people. Many articles have no particular political objective, hence can be "used" to support some particular objective. We are also publishing more discussions and debates.

You ask, why no social ecology in CNP? Answer: the social ecology "line" is argued as such within LGN, in Bookchin's works, etc., very uncritically. No self-criticism in this discourse. A self-reflexive article on social ecology would be very welcome. Also, I have encouraged Hawkins, chief LGN organizer, to write something for us. But he doesn't answer my letters!

Re: your second paragraph about not supporting a politics that is not consistent with the goal of direct democracy. I note that you don't address my point. Question: Do you support or would you support a strong move or struggle within European parliaments (any of them, including the all Europe parliament) to bring a little democracy, rationality, and humanity to the IMF (and central banks)? Even knowing that such a struggle would be seen as legitimating parliamentary forms and, from a political sociological view, that such a struggle would have the effect or function of reproducing parliamentary political forms. It's no use to answer, "this won't and can't happen." Because neither of us know whether it will or will not, can or cannot, since it's never been tried, among other reasons.

So….. on with the debate!

Best wishes,

Jim

---

5 February, 1992

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your letter of January 24 that I have just received.

Please, find enclosed the final draft of our editorial (this version has just been published in the Greek press as a pre-announcement of the journal) as well as a table of contents of the first issue. With respect to the questions you ask, in this intriguing debate, I would like to point out the following (I will try to keep to the order of your letter):

Although the direct democracy objective has received a new imminence in the last two decades or so, starting with the student movement in the late sixties and continuing with the Green movement in the seventies and the eighties — all this in proportion to the gradual demise of the traditional socialist movement — still, the point is not, to my mind, whether today's actual struggles are much more directed at democratising the state or instead at new forms of political organisation based on direct democracy. It is obviously easier to conceptualise the need to transform existing institutions rather than to be converted to a new form of society. It is also much more difficult to practice organisational forms based on direct democracy, rather than on representative democracy or hierarchically organised socialist movements that suit best the personal ambitions of aspiring politicians who usually constitute the most active elements in such movements. The point for me is that unless we create new forms of political organisation and a new vision of society, we shall steadily be moving towards a new barbarism where only the upper/middle classes will bother to participate in "politics" (usually, in the sense of just voting) and the lower classes will be marginalised, repressed and occasionally will resort to revolts.

The tradition of the polis is not just suitable for "Europeans," as you imply, and irrelevant to the needs of "people living in slums in Mexico city." As J. Friedmann emphasises (his article is published in our first issue) "in many of the working class barrios of Latin America, a new still fragile polis is taking shape...an extraordinary revival of poder popular" (development dialogue, 1987:1). On the other hand, we all know where the practice of hierarchically organised socialist movements has led us: to the debasement of any concept of socialism for many years to come.

I think that it is exactly today, when the socialist project (in its Marxist-Leninist and social democratic versions) is collapsing and the masses are pushed to either apathy or the "neo-liberal consensus," racism, nationalism, mysticism etc that a new "vision" is needed. A vision that would persuade them that involvement in politics, a

new kind of politics where everybody takes an active part, is desirable and that the old ideals of equality, solidarity and freedom could only be achieved to the full within the context of direct, political AND ECONOMIC, democracy. You point out that you are for direct democracy and a democratic state (presumably based on parliamentary institutions). This, I suppose, means that the former would usually apply to the local level and the latter to the national. I would agree with such a scheme but I think that, by its nature, it can only be valid for a transitional phase. Unless the objective of direct democracy is explicitly stated and practised as the ultimate objective guiding everyday practice and political strategy, sooner or later, forces will be set in motion within such a dual system which will lead to a situation where the direct democratic forms will wither away, at least in their essence. The experience of many green movements in Europe that started with direct democratic forms of organisation and ended up as hierarchically organised parties is indicative of the impossibility of sustaining such forms of organisation within an environment based on representative democracy.

Far from a democratic state presupposing an autonomous civil society, as you imply, I think that the former could only exist in growing tension with the latter. A really autonomous civil society has never coexisted with a state, however democratic, nor could it possibly materialise in the future, to my mind. All that is possible, within a democratic state based on representative democracy, is social institutions that function as counter-poles to the state's power, i.e. a very limited form of individual and social autonomy delineated within the contours defined by the state. The fact that such strong and long established institutions of civil society as the British Trade Unions and local authorities were so easily crashed by the Thatcherite state is also indicative of the above. Furthermore, an autonomous civil society does not necessarily imply the abolition of hierarchical structures within social institutions (Unions, local authorities etc), a fact that is conducive to the alienation felt by ordinary members, citizens etc and makes easier their undermining by the state.

My apologies for calling P. Juquin et al your “counterparts” in Europe. This was not due to any need of mine to categorise but to the fact that, as both you and Juquin call yourselves “ecosocialists,” (a title which, as far as I know, few use in the Green movement) and as you both refer to the need to achieve a synthesis of socialism and ecology, I thought that CNS and the people who signed the ecosocialist manifesto in Europe should have a lot in common. Anyway, much more in common than with any other current in the Green movement.

Although I agree about the quality of CNS material I am sure you would accept that it is not the only quality journal in the Green movement let alone the Left in general.

The reason therefore we are prepared to devote up to half our space to CNS articles has much more to do with ideological affinity than with quality. In other words, CNS is neither liberal environmentalist nor an eco-social democratic journal of the Euro-Left type and, of course, it rejects irrationalist and idealist approaches. As it is obvious from OUR AIMS, apart from social ecology, ecosocialism (in its European or USA varieties) is the only other current in the Green movement that is closer to our problematique. This is why we would like to reprint articles from CNS despite the fact that our "dogmatism" should have dissuaded us from doing so, given the ideological differences between the two journals.

As regards your final question on whether I would support a move within European parliaments to affect some changes in IMF etc policies, even knowing that this could be seen as legitimating parliamentary forms, I thought the answer was implicit in my letter. Of course, I would support such a move if it was going to produce significant changes (e.g. the transformation of IMF into an elected body by the UN General Assembly, as you mention) and not just cosmetic amendments to the policy of such institutions. The risk in supporting any changes, is not just that this may be seen as legitimating parliamentary forms but that it may be seen as legitimating the institutions themselves. In other words, my disagreement with parliamentary democracy arises not only from the fact that it is not a democracy at all but — as Castoriadis called it — a form of liberal oligarchy. It also emanates from the fact that no Western parliament has ever in the past taken steps to radically undermine capitalist economic power and survived to see the changes effected. On this at least Marx was right! I also suppose that no Western parliament will ever take the radical steps needed to reverse the ecological crisis — if this was against capitalist interests — since parliaments (as well as governments) are much more amenable to capitalist control than popular assemblies. However, as I pointed out in my previous letter, in a transitional stage, I will not be against parliamentary forms to the extent that they are not incompatible with other forms of political organisation based on direct democracy.

Best wishes

Takis

March 3, 1992

Dear Takis,

Re: Yours of Feb. 5th, point by point.

"The point is not whether today's actual struggles are much more directed at democratising the state or instead of new forms of political organization based on direct democracy" (your italics). Are you agreeing with me that as an empirical question the "democratising the state struggles" are more widespread and run deeper than "new forms of political organization based on direct democracy"? It would seem so. But it would be interesting if you think that this is true, as a question of fact. The evidence supporting this view is overwhelming. You mention the student movement of the 1960s — one thing this movement was all about was democratising the universities (e.g., Berkeley's free speech movement). This succeeded to a degree. For me, "the point" is very much this fact. This is the practical imminence, the what is becoming (maybe), the practical critique. This is in fact what radicals have to work with. Of course, self-organization, opposition to the leadership principle and the degeneration of movement organizations into personal forms of expression of their leaders, hierarchies that permanently entrench the few at the top, etc., etc., must be fought. Much of my political life has been spent doing this. But to do this, including with a "new vision of society" is not exclusive of doing the state democratisation struggle.

J. Friedmann doesn't know what he's talking about here. "Popular power" in LA is a bare survival movement, born out of dire necessity, with the usual array of leaders, organization, etc. Not "direct democracy." Yes, this is a movement. But it's not the type of anarchist movement you present it as. Anyway, precisely because these movements typically do not seek or try to democratise the state, and also because they are more or less powerless without outside help, sooner or later they turn to the government! For help. A government/state that remains undemocratic. So, you are opposing two non-existing forms: "popular power" as "polis" and hierarchically organised socialist movements. The former are hierarchical by and large; the latter are dead more or less. What we need is an ecosocialist/feminist movement that obeys principles of direct democracy meanwhile struggling to democratise the state, i.e., the bureaucracy. "Sublation" is the word. All old models make little sense — either "ex real socialism" or "traditional anarchism."

I take note of your language. The "masses" "pushed" this way or that way. They need to be "persuaded." Etc. Takis, take a look at your prose. The way you construct the problem, the world is doomed unless it listens to you and a few anarchist/social-ecologist friends in Greece, and even fewer here and elsewhere. You must see

yourself as having a huge responsibility — literally to save the world, and to save the "masses" from "apathy or neoliberal consensus." I can see why you must come on so sure of yourself If I thought I faced this vast and enormous responsibility, I would either crumble or have to sound very sure of myself.

I take it that you are against movements based on direct democracy having any other goal than a society based on the vision of direct democracy, e.g., your account of what happened with the German greens. But the government (parliament) and state (law and order system, bureaucracy, courts, etc.) still exist. And dispose of vast amounts of different kinds of resources. What does your direct democracy as both means and ends type of movement do about the government and the state? Ignore them?

There was never an autonomous civil society; there were many local autonomous, semi-autonomous village communes, guilds, etc. But these were vertically organized. Loyalty was to the member of the commune, the guild, etc. Thus the class question within the community was suppressed. Outsiders were looked upon with suspicion. Solidarity between those at the lower end of, e.g., the guilds or free towns, with others at the lower ends of other guilds or free towns elsewhere was non-existent. I think you are romanticizing history.

"Societies" were always born and developed as national entities. It was the state that imposed language, common standards, etc., on the villages, free towns, guilds, etc. So there never was "autonomous civil society" — with "society" defined the way it is commonly used today.

Yours,

Jim

London, 17 March 1992

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your letters of March 1 & 3 as well as for your comment about my IRAE article. You are right about the omission of the relationship between foreign debt and the ecological crisis but unfortunately the editors of IRAE had imposed severe space limitations which meant that the published version had to exclude about 1/3 of the first version!

Coming to your comments I would like to make the following points.

I think it is a serious underestimation of the significance of the student movement in the sixties and of the New Left in general (at least in its initial phase) to characterise it as aiming just to the democratisation of the university, or the State. As a participant in this movement I know that , at least in this side of the Atlantic, the objectives of too many people in the movement went much further than that (radical reorganisation of society, a new kind of politics based on direct democracy, fundamental attack against the Old Left and almost everything it stood for etc). If, at the end, the movement degenerated into a struggle to "democratize" — at the formal level — the State and its institutions, this is another story which, to my mind, has to do with the uneven level of consciousness of the participants in the movement which resulted in its "absorption" by the power mechanisms of the State and of the "alternative" Left (Maoists etc). So, at the empirical level, it may be true that today the "democratising the state struggles" are more widespread than those aimed at new forms of political organisation based on direct democracy, but under one important condition: that you include in the former the social-democratic movements, as well as all those reformist green parties that function as electoral mechanisms in parliamentary elections, usually with just environmentalist demands. However, if we exclude these reformist movements and parties, because I know that your vision is much more radical than theirs, then I do not think that comparing like with like, i.e. radical green currents still struggling for a new kind of politics and your current of radical democratisation of the State, that there is any evidence supporting your view.

It was neither my intention nor that of J. Friedman's, as I understand him, to represent the "popular power" movement in L.A. barrios as an anarchist movement, but as a movement which, as JF stresses, brings back the idea of the polis, in the sense of shifting social, political and economic power from the centre to the local community. Although I could not say that I will oppose movements struggling to democratise the state, in the radical form that you suggest, still, I believe that "sublation" can not lead to a new kind of politics and society. To my mind, as long as elites in the form of professional politicians, capitalists, managers etc control the decision-making mechanisms of society (state, means of production and so on), irrespective of how hard we fight elitist practices rather than the very institutionalisation of elites, we are going to end up with, at best, some form of decentralisation of power at "the macro level," keeping the hierarchical structures very much the same at the "micro level." Any process of real democratisation will be fought fiercely by any means available to the elites controlling the decision-making mechanisms. That is why I feel that the state democratisation struggle (which can easily be absorbed by the traditional social democratic parties etc) might disorient

the struggle for the de-institutionalisation of domination of man over man and Nature.

As regards the need to persuade people, I think that the only contribution intellectuals can make today is to work out "visions" of alternative societies that will illustrate that capitalism is just one way of organising it and not the only way, as too many people, especially after the collapse of existing socialism, tend to believe. I do agree with Ted Trainer (Developed to Death, Green print, 1989) that "the problem is an educational one (and that) we cannot hope to achieve a transition to a sustainable world unless and until most people come to understand why fundamental change is essential and come to see the alternative ways not only make survival sense, but represent an attractive way to live." It is therefore on only one thing that "I am sure of myself": on what sort of society I, or my children, would like to live in ! And I believe that this society can come about through the determined and conscious effort of people who imagine it, rather than because some "immanent" trends have created the conditions for its emergence. I suppose therefore that I am much less sure of myself than people who still believe that their struggle and their strategy could still be based on "general theories" that "explain" social and economic evolution. I would agree of course with you that you cannot ignore existing laws and institutions. However, at the European level, the crucial question is whether we should struggle for a confederal Europe of the regions, rather than a federal super state. To my mind, the creation of self-reliant local communities and economies — a precondition for a real democratization — can only be achieved within the former rather than the latter. A struggle therefore to democratise a federal European State becomes meaningless, taking into account the vast concentration of economic power at the moment, which will simply be institutionalised at the political level as well, as a result of a federalisation of Europe.

My point about "autonomous civil society" was not to refer to controversial historical evidence on the matter and of course I would agree about the social divisions within democratically organised societies (e.g. the Athenian democracy — and I do not just mean women and slaves). That is why I believe direct (political) democracy, not accompanied by economic democracy, is meaningless. My point was that I see a contradiction in an autonomous civil society coexisting with a state, however democratic.

Best wishes

Takis

April 1, 1992

Dear Takis,

Thanks for yours of March 17. I just returned from a quite successful CNS European meeting, so am exhausted and will make this short.

Quickly, taking up your points:

Here the student struggle started as a fight to democratise the university (Berkeley free speech movement), then quickly got involved with the civil rights struggle (which aimed to give blacks basic bourgeois democratic rights, i.e., to vote without being terrorized), then turned into the anti-war movement, which was pacifist, and challenged the national security state, but offered little or poor alternatives. Visions of an alternative society quickly turned sour with drugs, etc. Communal experiments mostly failed. Reality struck. I'm glad that you recognized the fact that "democratising the state" struggles are more widespread than those aimed at new, anarchist forms of political organization. Ironically, if I read the anarchist Left Green Network here correctly, more people are involved in "demo state" struggles than in "municipal confederalism" struggles. Of course, "demo state" struggles are wrapped up with all kinds of politics, including anarchist! And social democratic. And feminist. And green village politics (definitely not anarchist in, e.g., India). Etc. What I would like to know is ONE OR TWO EXAMPLES OF STRUGGLES FOR YOUR KIND OF POLITICAL REORGANIZATION, i.e., what is it that you support, specifically, here and now, concretely? And who? I don't mean re: ideas. I mean, practice.

Also, glad to get clarity on your lack of belief in the process of sublation (local/central, spontaneity/planning, etc.) This clarifies one big difference between us. Of course, elites will fight and do fight such sublation struggles! It is precisely through struggle that a new politics is formed! By the way, the main struggles in LA are led by either old-fashioned leftists or those who believe in the sublation thesis! True, in the LA barrio and elsewhere, there are struggles to make decisions locally — to get away from the power — the corrupt power — of City Hall. But these struggles lack resources, so they have to go to City Hall to get them. And also turn to outside experts of different kinds for help. Don't romanticize these struggles, e.g., in Portland, many cities, including my own! If anything, these city struggles in the States today are "sublation" struggles.

Also, I am happy to get clear our differences re: the role of intellectuals, theory, visions, etc. You say that the "only" contributions intellectuals can make is to work out visions. Of course, this is somewhat like utopian socialism in the old days! This position is profoundly idealist, of course. Intellectuals should help produce ideas about a better future — in the utopian tradition. Not analyse and theorize the world, in terms of class, women's struggles etc., to find imminence, to locate the possible as well as desirable. Finding "imminence" is the same thing as making a "general theory" that "explains social and economic evolution." Here I fear you do not discriminate properly between the intellectual as visionary vs. the intellectual as the holder of the "science of history" (now dead). There are many in-between positions!

What is "economic democracy"? Bookchin has it that the municipalities are based first and foremost on political life, "political man [sic]" a la the Greeks, and that material life and "economics" is strictly secondary. Which gets his theory into all kinds of trouble.....

In sum, I think we've clarified our differences very well. You "see a contradiction in an autonomous civil society coexisting with a state, however democratic." I don't. For many reasons.

Yours for clarity, best wishes,

Jim

London, 4 July 1992

Dear Jim,

I am very sorry for the long delay in answering your letter which was due to the fact that all this time I was terribly busy with the publication of the first issue of Society and Nature, in both its Greek and English versions. I hope, by the time you receive this letter, the first issue will have been delivered to you and I would be grateful for your comments.

Some quick points about your reply to my letter. I am also glad that our differences have been clarified and I hope that S&N will further help on this (e.g. as regards your question — point no 4 — on economic democracy, I hope my article in no. 1 will be

helpful).* However, I think that there is still some misunderstanding especially on my position with respect to the role of intellectuals, theory etc. As regards the role of theory I hope that my article in S&N no. 2 will clarify my position but as regards the role of the intellectual, when I said that the only contribution intellectuals can make today is to work out visions of alternative societies of course I meant, of course, that part of this contribution is the critique and analysis of the present society and this is exactly what I am trying to do. How else could we project another society unless we start by criticising and analysing the present one? I therefore think that you rather simplify the possibilities when you characterise my position as utopian socialist, as it can not obviously be classified as scientific socialist. There are indeed many in between positions and the one I adopt is the one suggested by C. Castoriadis (L'institution imaginaire de la société) i.e. that there are several tendencies in social development leading to different directions and we have to choose among them the ones compatible with our own liberatory vision and then interpret the implications of our choice. In this sense, the autonomy tradition that I support has a long history which is exemplified today by the general shift away from statism rather than towards it, that your sublation thesis suggests. Of course, the ruling elites try to divert this shift away from the state towards a further deepening of the capitalist organisation of society and that is why I believe there is an urgent need today for a new kind of politics that would abort this effort and establish the conditions for a new kind of political and economic democracy.

Best wishes

Takis

January 25, 1993

Dear Takis,

Copies of "missing letters" received.* I looked again in my files, which are not always in good bureaucratic order (the anarchist in me) and the letters you sent were

---

* *[*] Editor's note: Since the above letter was written, a more detailed analysis of economic democracy has appeared in Society and Nature/Democracy & Nature. See Takis Fotopoulos, Vol. 1, No. 3 and Vol. 3, No. 3.*

* *[*] Editor's note: This refers to the letters by Takis, December 4, 1991; Jim, December 6, 1991; and Takis, December 9, 1991, that were initially not published along with the others in the CNS Newsletter.*

missing. I would have no reason or interest not to include them with the others, as for the most part they focus on the discussion/debate about what left green politics is or should be. I will be sure to include them in our next Newsletter. By the way, a number of people have called or written saying more or less the same thing — "very good substantive exchange without the usual dumb polemics these types of exchanges usually inspire." Two positions laid out by two people with a different theory and politics. So the results of publishing them have been positive — clarifying for many what the main issues are.

We have our differences, as we developed rather nicely in the letters, and our similarities (we don't like the exploitative, oppressive system of global capitalism, which is not doing nature any good at all!).

So let's leave it at that…

Best wishes,

Jim

~

This letter of January 25, 1992, is a response to Takis after Takis apprised Jim that some of the letters from the initial correspondence had not been printed.