

BOOK REVIEWS

ECO-WARRIORS AND ECO-FEMINISTS

by Meta Heller

ECO-warriors and eco-feminists are needed in the world today, not just to fight large corporations or to save the Earth's resources, but to bring about a social and economic order that is neither market-oriented (capitalistic) nor centrally-planned (socialistic or fascist) but anarchistic. Anarchy in the modern sense means individuals who are self-governing in the workplace, in the community, and in harmony with nature.

Is this possible, given the disintegration of both major economic systems in the world? Yes, say the authors of two books: *Ecology as Politics* by Andre Gorz, a French political scientist, and *For the Common Good* by Herman E. Daly, an economist, and John B. Cobb, Jr., a Protestant theologian.

Furthermore, there is no alternative to a convivial free society in which people have more control over their lives, except "technofascism" (as Gorz calls it) in which multinational corporations rule countries in which they reside, prompting governments to enforce power over citizens by coercion through bureaucracies, police forces, armies and private security forces. Under such conditions, the ecological complexities of the Earth are doomed, for technocrats would have control of the task of calculating "optimal" norms of pollution control and production. But, also doomed would be freedom in society, for people would be "programmed" to try to survive in a less and less hospitable environment.

As Gorz points out, this prospectus is highly probable if capitalism is compelled to integrate ecological costs without being challenged at all levels by alternative social practices and alternative visions of human civilization. "The advocates of growth are right on one point: within the framework of the existing society and consumption patterns - based on disparity, privilege, and the quest for profit - zero or negative growth can only mean stagnation, unemployment, and a widening gap between rich and poor. Within the framework of the existing mode of production, it is impossible to limit or suppress growth while simultaneously distributing goods more equitably."

Daly and Cobb agree, though they explain the realities of global economics in a different way. They stress the need to proceed from individualism to person-in-community, from cosmopolitanism to communities of communities, based on bioregionalism. They explain how abstractions in economic thought have led us astray from reality. When economic theory reduces all the physical world to "matter" and defines all land and its resources in terms of "rent" (the return on the use of land or its resources therein and thereupon), little wonder we have such a mess.

Gorz suggests how we can get from "here to there" based on European experience. Daly and Cobb recommend specific changes in the USA's fiscal policy (taxes) at the three levels of government - federal, state, and local. It is a masterpiece

of design which makes taxes understandable. In effect they would take from the rich and give to the poor via a federal inheritance tax and the income tax (with a guaranteed annual minimum income, also endorsed by Gorz). They would give states more autonomy by letting them collect exclusively the sales tax, all excise taxes, and the petroleum tax, but also give them more responsibilities (for all education, health, safety, agriculture and highways). To local governments they reserve the best tax of all, a land-value form of property tax, with a high rate on land values and a low rate on buildings; this generates many good things, such as more jobs, efficient land use, lower land prices and affordable housing. Since most land in any capitalistic country is owned by 1-2% of the richest people (who can prevent others from using it and who are free to misuse or underuse it themselves), this simple change goes a long way towards equalizing wealth distribution.

In the Soviet republics, where land is still publicly owned, Russia has adopted a land-value leasing system to underwrite costs of government as the socially equitable thing to do. They may have no other taxes on wages, sales, or profits, thus setting a precedent in building autonomous, self-governing communities, regions, republics.

Why do we need eco-warriors and eco-feminists to fight for a sustainable Earth and a sane society based on community, reciprocity and freedom? Because ecologically-sensitive people are aware of what is happening to our Earth and to our societies. They care. The ecologically-sensitive can sharpen their attacks - through courtrooms, non-violent actions, demonstrations and public relations - if they understand more about economics, taxes, the pitfalls of "markets" or central planning, if they understand the growth mentality and what generates the unequal distribution of wealth.

We are not necessarily poorer if we have fewer goods more evenly distributed, as all the authors point out. We can enjoy a far richer life in a sustainable environment. We can simply enjoy! By emphasizing the ecological imperative, both books equip us to be competent eco-warriors and eco-feminists.

1. *Ecology as Politics*, by Andre Gorz. South End Press, 116 St. Botolph Street, Boston, MA 02115, 1980. (First published by Editions Galilee, Paris, France, 1975).

2. *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*, by Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr. Beacon Press, Boston, 1989.

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