

A plethora of companies, which do as much business as bike makers, deal in everything from training new drivers to towing idle vehicles. There are parking operations, snow removal companies, and people who salt the streets. More than 50,000 US car washes wring out \$8.6 billion from automobile dirt while U-Haul pulls in over \$2 billion a year.

The list of industries that profit from the car is virtually endless. Even in death, the car is a money-maker. An entire culture has been spawned by weekend adventures and day trips to search out junkyard gems. Including chains, the six thousand auto scrap yards strewn across the USA do \$30 billion a year in sales. But many bits and pieces don't make it to the yards; landfills are the final resting place of a huge amount of material from cars. This is another multi-billion-dollar industry.

Beyond direct spin-offs, the private car underpins a host of (heavily capitalized) businesses that would not exist if bikes were the dominant form of transportation. Wal-Mart, for instance, grew on the back of the highway to become the biggest company in the world. Similarly, the motel (or "motor hotel") business created by and for the car does tens of billions of dollars in sales annually while the \$120 billion fast food industry began on Southern California highways and continues to do most of its business via the drive-thru.

Sprawling car infrastructure has also allowed for the massive growth in house sizes. Brick, wood, ceramic, grass, paint, glass and pipe producers have all benefited. Appliance manufacturers are the better for it too. It's not easy fitting two fridges, a dishwasher, a freezer, a washer and drier, a pool table, six beds and four TVs into a small house or apart-

ment; big houses are a boon to the appliance industry. "Urban areas have less junk than suburbs", said 1-800-GOT-JUNK's Darryl Arnold. "But only because they have less space. My residential jobs in apartments and condos downtown are on average one eighth of a load, compared with closer to half a truck load in the suburbs."

When all is said and done, cars facilitate an extra large culture, which is grand for business. Propelling the capitalist economic system full speed ahead,

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**... only about one in three automotive dollars is generated directly by carmakers.**

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the automobile is a vehicle of endless consumption. Capitalism would prefer everyone traveling to the grocery store by private jet, but since that's not practical 3,000- or 4,000-pound metal boxes will have to do.

The car's ability to generate business explains in large part why public monies are overwhelmingly devoted to this dangerous, unhealthy and unsustainable form of transport.

Those who want cities structured for safer and more ecologically sustainable forms of transport need to challenge, rather than reinforce, the idea that transit policy should be designed to expand profits. Proponents of the bike and walking will thrive as more people challenge the logic of a system driven by the endless accumulation of profit.

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## In Defense of Planning in the Eco-State

by Mark Jablonowski

As the defects of the neo-liberal hegemony become increasingly obvious, many seek answers in alternative systems. The fact that our natural environment remains under direct assault by these forces has spawned alternatives that focus on ecological preservation. Such radical eco-centrism, however, is still searching for a workable program of transition to a better world (the *ecotopia*). For the most part, proponents focus on a decentralized vision of community action that attempts to protect against the adverse effects of increased materialism. This localized vision has much in common with early utopian socialist visions, the basics of which still permeate many modern approaches to an improved human society.

We might argue that they both build from a primitive communism, the birth of which was in the earliest of human civilizations. Both socialist humanists and eco-centric naturalists reasonably argue that society took a "wrong-turn" with the rise of modern capitalism. The result is the subjugation of both human and non-human populations to the whims of an increasingly concentrated power structure.

While the romantic notion of a return to an unspoiled pastoralism is tempting, its practical value in a world (both human and natural) in which change is *inexorable* is at least doubtful. A more realistic ap-

proach that still manages to preserve human and non-human dignity arises from our ability to consciously work towards a harmonious coexistence among all biotic communities of the earth.

We would suggest that such a vision entails at least some degree of coordination of purpose, and direct *planning*, at the most central levels of society. We would further argue that the prejudice many feel against central planning by a democratically constituted state is not natural, but rather human-induced.

It is a stigma that has been intentionally created by those same humans who seek to exploit human and natural resources while suggesting that it is for

the good of all. Having nothing to fear from phantoms, it remains in their best interest to encourage romantic visions of a better world, while denigrating practical ones, as a diversion from progress toward genuine solutions.

### Planning for *sustainable* progress

Unfortunately, many environmentalists believe, or have been led to believe, that planning is unnatural, or exists solely as an attempt to control both humans and nature. In fact, we may view natural evolution as a planning process itself: *Organism* implies *organization*. The ancient Stoic philosophers recognized that all life is driven by fate, or an inexorable connection among things in the wider cosmos. This cosmos is complex and may likely never be fully understood by mere mortals.

It is precisely the recognition that we *can't* know everything about how the world fits together that should prompt us to take extra care in establishing our relationship with the natural environment. Maybe in the time of Emerson and Thoreau some degree of rugged individualism with respect to nature made sense. In the modern complex society, the need for a communitarian effort is inescapable.

Planning for a balance, or harmony, with nature on a society-wide basis requires some degree of centralized coordination. Once again, environmentalists have been turned against any such coordinated efforts by the scarecrow of "statism," erected by the very private interests who attempt to preserve their own brand of centralized control. We often believe that the only type of authority that may exist at the central level is that of the (fragile) human kind. This ignores the potential of an *authority of nature*.

We need to accept that the humans who can lead us to a better world are those who speak with the authority of nature, and not on the basis of selfish interests. And while the idea of a benevolent potentate or ruling vanguard has lost much of its luster in today's secular world, voluntary acceptance of a higher authority remains primary in religious and spiritual beliefs — belief systems on which our future existence may itself depend.

Planning lies at the foundation of a transition to an extended sense of community, or *e-communism*, that includes all life. The idea owes more to naturalists like Aldo Leopold and Arne Naess than to Marx



and Engels, though there is nevertheless a strong affinity between underlying structures.

Marx foresaw the methods of communal coordination in his study of human history, from which his material-historical dialectic of progress sprang. Yet Marx used these historical facts to construct a *theoretical* basis for his future vision of the perfect human community. That Marx formed no specific "blueprint" for future socio-economic systems was a sign of his theoretical bent. He recognized, however, that throughout history the specifics were to be filled in by those who applied theory to practice. People like Lenin, for example.

From this perspective, Marxism-Leninism is perhaps most accurately viewed as an attempt at "applied Marxism," suited to the social situation of

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its time. The practical agenda, in turn, incorporated ideas for working toward the common interest, including centralized

planning of crucial economic relationships and social ownership of means of production, along with the recognition of the need for common stewardship of natural resources (i.e., no one person, or group of persons, can "own" nature). We would argue here that these same ideas can also be fruitfully incorporated into the extended vision of community, as their basic goal is the same — autonomy and the preservation of dignity.

So, who supports the eco-localist vision, and why? Well, a host of honest supporters of a better world surely do. Many base their faith on the perceived notion of the sustainability of ecological micro-systems. The analogy between human society and ecological systems however cannot be pushed

too far. Less recognized, and seemingly paradoxical, is the backing of an oppressive status quo. They lend their support, often surreptitiously, for the simple reason that continued emphasis on diffuse local action presents little or no threat to their power.

Prominent spokespersons of eco-localism include a variety of capitalist “environmentalists,” including Al Gore, Lester Brown and Amory Lovins — all of whom recommend a host of relatively minor reforms rather than the replacement of malfunctioning economic and political systems. They extol the virtues of a more ecologically friendly world, while undercutting our ability to really make it happen.

If the existing power structure does not feel threatened by eco-localism, what is it afraid of? It fears most of all the confiscation, or takeover, of the existing economic apparatus, with the eventual goal of replacing its underlying program of profit through exploitation with a more human *and* ecologically friendly one. Nationalization, public ownership, community control are all reviled. Public planning at any meaningful level is also ridiculed, despite the fact that all of corporate America plans on its own behalf.

In fact, genuinely “free” markets are a mere remnant of the past, despite the extended lip service the existing power structure pays to them. On the dangers of public planning we are told to look no further than the mess that the former Soviet Union created, resulting in its eventual demise. The fact is that public planning had little or nothing to do with the collapse of a Soviet system that might more accurately be characterized (at least in its later years) as “state capitalism.”

### A framework for transition

Radical eco-centrism needs a coherent working framework if it is to achieve its underlying goals. The idea of an extended community must be built on a foundation of ideas that have been pioneered by both theoreticians and practitioners of alternative social and economic systems that have given us at least glimpses of the workability of such systems through history. Among the underlying fundamentals of the transitional structure are:

- Increased use of centralized (public) planning
- Public ownership/stewardship of survival-critical industries and resources
- Coordinated assessment and research for safe (sustainable) progress
- Decentralized (community-based) planning, *where it makes sense*
- Use of *genuinely* free markets to supplement planning efforts

Serious application of these ideas, embodied in a transitional *eco-state* based on a commitment to natural harmony, offers us the best hope of achieving a viable utopia in which the autonomy of all na-

ture (including humans) is preserved. The democratic centralism so constituted has at its center not human whim, but the inexorable absolutes of nature. It has as its driving force a suitable coalition, or related *e-vanguard*, consisting of those who codify this extended vision of community. The duty of the citizenship is to support this program, once formulated with proper democratic input.

Real-world applications are already at hand. For example, the much maligned “cap and trade” can serve as a useful vehicle for a cleaner environment if applied with a commitment to the basic principles of planned progress. Caps, the directly planned portion of any sensible plan of pollution reduction, need to be publicly vetted and commanded by a similarly coordinated public body — not solely by those entities we seek to regulate.

Markets, acting in a suitably controlled fashion (perhaps via public auction mechanisms), can then act to “fine tune” the thousands of decisions that must be coordinated on a decentralized level. Markets in this sense perform only a computational function, not a distributive one, as they do under private monopolies.

### What lies ahead

The task of winning the “hearts and minds” of those who will drive change demands a coherent process of transition. While Marx rightly perceived that no such socio-economic system can specify all its details in advance, successful transition needs to be based on workable alternatives. One such alternative is the development of an extended notion of community that, like its humanist counterpart, incorporates public ownership and planning for the successful achievement of its goals. This approach lets us maintain a deep ecological commitment, while recognizing the need to actively pursue its goals.

A large part of the challenge ahead lies in resisting simplistic or incoherent solutions to complex

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problems. This also means recognizing that the status quo will do everything it can to encourage such thinking, in the hope that by doing so they may neuter any movement for change. It is only with the development of *viable* alternatives that a radical eco-centrism will be taken seriously.

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