

Politics of Existence

- 2 Life After the Exit Ramp**
Stan Cox envisions a future where restraining resource exploitation would stimulate discovery of quality-of-life improvements.
- 5 Why We Need an Ecosocialist Revolution**
Ian Angus observes that the fight against environmental destruction is central to the fight against capitalism.
- 11 The Struggle for Egypt**
Joseph Massad realizes that both the Mubarakists and the Muslim Brotherhood have a unified policy against social justice.
- 14 Venezuela's 21st Century Socialism: Neo-developmentalism or Radical Alternative?**
Federico Fuentes describes the preferred economic strategy of Venezuela's elites, which was to import rather than develop local industry.
- 18 Thinking of Joining the ISO?**
Pham Binh ponders a group that has never had a competitive election for its Steering Committee since it was founded in 1977.
- 22 History Rebooted**
In his review of The Rebirth of History, R. Burke notes that Badiou considers the western world to currently be in a state of latent riot.
- 24 Recovering the Future**
Reviewing Andy Price's book, Recovering Bookchin, Bob Spivey worries that confederal structures may end up reconstituting state-like systems of authority.

Biodevastation

- ifc Defend against Natural Disasters? Stop Making Them**
Stan Cox reminds us that it's generally low-income families who find themselves stuck with disaster.
- 27 Marxists Need to Return to Marx's Ecological Critique**
Simon Butler advocates being part of movements to stop climate change and other ecological breakdowns.
- 29 Cuba's Other Revolution**
Carmelo Ruiz-Marrero explains how a country prevented its agroecological revolution from suffering a bureaucratic death thanks to decentralization and participatory models.
- 32 Over the Water of the Nile**
Sasha Ross comments that 90% of the Nile's water is siphoned off for use in Sudan and Egypt.
- 33 Oil, Energy and Capitalism**
A newly published speech by Barry Commoner points out that oil companies do not operate for the purpose of producing oil.

Thinking Economically

- 40 Fight Wage Theft with Direct Action**
Aaron Giesa and Kari Koch emphasize that the boss gives in because of what he is afraid you will do tomorrow.
- 42 What We Could Do with a Postal Savings Bank**
Ellen Brown wants a network of publicly owned banks devoted solely to taking deposits and providing check-cashing services.
- 44 Ours Is a Shared Struggle for a Just Transition Toward a New Economy**
Climate Justice Alliance believes that costs of reducing consumption must be borne out of profit, not people.
- 47 BRICS Lessons from Mozambique**
Bobby Peek finds that BRICS countries have the highest gap between those who earn the most and the poor.

Life After the Exit Ramp

by Stan Cox

This article appeared in the July 2013 issue of the journal Solutions, which includes a regular feature in which authors are challenged to envision a future society in which all the right changes have been made.

The year is 2071, and the world is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 2021 Mumbai Earth Treaty. On this momentous day, it seems appropriate to look back at the dramatic sequence of events that followed in the wake of that agreement. Today's world may seem somewhat tame and unexceptional, but its origins lie in the wrenching decisions of the 2020s that led to what is now known as the Great Deceleration—choices that had to be made quickly, at a time when no one could be certain of the consequences.

The dilemma

Through the first two decades of this century, the world's biggest economies had continued to function as if the Earth's store of fossil fuels and

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other mineral resources was inexhaustible and its capacity to absorb greenhouse gases and other wastes was unlimited. Of course, few actually believed that to be true, but almost everyone acted as if it was true; the way that economies of the time were structured, their very survival depended on uninterrupted growth. It was assumed, somewhat vaguely, that our ability to provide life's physical necessities, regardless of resource constraints, would follow the trajectory that digital technology had taken over the previous half-century, with rising efficiency, rapid doubling times, and no apparent endpoint.

Harsh realities could not be ignored forever. By 2020, rapid rises in global temperatures, the environmental outrages being committed in pursuit of exotic fossil fuel reserves, the rapid increase in frequency and intensity of climatic disasters, and the accelerated degradation of the planet's soils, oceans, and populations of plants and animals all were making it clear that humanity faced a stark decision. Would we simply forge ahead, hoping for a last-minute technological bailout? Or could we pull back within the necessary ecological boundaries and resolve not to trespass beyond them?

Invisible futures

Earlier, as the twentieth century was ending, ecological economists had foreseen the necessity of making such tough decisions. [1] They had argued that for civilization to endure intact through the com-

ing century, we would be compelled to decide between the worldviews of the "technological optimist" and the "technological skeptic." [2] Because the world can exist in only one state at a time, they wrote, either the optimist or the skeptic, but not both, can be right in their assumptions about our actual future. Depending on which worldview we allowed to guide our actions—and, crucially, on which worldview turned out to be the correct one—we would see, in this schema (and using the nicknames assigned) one and only 1 of 4 scenarios come to pass:

- A "Star Trek" future would emerge if we acted in accordance with the technological optimists' worldview and the optimists turned out to have been right.
- A "Mad Max" future would be our fate if we acted in accordance with the technological optimists' worldview only to find that they had been wrong.
- A "Big Government" future would emerge if we acted in accordance with the technological skeptics' worldview, but the optimists, not the skeptics, had actually been right.
- But an "Ecotopia" future (named with a nod to Ernest Callenbach's 1975 novel of that title) would await if we acted in accordance with the technological skeptics' worldview and they turned out to have made the right assumptions.

We would see only 1 of 4 scenarios come to pass...

The names given to these alternative futures tell the story. In the Star Trek world, for example, seemingly miraculous climate-neutral energy technologies would be developed, making a life of leisure possible for 20 billion human beings, a large share of whom would depart for a life on other planets or moons. In a Mad Max world, by contrast, betting on the emergence of world-saving technologies would turn out to have been a big mistake.

Technological marvels, in particular abundant cheap energy sources, would never appear; the world would be run by greedy corporations, with individuals and governments powerless to control them; and the few people lucky enough to have jobs would

slave away for 90 to 100 hours a week, while everyone else scrambled for scarce food and shelter in vast, brutal slums that had once been great cities. (And, as in the film, you could get yourself killed over a liter of gasoline.)

By taking the skeptics' road, on the other hand, the world would risk missing out on postindustrial miracles that, some believed, might still be just around the corner. This became the chief preoccupation of leading free-market proponents. If economies were subjected to constraints, they argued, the Star

... imposing restraints on resource exploitation could stimulate the discovery of many quality-of-life improvements...

Trek future would always remain a fictional future, a tragically missed opportunity. We would have to resign ourselves to living out this century in a Big Government world, one in which bureaucratic encumbrances and high resource taxes protect the ecosystem but at the cost of not letting economic growth reach its full potential.

Those making this argument generally failed to point out that by taking the skeptics' route, the world could actually keep open the option to take advantage—cautiously to be sure—of any promising new developments that actually did emerge; in fact, imposing restraints on resource exploitation could stimulate the discovery of many quality-of-life improvements that might not have arisen in a society devoted to growth for growth's sake. And whatever its deficiencies, a world that had conserved and maintained its physical and biological foundations, and its options for innovation, would be far preferable to a Mad Max scenario from which there would have been no escape.

Two years later, a group of thinkers known as the Global Scenario Group set out to broaden and deepen the analysis of alternative visions, with their publication *Great Transition: The Promise and Lure of the Times Ahead*. [3] In it, they examined a larger set of possible futures, from a world that attempts to carry on business as usual, to a hyper-local Ecotopia, to a descent into barbarism. The two most desirable of the futures required a "Great Transition" that would be "galvanized by the search for a deeper basis for human happiness and fulfillment." That search would be global in scope and would replace wealth accumulation as "a central theme of human development." While policy reform and technological progress would be necessary to make consumption less dependent on material throughput, the Great Transition would be required to break what had until then been a "lockstep connection between consumption and well-being."

In the decades that followed, the Great Transition Initiative and allied efforts on every continent turned out a large body of work that would provide the post-2021 world a roadmap of sorts. The precise

route to be taken to a sustainable future remained to be worked out, but the consequences of choosing one route over another were much clearer.

After ignoring such logic for decades, the world finally woke up. By the time delegates to the August, 2021 UN Earth Conference gathered in the half-flooded city of Mumbai, India, it had become clear that without a dramatic change of course, our civilization was going to devolve into a Mad Max world long before salvation through technology could be achieved. Indeed, many of the world's impoverished majority were already living in that world. The final available exit ramp was just ahead, and in an unprecedented moment of international collective decision-making, humanity swerved onto the ramp.

The hastily drawn-up Earth Treaty was limited in that it applied only to greenhouse emissions, leaving consideration of other ecological crises for another time; nevertheless, the emissions cuts it mandated—a 50% reduction globally, which meant cuts as large as 80% in the United States and 60% in Europe—would be deep and steep enough to shake the world economy to its roots. The treaty kicked off a process that eventually would bring to life (at least in some respects) that fourth future, the one labeled Ecotopia. But there were many missteps and meanders along the way.

The initial policies intended to achieve those deep emissions cuts were focused on a global carbon tax [4], and they flopped. First, the tax was widely regarded as unfair. Despite redistribution of revenues from the tax as a per-capita cash dividend, the world's poor majority continued to suffer under shortages and inflation, while a rich minority could

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afford to pay any price to maintain their accustomed lifestyle. Second, the policy was largely ineffective. The tax was an indirect mechanism for suppressing consumption by making it more costly, but demand for those critical goods affected by the tax was much less elastic than had been anticipated. In an effort to lift prices high enough to drive down demand among the affluent, the tax had to be increased seven times in three years. But without an explicit ceiling on production or consumption (and with the annual dividend payment providing a strong economic stimulus), greenhouse emissions dipped only modestly, about as much as they had in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008–09. And, crucially, there still was no "floor" to ensure that everyone on Earth had access to sufficient resources. Stronger action was needed.

The fair-shares solution

An epoch-making course change came with the 2024 Common Resources Treaty, signed and ratified by 227 nations. It imposed ironclad barrel-and-ton

ceilings on global extraction of fossil fuels and other minerals. Specific extraction, import, and export ceilings were adjusted in accord with each country's domestic endowment of resources, taking into account per-capita requirements for good quality of life. An impermeable ceiling with no offsets or other escape hatches meant that accustomed volumes of production, consumption, and wealth generation were no longer possible in wealthier nations, while a solid floor made possible a better life for resource-poor populations. [5]

Production of superfluous consumer goods was reduced even further when a large share of resources had to be diverted into building an ecologically durable society. That effort included massive investment in non-fossil, non-nuclear energy sources; conversion to a much less energy-dependent infrastructure; building or converting to more compact, low-consumption housing; a reworking of agriculture; and rearrangement of living and working patterns to reduce the amount of transportation required. Many saw parallels to the 1940s, when large sectors of Western economies were walled off from domestic consumption in order to meet the needs of wartime production.

And the wartime comparisons didn't stop there. This deliberately imposed scarcity, like all scarcities, triggered inflation that threatened the world's poor majority in particular. Governments had learned from experience with resource shortages, wartime and otherwise, that price controls would have to be imposed for essential goods and factors of production. And they knew that with price controls, demand would far outstrip available supplies and that rationing by quantity would be necessary to ensure fair shares for all.

At first, rationing was restricted to energy and carbon emissions. As a model for how to proceed, governments dusted off several turn-of-the-century British proposals that had never been passed into law. [6] As eventually adopted, the various post-2024 ration systems set strict national carbon-emissions ceilings that were lowered year by year. Every purchase of energy was then accompanied by a transfer of the appropriate number of ration credits, with each credit corresponding to the quantity of carbon dioxide (or equivalent in other gases) expected to be emitted in generating the energy. Utilities and other businesses and government bought their credits, while individuals received free quotas of credits, which were deposited monthly into their personal "carbon accounts."

By the mid-30s, with these systems in place, anthropogenic climate impact was already declining steadily. But a problem that some had foreseen from the beginning was now becoming obvious to all. As producers and consumers became more carbon-efficient, and as they spent less on energy, they spent more on other goods and services, stimulating production that often resulted in ecological damage extending well beyond greenhouse emissions. A new

strategy was needed, and it employed the concept of "ecological footprint," which had by that time been under examination and refinement for several decades. It had finally become feasible to assign a fairly realistic footprint value to every good and service in the economy, not just to fuels and energy sources. An item's footprint value encompassed not just the greenhouse emissions generated during production but also all of its impacts on soil, water, biodiversity, and even whole ecosystems.

So in fairly short order, in country after country, both producers' and consumers' carbon accounts were replaced with eco-accounts. Everyone now received a fair monthly allotment of eco-points, and every

good and service was assigned a point value. Like World War II-era grocery shoppers deciding whether to spend their meat points on a small piece of steak or a larger quantity of hamburger, consumers quickly became accustomed to a ration system that became the foundation of the one we still use today. For many products, the eco-point value, not the cash price, became the dominant factor in consumers' decisions on whether to buy and what to buy. And in yet another wartime parallel, non-essential products with too-heavy footprints were excluded from the economy altogether.

On to the next future

Our world today includes many of the elements foreseen so long ago for both the localized world of Ecotopia and the globally integrated world of the Great Transition vision. Gross domestic product as a measure of economic health was ditched long ago in favor of various quality-of-life indices. Daily life for most of us has indeed become more local, with small communities of a thousand or so population being the basic social unit.

But strong political and intellectual relation-

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ships are maintained electronically among communities around the planet, many of whom will never meet physically because of limits on long-distance transportation. (And because the data centers that support today's "lean" Internet no longer have to bear a crushing burden of advertising and marketing traffic, they require far less energy than did early-century ones.) The worldwide consumption floor continues to ensure sufficiency. Although some people do, as was predicted, work as little as 20 hours per week, typical work weeks are still 25 to 30 hours; far less production is necessary, but human labor will always be needed to do much of the work previously done by fossil fuel-powered devices.

By fostering a sense of common purpose and burden-sharing, rationing has been a highly effective

alternative to the inevitably disappointing campaigns for voluntary restraint that characterized the early years of global ecological crisis. Without national fair-shares rationing systems, international success in achieving ecological restraint probably would have been short-lived. However—and this cannot be stressed enough—rationing is not a panacea. It was never a plug-in tool for limiting consumption or creating fairness in a growth economy. Rather, it was a policy that became necessary *once we had suc-*

...rationing has been a highly effective alternative to campaigns for voluntary restraint...

ceeded through other means in pulling our economies back within critical boundaries.

Nor could rationing alone have eliminated the pervasive injustices that plagued the global economy. Early in this century, inequality of wealth and income—both among nations and within the world’s biggest economies, especially those of the United States and China—was rising rapidly. Reversing that trend required a revolutionary transformation, a shift of power from the haves and the investors to the have-nots and the people who do the work of societies. At long last, we appear to have come close to achieving that shift in most of the world; however, an account of that experience will have to wait for another time. Suffice it to say that as difficult as it was for twenty-first-century nations to achieve sustainability and sufficiency, rebuilding the human economy in a way that eliminated exploitation and

brought fair sharing of economic power was an even tougher job for us, their citizens.

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Notes

1. Robert Costanza, 2000. Visions of Alternative (Unpredictable) Futures and Their Use in Policy Analysis. *Conservation Ecology* 4:5.
2. For an articulation of the optimists’ argument, see Peter Diamandis and Steven Kotler, *Abundance: The Future Is Better Than You Think* (New York: Free Press, 2012); for a skeptic’s view, see David Owen, *The Conundrum* (New York: Riverhead, 2012).
3. Paul Raskin, Tariq Banuri, Gilberto Gallopín, Pablo Gutman; Al Hammond, Robert Kates, Robert, and Ro Swart. 2002. *Great Transition: The Promise and Lure of the Times Ahead* (Boston: Stockholm Environmental Institute)
4. Such a tax or fee was advocated most prominently by climate researcher James Hansen. See Hansen, Climate Change is Happening now—a Carbon Price Must Follow, *The Guardian*, November 29, 2012.
5. Quantification of ceilings and floors followed the methodology of Shoibal Charkavarty et al., 2009. Sharing CO2 Emissions Reductions Among One Billion High Emitters. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 106: 11884–11888.
6. One of the most detailed of such proposals was outlined in David Fleming and Shaun Chamberlin, TEQs: Tradable Energy Quotas (London: House of Commons All Party Parliamentary Group on Peak Oil and The Lean Economy Connection, 2011).

Why We Need an Ecosocialist Revolution

by Ian Angus

This is the text of Ian Angus’ talk at the Socialism 2013 conference in Chicago, June 29, 2013, organized by the international Socialist Organization (USA).

I’ll start with two quotations. The first is the opening sentence of Chris Williams’ excellent book, *Ecology and Socialism*. “There is a giant death sentence hanging over much of our world.”

If you’ve read Chris’s book, you know that is not an exaggeration: There is a giant death sentence hanging over much of our world, and only a mass revolutionary movement can stop the execution.

My second quotation is the slogan that has appeared on the masthead of *Climate & Capitalism* for seven years. We borrowed and paraphrased a famous statement by Rosa Luxemburg: “Ecosocialism or barbarism: There is no third way.”

Today, I want to make two arguments that are implicit in Chris’s sentence and in *Climate & Capitalism’s* slogan.

My first argument will be that the environmental crisis we face today is not a simple extension of capitalism’s centuries-old war with nature. In the last half of the 20th century, what Karl Marx and

Frederick Engels called the “metabolic rift” became qualitatively wider, qualitatively more serious.

My second argument will be that because the metabolic rift has become a global ecological abyss, socialists today must be ecosocialists. Not because the word itself is particularly wonderful, but because in our time the fight against environmental destruction is central to the fight against capitalism.

It’s not enough to say that socialism is the solution. In the 21st century, fighting capitalist ecocide must be at the heart of our vision, our program and our activity.

A century ago, the founders of the Communist International had to deal with a new phenomenon—imperialism—and had to make the fight against imperialism central to their work or be doomed to irrelevance. To make that change very clear to everyone, they rewrote one of the most time-honored of all revolutionary slogans: They changed “Workers of all countries unite!” to say “Workers of all countries and all oppressed peoples, unite!”

As I’m sure you know, revolutionaries are often pretty conservative people. Inevitably, some com-

... the fight against environmental destruction is central to the fight against capitalism.

rades objected to that change. Lenin himself replied: Of course, the modification is wrong from the standpoint of the *Communist Manifesto*, but then the *Communist Manifesto* was written under entirely different conditions.

The Bolsheviks knew that a truly revolutionary program must respond to reality. When reality changes, our program must change too.

Today we are in a comparable situation. We face a global environmental crisis that is qualitatively more serious than anything socialists 50 years ago could have imagined. We must adjust our thinking and our actions to respond to that reality.

We need to take the beginning points that ecosocialism offers today, and to build on them using the method of Marxism, using the best scientific work of our time, and using the lessons we learn in struggles for change. We must apply our new understanding in a wide variety of places and circumstances.

From *The Closing Circle* to the great acceleration

The idea that humanity’s relationship with the biosphere changed qualitatively during the 20th century isn’t new, although it has not been widely discussed until recently.

To my knowledge the first person to argue it explicitly was the radical biologist and ecologist Barry Commoner. His analysis of the environmental crisis, published 40 years ago, stands up very well today.

In the 1960s and 1970s, when the modern environmental movement was being born, most environmentalists held that environmental problems were a result of a permanent conflict between humans and nature, so the only way to stop pollution and environmental degradation was to reduce the number of people.

That view is still very common today. The defenders of that view frequently point to past societies that cut down all their trees, exhausted their farm-

lands, or otherwise undermined the natural basis of their existence.

Barry Commoner didn’t deny that human activity damaged or even destroyed ecosystems in the past. But in his classic 1971 book *The Closing Circle*, he argued that the modern environmental crisis is qualitatively different.

In the second half of the 20th century environmental destruction went from gradual to rapid, from short-term to long-term and often permanent, and from local to global. In Commoner’s words, “most pollution problems made their first appearance, or became very much worse, in the years following World War II.” It was then, he said, that “the fabric of the ecosphere began to unravel.”

The unravelling, he showed, was closely associated with the spectacular expansion of the petroleum and petrochemical industries, which produced immense volumes of products and wastes that nature could not recycle, and at the same time stimulated a huge expansion in the amount of energy used in production and transportation.

Much of his book was devoted to documenting that transformation, and showing that it could not possibly be explained by population growth. He argued, very convincingly, that the worldwide deployment of destructive technologies and products was driven by capitalism’s inherent need to grow.

The new technologies were adopted because they were more profitable—but they were only more profitable because corporations didn’t have to pay for the environmental damage they caused. “The environmental crisis,” Commoner wrote, “reveals serious incompatibilities between the private enterprise system and the ecological base on which it depends.”

Sadly, Barry Commoner lost the battle of ideas in the green movement. The advocates of population control became dominant in the environmental movement and in mainstream ecology. Even more sadly, the socialist left did not take up Commoner’s arguments. His most important book, *The Closing Circle*, has long been out of print.

But today, although he isn’t getting credit, Barry Commoner’s view that there was a radical environmental turning point after World War II is gaining widespread acceptance.

In 2000, the Nobel Prize winning chemist Paul Crutzen made a convincing case that the Industrial Revolution marked the beginning of a new geological epoch, a time when humans and human society are the dominant force shaping our

planet. He proposed to name this epoch the Anthropocene—the new Human epoch. That proposal has not been officially adopted yet, but it has won wide support in scientific circles.

More recently, Crutzen joined with ecologist Will Steffen and historian John McNeill to make a further proposal, to divide the Anthropocene into two eras—the Industrial Era, from 1800 to 1945, and the Great Acceleration, from 1945 to the present. After World War II, they write, “the most rapid and

... revolutionaries are often pretty conservative people.

pervasive shift in the human-environment relationship began.” On almost every possible measure, “the human enterprise suddenly accelerated.”

They’ve published graphs showing increases in water use, greenhouse gas emissions, paper consumption, motor vehicles, urban population and more, since 1950. Some show no activity at all before 1950, others show slow increases prior to 1950 — all show a sudden shift into high gear after 1950. The graphs suddenly go almost straight up.

In short, scientists today are rediscovering and documenting the radical environmental transition that Barry Commoner described over 40 years ago. We can only hope that they will eventually adopt his radical social conclusions as well.

Interlocking crises

With the Great Acceleration, capitalism’s assault on the biosphere entered a new phase, one defined by, as John Bellamy Foster says, “a qualitative transformation in the level of human destructiveness.” As a result, we face what is usually called the global environmental crisis. A few months ago, *Monthly Review* justly suggested we call it a planetary emergency.

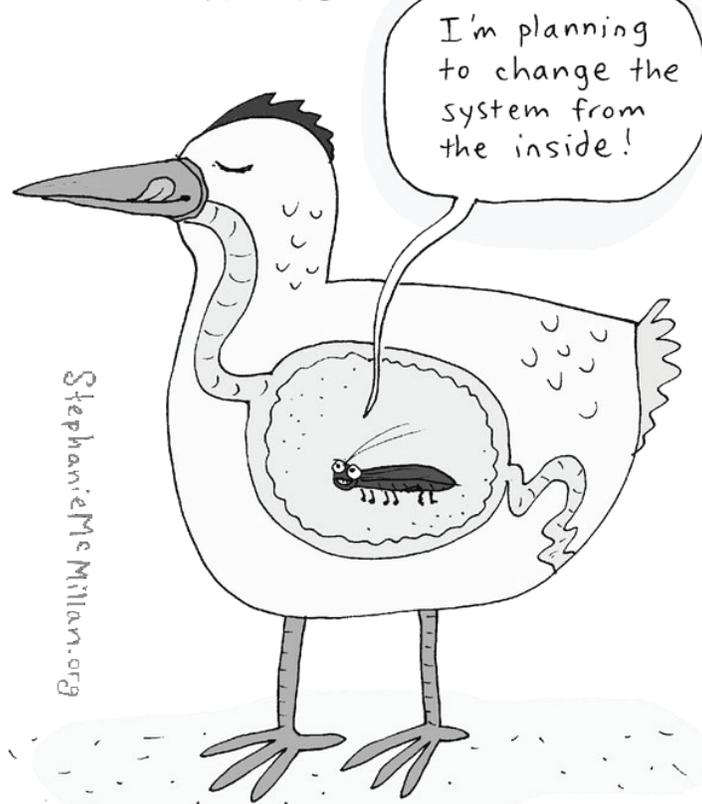
The emergency comprises an interlocked set of crises in the fundamental natural processes that have made Earth habitable for millions of years.

In 2009, a group of 28 internationally renowned scientists associated with the Stockholm Resilience Center identified and quantified nine planetary boundaries that define what they call a “safe operating space for humanity.” Crossing any one of those thresholds, they wrote, could have “deleterious or even disastrous consequences for humans.” In fact, we have already crossed three of them, and we are getting close to the red line on four more. Seven of the nine critical planetary boundaries are close to or in the danger zone.

Climate change is the best known and most critical case. The Stockholm study says that once the

“THE UNITY OF THE CHICKEN AND THE ROACH HAPPENS IN THE BELLY OF THE CHICKEN.”

~HAITIAN PROVERB



Capital is the fundamental enemy of the working class.
Compromising with capital will never lead to emancipation.

...all show a sudden shift into high gear after 1950.

...300,000 deaths every year that would not have happened without climate change.

level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere passes 350 parts per million, the climate system becomes increasingly unstable and catastrophic tipping points become possible. As you probably know, the level is now at 400 parts per million, so that boundary has been passed, and we are now solidly in the climate danger zone.

We are also over the red line for interference with the nitrogen cycle, which results primarily from overuse of artificial fertilizers, and for loss of biodiversity caused by the highest rate of species extinctions in tens of millions of years.

The crisis is now

There is a tendency in discussing these environmental crises to say that catastrophes will happen if we don’t act soon, in 10 or 20 years. In a sense that is true, but it is misleading. In

reality, catastrophic change has already begun.

According to the Global Humanitarian Forum, a think tank headed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, there are already 300,000 deaths every year that would not have happened without climate change.

Nearly half of those deaths are children aged five years or younger, dying in agony from diarrhea or malaria, diseases whose frequency and intensity have been massively increased by global warming.

Think about that. Every 20 seconds, a small child dies because greenhouse gas emissions are out of control. No society that permits that to happen deserves to be called civilized. No society that causes it to happen deserves to continue.

Another study shows that in 2012, over 30 million people were forced out of their homes by cli-

mate- and weather-related disasters. By way of comparison, in 1945, after six years of total war, there were about 40 million refugees in Europe. Now,

three-quarters as many are displaced by climate disasters in one-sixth of the time.

But temporary displacements caused by storms and floods are only a small part of the environmental refugee story. The United Nations estimates that one-third of the people who live in urban slums in Africa are there because advancing deserts and failing farms have made their traditional homes uninhabitable. In Asia, in Bangladesh alone, over 400,000 people move into the capital city, Dhaka, every year. Most are environmental refugees.

And this is only the beginning. I don't intend this talk to be a list of disaster stories, but it could well be. The point is that a global environmental crisis is already here. It is already killing and displacing millions of people. It requires action now.

The planetary emergency is already upon us. If we delay, it will get much worse.

A four degree world

International agreements say that the global average temperature increase should be less than 2 degrees Celsius over the pre-industrial level, to avoid disastrous climate change. Many scientists say the limit should be lower. But if current trends continue, there is no chance of staying below 2 degrees, and there is a strong possibility that the increase will be twice that level.

Recently the World Bank warned that even if all countries meet their commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the world is likely to warm by more than 3°C. If they don't, global warming could exceed 4°C as early as the 2060s. The World Bank report has a provocative title: *Turn Down the Heat: Why a 4°C Warmer World Must Be Avoided*. In it the World Bank's president writes:

The 4°C scenarios are devastating: the inundation of coastal cities; increasing risks for food production potentially leading to higher malnutrition rates; many dry regions becoming dryer, wet regions wetter; unprecedented heat waves in many regions, especially in the tropics; substantially exacerbated water scarcity in many regions; increased frequency of high-intensity tropical cyclones; and irreversible loss of biodiversity, including coral reef systems.

And most importantly, a 4°C world is so different from the current one that it comes with high uncertainty and new risks that threaten our ability to anticipate and plan for future adaptation needs.

The International Energy Agency recently said that even if current promises are kept, "the long-term average temperature increase is more likely to be between 3.6 °C and 5.3 °C ... with most of the increase occurring this century."

But no one expects the worst polluters to keep their promises. Emissions aren't slowing down, they are speeding up, and the world is speeding into climate hell. What's worse, the climate crisis is only part of the story—even if by some miracle, emis-

sions were cut to zero tomorrow, six other planetary boundaries would still be in danger.

What humanity faces in this century is not just deterioration of the conditions of life in one area or even one country. The metabolic rift is now global, and there is now a very real possibility that it will throw all of humanity into a new dark age, that all our dreams of

a better world will be replaced by unending nightmares.

Socialists and the crisis: theory but not practice?

I think most socialists and socialist groups would agree with what I've said so far, at least in general terms. Capitalism is destroying the Earth, socialism is the solution. And yet, when I compare the socialist literature on the environmental crisis with the actual socialist response in action, I am struck by the gap between theory and practice.

I have a shelf full of books that offer Marxist perspectives of environmental crises, especially of global warming. All show clearly that capitalism is the cause, and all say socialism is the solution. But very few of them, almost none, offer concrete proposals for actually making the necessary change. It's as though Marx wrote: "The philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways ... and that's good enough."

As Nick Davenport wrote recently in an article we published in *Climate & Capitalism*, socialists have tended to treat the environmental crisis as a stick to beat capitalism with, as another proof that capitalism must go, but not as an arena of the class struggle to which we must be fully committed.

There have been some significant exceptions. The Socialist Alliance in Australia, for example, defines itself as ecosocialist and has played an important role in building environmental movements there. There are other examples in Europe. Closer to home, I have been impressed by the growing involvement of members of the International Socialist Organization in the fight against capitalist ecocide across the US, and I see that the Solidarity is discussing ecosocialism in its current pre-convention period.

...socialists have tended to treat the environmental crisis as a stick to beat capitalism with...

But in general, environmental action has not been treated as a strategic priority by organized socialist groups in the global North. That needs to change. In the 21st century, socialists must be ecosocialists. To stop capitalist ecocide, we need both the scientific insights of modern ecology and the revolutionary social analysis that only Marxism provides.

That's why I am very excited about the recent formation of System Change Not Climate Change – the Ecosocialist Contingent, and about the reports I've heard this weekend on the growing activity of ISO members. I hope we are seeing a turn in the North American socialist left towards environmental activism, and towards ecosocialism.

What does “being ecosocialist” mean?

The word “ecosocialism” isn't copyrighted. Just like the word “socialism,” it means different things to different people. I can only present my own per-

...ecosocialism...is socialism with Marx's important insights on ecology restored...

spective, and I won't be at all surprised if some ecosocialists disagree with what I have to say. For me, ecosocialism is not a new theory or brand of socialism—it is socialism with Marx's important insights on ecology restored, socialism committed to the fight against ecological destruction.

Ecosocialism is not a separate organization, it is a movement to win existing red and green groups and individuals to an ecosocialist perspective. It is socialism that recognizes, in John Bellamy Foster's words, that “there can be no true ecological revolution that is not socialist; no true socialist revolution that is not ecological.” And it is socialism that is actively engaged in peoples' struggles against capitalism's assaults.

Increasingly, the planetary emergency is directly affecting the lives of working people, farmers, Indigenous communities, and all of the oppressed. As capitalism continues its relentless drive to expand no matter what damage it causes, we will see—we are already seeing—increasing resistance.

Many of these struggles will focus on narrow issues, and many of the participants will have huge illusions about what can be done within the system. That's inevitable.

The worst mistake socialists can make in such circumstances—unfortunately it's a mistake that many socialists do make—is to stand on the sidelines because a given campaign isn't radical enough, or because it doesn't fit someone's preconceptions of what a movement ought to look like.

We need to remember Marx's great insight that people in large numbers don't change themselves and then change the world—they change themselves by changing the world. As Rosa Luxemburg wrote, class consciousness and organization aren't created simply by pamphlets and leaflets, but “by the living political school, by the fight and in the fight.”

In *Rebuilding the Left*, the Chilean Marxist Marta Harnecker puts it this way:

Being radical is not a matter of advancing the most radical slogans, or of carrying out the most radical actions....

Being radical lies rather in creating spaces where broad sectors can come together and struggle. For as human beings we grow and transform ourselves in the struggle.

Understanding that we are many and are fighting for the same objectives is what makes us strong and radicalizes us.

Only through and in struggles for change can we reach and win the many people who today find it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

We need to be patient—as another famous Marxist said, we must “patiently explain.” Contrary to the liberals who think we should place our faith in Democratic Party politicians, and contrary to the advocates of guerrilla attacks on infrastructure, there really is no shortcut to “creating spaces where broad sectors can come together and struggle.”

But we also need to be prepared for unexpectedly rapid shifts. Let's learn from Turkey, where a mass movement against the regime exploded from what at first seemed to be a very modest environmental protest, a fight to save a park. The fight for Gezi Park and Taksim Square is not an isolated case. In our time, when the Great Acceleration is pushing us to the edge, and when capitalism's ability to maneuver on even small environmental problems is severely limited, we will see more and more such conflicts.

That's especially true in the global South, where catastrophic environmental change is a present reality, and where the fight to save the environment and the fight against imperialism are visibly and inextricably linked. But it's also true here in the belly of the beast.

Lenin famously wrote that revolutionaries must not restrict themselves to a narrow, economic understanding of class struggle. He said we must be tribunes of the people, responding to “every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it

...in the global South...the fight to save the environment and the fight against imperialism are visibly and inextricably linked.

appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people.” In our time, revolutionaries cannot be tribunes of the people unless we are also tribunes of the environment. We must respond, to the best of our ability, to every manifestation of capitalist environmental destruction.

That's why I like the word ecosocialism. Not because we need a new kind of socialism, but because the word signals loud and clear that we don't view environmental destruction as just another stick to bash capitalism with. It is also why I prefer to spell ecosocialism as one word, without a hyphen. Because the “eco” part is not an add-on. It is—and must be—integral to socialism in the 21st century.

We are ecosocialists because the environmental crisis isn't just a talking point—it's a planetary

emergency that revolutionaries must confront as a top priority. We need to initiate and join struggles for immediate environmental aims. We need to participate, not as sideline critics, but as activists, builders and leaders.

The world we want

And at the same time, we need to find the best ways to “patiently explain” how those struggles relate to the larger fight to save the world from capitalist ecocide. In our book, *Too Many People?* Simon Butler and I expressed the goal of that larger fight this way:

In every country, we need governments that break with the existing order, that are answerable only to working people, farmers, the poor, indigenous communities, and immigrants — in a word, to

...an ecological civilization would... stop growing when basic human needs are satisfied...

the victims of ecocidal capitalism, not its beneficiaries and representatives.

Such governments will have two fundamental and indivisible characteristics.

First, they will be committed to grassroots democracy, to radical egalitarianism and to social justice. They will be based on collective ownership of the means of production, and they will work actively to eliminate exploitation, profit and accumulation as the driving forces of our economy.

Second, they will base their decisions and actions on the best ecological principles, giving top priority to stopping anti-environmental practices, to restoring damaged ecosystems, and to re-establishing agriculture and industry on ecologically sound principles.

We suggest some of the first environmental measures such governments might take. Our suggestions include:

- rapidly phasing out fossil fuels and biofuels, replacing them with clean energy sources;
- actively supporting farmers to convert to ecological agriculture; defending local food production and distribution;
- introducing free and efficient public transport networks;
- restructuring existing extraction, production, and distribution systems to eliminate waste, planned obsolescence, pollution, and manipulative advertising, and providing full retraining to all affected workers and communities;
- retrofitting existing homes and buildings for energy efficiency;
- closing down all military operations at home and elsewhere; transforming the armed forces into voluntary teams charged with restoring ecosystems and assisting the victims of environmental disasters.

Our suggestions aren't carved in stone, and I'm sure you can think of many other essential changes.

Those are transitional measures, steps towards what Fred Magdoff has called “a truly ecological civilization—one that exists in harmony with natural systems.”

Magdoff lists eight characteristics that an ecological civilization would have. It would:

- stop growing when basic human needs are satisfied;
- not entice people to consume more and more;
- protect natural life support systems and respect the limits to natural resources, taking into account needs of future generations;
- make decisions based on long-term societal/ecological needs, while not neglecting short-term needs of people;
 - run as much as possible on current (including recent past) energy instead of fossil fuels;
 - foster human characteristics and a culture of cooperation, sharing, reciprocity and responsibility to neighbors and community;
 - make possible the full development of human potential; and,
- promote truly democratic political and economic decision making for local, regional and multi-regional needs.

As Fred Magdoff says, a society with those characteristics would be “the opposite of capitalism in essentially all respects.”

Today, we must be ecosocialists

Such a profound transformation will not “just happen.” In fact, it will not happen at all unless ecology has a central place in socialist theory, in the socialist program and in the activity of the socialist movement. There was a time when you could make a case that environmental destruction, though serious, was no more critical than any of capitalism's other crimes. That time is long past.

Capitalism has driven us to a crisis point in the relationship between humanity and the rest of na-

...a society with those characteristics would be “the opposite of capitalism in essentially all respects.”

ture—if business as usual continues, major ecological collapse isn't just possible but probable, and that will put civilization at risk.

There is a giant death sentence hanging over much of our world, and capitalism is the executioner.

Ian Angus is editor of *Climate & Capitalism*.

The Struggle for Egypt

by Joseph Massad

Ever since Muhammad Morsi was elected president of Egypt in democratic elections marred by his Mubarakist opponent Ahmad Shafiq's electoral corruption and bribes, a coalition of Egyptian liberals, Nasserists, leftists—including socialists and communists of varying stripes—and even Salafist and repentant Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members began to form slowly but steadily, establishing an alliance with Mubarak's ruling bourgeoisie and holdover politicians from his regime to oust Morsi from power, fearing that he and his party were preparing a "Nazi-like" takeover of the country and destroying its fledgling democracy.

The scenario they feared is the one that brought the Nazis to establish a totalitarian state in 1933. On 27 February 1933, arsonists burned down the Reichstag building in Berlin. Hitler blamed the communists and accused them of a plot to overthrow the democratically elected parliament. On March 23, the Reichstag conferred on Hitler dictatorial powers, establishing the Nazi totalitarian regime and state.

The anti-Morsi alliance, which began to form in earnest in August 2012, started out bashfully but became proud and assertive by November 2012, after Morsi's infamous Constitutional Decree, which centralized political power in the hands of the President. With the aid of Mubarak's judges, the Mubarakist bourgeoisie and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which had ruled Egypt for a year and four months after Mubarak's ouster, had already dissolved the post-uprising democratically-elected parliament—which was composed of a majority of Islamists—on technical grounds, before Morsi's election. They did so to the cheers of liberals and leftists who claimed that they were the real leaders of the 25 January uprising that overthrew Mubarak, and who feared the elected Islamists whom they depicted not as part of the uprising but as encroachers on their "revolution." A few days before the elections, the military also issued a constitutional decree constricting the powers of the elected president and concentrating it in the hands of the military.

The liberals' and the leftists' fear was that the MB was Egypt's Nazi party—that they would pretend to be democrats until they got elected, and then they would refuse to leave power and would eliminate the democratic process and establish an Islamist

he had tried to depose unsuccessfully. Indeed the Constitutional Decree was seen as a sort of Reichstag Fire Decree, which it could very well have been. Morsi would soon reverse himself and would cancel the Decree in response to popular uproar. He would later express regret for having issued it.

Morsi's record

The Morsi government seemed surprisingly pliant and friendly to Western interests, including towards Israel, whose president Shimon Peres was addressed by Morsi as "my dear friend" in an official presidential letter. Contrary to expectations of a burgeoning friendship with Hamas, under Morsi's

The Morsi government seemed surprisingly pliant and friendly to Western interests...

government, the Gaza border in Rafah was closed more times than under Mubarak, security coordination with Israel became more intimate than under Mubarak, and to make matters worse, Morsi, with the Egyptian army and the help of the Americans, destroyed the majority of the underground tunnels between Gaza and Sinai which the Palestinians had dug out to smuggle in food and goods during their interminable siege since 2005 and which Mubarak had not dared demolish.

Morsi even went further by mediating between Israel and Hamas during the latest Israeli attack on Gaza, vouching that he would guarantee that Hamas would not launch rockets against Israel but not the other way around. It is true that Morsi refused to meet with Israeli leaders, but even Mubarak had refused to visit Israel for years before his ouster and had recalled his ambassador in protest

against Israeli policies. One of Morsi's major acts before his recent ouster was not the closure of the Israeli embassy, as friends and enemies of the Islamists threatened he would do, but closing down

...the Mubarakist bourgeoisie and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces... had already dissolved the democratically-elected parliament... before Morsi's election.

dictatorship. That the Mubarak-appointed judges were the ones who dissolved the democratically elected parliament seemed not to bother the liberals and the leftists much, but they were horrified when Morsi issued his Constitutional Decree, which aimed to take away the power of Mubarak's judges, whom

instead the Syrian embassy in support of the ongoing rightwing Islamist insurrection in that country.

While in power, Morsi and his government continued Mubarak's policies of contracting the public sector and social spending in a continuing war against the poor and downtrodden of Egypt, who are the majority of the population. Morsi pushed forth neoliberal economic policies that favored the rich and powerful, including an IMF deal (which was never finalized for no fault of Morsi's), which would have increased the already existing austerity measures against the poor. Indeed, he did nothing to change the existing labor and tax laws that favored the rich and oppressed workers, middle class employees, and the poor. Morsi neither prosecuted army generals for crimes of which they stood accused—he rather bestowed on them major state honors and awards and made those whom he retired into advisors to the President—nor tried the Mubarakist thieving bourgeoisie in the courts for its pillage of the country for three and a half decades, let alone the security apparatus that continued to repress Egyptians under his rule.

On the contrary, as a president who came out of the rightist and neoliberal wing of the MB—compared to the more centrist 'Abd al-Mun'im Abu al-Futuh who also ran for the presidency and lost—Morsi was interested in an alliance between the Islamist neoliberal bourgeoisie, whose most visible member is Khayrat al-Shatir (who was barred from running for the presidency by the Mubarakist courts), and the Mubarakist bourgeoisie.

Unlike scenes

Publicly, Obama has been attempting all kinds of verbal acrobatics to accommodate the liberals and leftists by not calling the coup a coup. Their misplaced anger at the Americans, however, is not necessarily anti-imperialist, but rather elicited by a narcissistic injury that the United States (like the Egyptian Army) had allied itself, if temporarily, with the MB and not with them, even though the US (like the Egyptian Army) had clearly abandoned the MB and given the green light to the coup. Their fulminations are their way of courting the Americans back to their camp where the Americans already are. *The Wall Street Journal* has already expressed its hope and expectation that General Sisi would be Egypt's Pinochet. Some amongst the liberals were complaining that had the Republicans been in power, they would not have given this "soft" response to their coup that the Democrats have allegedly shown. But the Americans have not tarried at all in this regard!

The Americans are allies of all parties in Egypt, and they are willing to let Egyptians choose who will rule them so that the US can then give them their marching orders as they

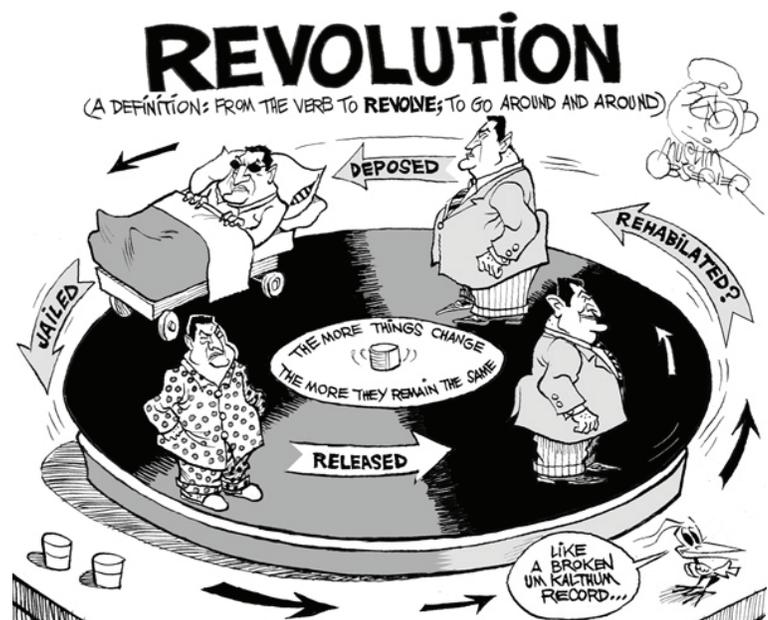
did with Mubarak and the MB. All the Americans care about is that their interests are protected, and no member of the current anti- or pro-Morsi coalitions has dared threaten those interests. They are all vying to serve American interests if the Americans would only support them. In the last two and a half years, the Americans have been floundering, trying to determine who among those competing to serve them in Egypt will be most successful in stabilizing the country so that the US can continue its dominance as before.

Nazis, Islamists, liberals, and leftists

For a year, we have been told that Morsi is Hitler, the MB are Nazis, and that they were consolidating their power so that they could later crack down on everyone else. Perhaps they were planning to do so, but no shred of real evidence has been produced to prove this. What happened, however, was the exact opposite: it was the coalition of liberals, Nasserists, leftists, Salafists and the Mubarak bourgeoisie who called for, cheered and supported the coup by Mubarak's army. Unlike the MB who never controlled the army or the police, the army and police continue to be fully answerable to the Mubarakist bourgeoisie with which the liberals and leftists are allied.

Egyptians have been flooded with images that the "Islamofascists" were going to destroy the culture of Egypt and its identity with their intolerance, narrow-mindedness, lack of inclusivity, and anti-democratic policies. But it has been the liberals and the leftists—perhaps some would call them the "secularofascists"—who proved to be less open, less tolerant, and certainly less democratic than the

...he did nothing to change the existing labor and tax laws that favored the rich and oppressed workers...



“Islamofascists.” In the United States, the saying goes that “a conservative is a liberal who got mugged,” indicating in a proper American classist manner that the mugging of a well-to-do liberal by the poor turns the liberal against them. In the case of Egypt, one could easily say that “a secularofascist is a liberal democrat who lost to the Islamists in democratic elections.”

...the education that the members of the anti-Morsi coalition have been subjected to is imparted to them by the Mubarakist bourgeoisie...

The army coup, which the leftists, among others, support, was not a coup by middle rank, socially conscious, anti-imperialist army officers who were supported by progressive anti-capitalist forces to overthrow imperial and local capitalist control of the country and the dictator who ran it. (When the Free Officers staged their coup in 1952, within a few weeks they enacted laws that undercut the feudal lords of Egypt and redistributed the land to the poor peasants.) Rather, the coup was by top army generals who receive a hefty sum of US imperial assistance annually, and who have always been the protectors of Mubarak and his bourgeoisie. It is this army leadership that overthrew a democratically elected president, his incompetence and services to local and international capital notwithstanding.

Some of the leftists who are cheering on the coup seem to feel that their mobilization was successful because people are now educated and aware of their rights, which the MB was undercutting. But the education that the members of the anti-Morsi coalition have been subjected to, including the workers and the poor who joined its rallies, is an education imparted to them by the Mubarakist bourgeoisie through their media empires. It has not been an education emphasizing the MB's neoliberal anti-poor policies, stressing workers rights, peasant rights, the right to a minimum wage, etc. The Mubarakist media empire's education is not for the liberation of the poor, the workers, the peasants, and the lower middle classes of Egypt from capitalist and imperial pillage of their country and livelihoods, but rather for the liberation of the “secular” Mubarakist bourgeoisie and its partners from the competition of the neoliberal MB bourgeoisie and its Qatari sponsors.

That the King of Saudi Arabia and the foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates, the sponsors with the Americans of the Mubarakist bourgeoisie, were the first to send their congratulations to the coup leaders, minutes after the coup took place, clarifies who they believe was liberated from whom. Within hours of the coup, the Mubarakist bourgeois-

ie also celebrated. On Thursday, July 4, 2013, Egyptian singer Muhammad Fu'ad, who had cried on TV two and a half years earlier to express his sadness and despair over the toppling of his beloved Mubarak, was invited to open the Cairo stock market, which has been gaining billions of pounds since the coup. If the Qataris and the MB bourgeoisie won the first battle against the Saudis with the fall of

Mubarak and then the second battle when the MB was elected, the Saudis and the Mubarakist bourgeoisie intend their latest battle, which they won by the removal of the MB, to be the final victory in the war for Egypt.

The goals of the Egyptian uprising from the outset included social justice as primary. Both the Mubarakists and the MB have a unified policy against the social justice agenda of the uprising. But the anti-MB coup, which has driven and will drive many of their supporters to openly violent means now that peaceful ones have been thwarted, has transformed the uprising from one targeting the Mubarakist regime and its security and business apparatus to one that has joined Mubarak's erstwhile war against the MB. If the goals of the liberals and the leftists are to bring about a real democracy with social security and decent standards of living for the majority of Egyptians who are poor, then the removal of the MB from power by military force will not only prevent this from happening but is likely to bring about more economic injustice and more repression.

Both the Mubarakists and the MB have a unified policy against the social justice agenda of the uprising.

Whether the leftists' and the liberals' calculations that their alliance with the Mubarakist bourgeoisie and the army is tactical and temporary, and that they will be able to overcome them and

take power away from them as they did with the MB, are a case of naïve triumphalism or of studied optimism will become clear in the future. What is clear for now, however, with the massive increase of police and army repression with the participation of the public, is that what this coalition has done is strengthened the Mubarakists and the army and weakened calls for a future Egyptian democracy, real or just procedural.

Gripped by popular fascist love fests for the army, Egypt is now ruled by an army whose top leadership was appointed by and served under Mubarak, is presided over by a judge appointed by Mubarak, and is policed by the same police used by Mubarak. People are free to call it a coup or not, but what Egypt has now is Mubarakism without Mubarak.

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