

# Ecologism and the Relegitimation of Socialism

*Andrew Dobson*

Ever since 1974 – at least – and the publication of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's 'A Critique of Political Ecology',<sup>1</sup> the relationship between socialism and ecologism has been a source of contention. Sometimes this relationship has been one of outright hostility as the differences between the analyses and aspirations of the two ideologies have been deployed as evidence of lasting incompatibility.

## **Against rapprochement**

On the face of it the chances of rapprochement seem slim. Centrally, socialism and ecologism appear to be talking about two entirely different problematics. Socialism (or at least the so-called 'democratic' type) has traditionally been concerned with bringing about a fairer and more just distribution of power and wealth in society, while ecologism argues that a precondition for distribution of any sort (fair or unfair, just or unjust) is a sustainable human relationship with the environment. Socialists have not usually been much worried about the non-human natural world,<sup>2</sup> while ecologists place it at the heart of their concerns.

Similarly, Greens identify industrialism (or productivism) as the source of our malaise, while socialists generally claim that it is a particular form of production – capitalism – that is at fault. In line with a remark made above, the issue for socialists has been not so much what is produced or how it is produced, but how justly to divide up what is produced. Greens, on the other hand, are sensitive to questions concerning the desirability of certain products, both in terms of what they are and in terms of the damage their production might do to the environment.

Further, Greens and socialists seem to disagree fundamentally over the issue of class. Greens pride themselves on being beyond class or, as they like to put it, 'beyond left and right'. The appeals they make are universal, in the sense that they seek to persuade us that environmental catastrophe is class-blind and will affect us all equally. It is, then, in everyone's interest, regardless of class, to work towards a sustainable society.

Socialists, on the other hand, will consistently remind Greens that 'we still live in a class society, in which the rich have lately been getting relatively richer'.<sup>3</sup> This means both that an analysis of how environmental degradation is

concretely experienced must have a class dimension (money can soften the blow), and that the creation of a sustainable society will only be possible through the organisation of majorities in favour of it – majorities which will have class characteristics and which may involve, crucially, the organised labour movement.

## **Moves towards rapprochement**

This brief survey of three of the critical differences between socialism and ecologism lends weight to the contention that the two ideologies are, and will remain, incompatible. More recently, though, there have been attempts to find common ground in the two traditions. This, I think, is partly because of socialism's difficulties during the 1980s, and the reappraisal of doctrine that took place in the wake of attacks from the New Right necessarily included reference to the one challenge to its radical hegemony on the progressive<sup>4</sup> wing of politics – the environmental movement.

Similarly, the environmental movement itself has been sensitised both to socialist critiques of its position and to the idea that it is not a movement without a history. Significantly, that history can be shown to be one with socialist resonances (with the reservations pointed out in note 4), and in this respect there is more common ground between the two traditions than might appear at first sight.

For these reasons most of the work that has been done recently on the relationship between socialism and ecology has focussed on minimising their differences and maximising their similarities so as to find a meeting point of relative compatibility somewhere in the middle. Pretty quickly it was discovered that the centre of gravity of compatibility was to be found somewhere in the utopian socialist tradition, so when Greens and socialists have engaged in constructive debate they have usually ended up in territory occupied by (say) William Morris.<sup>5</sup>

Given the terms of reference outlined above, this seems entirely sensible. Morris's work responds to Green appeals for sensitivity towards, and an aesthetic regard for, the non-human natural world. Class analyses take second place to a universal-humanist appeal, and the character and quality of production are essential criteria for judging the acceptability of the society in which it takes place. At the same time as

Greens can comfortably accept William Morris as 'one of them', socialists obviously recognise him – and the utopian tradition he represents in general – as a part of their heritage. In this way the gap between Greens and socialists narrows to the point of extinction.

This process of rapprochement has been a necessary one; not only because there just are points of common interest, but also because it has been felt that the vacuum in the space vacated by progressive politics in the wake of the New Right onslaught needs to be filled by something more than diverse and divided groups and movements bickering over territory. In this respect the search for common ground has performed a useful healing and cohering function as groups and individuals seek to rebuild their political confidence.

### **Beyond rapprochement**

I want to suggest that this should be seen as a beginning and not an end. The search for common ground or for reasons for rapprochement is essentially a defensive and non-transformative strategy. It is defensive in that it reads like a withdrawal into the stockade – necessary, but ultimately a journey to nowhere. It is non-transformative in that the rapprochement pushes neither ecologism nor socialism into new theoretical or practical territory. The meeting is minimalist: themes and practices on both sides are dropped as a lowest common denominator of mutual acceptability is sought, and both sides emerge from the engagement fundamentally unchanged.

My argument here is that radical and progressive politics need not (and, from an activist point of view, should not) rest content with such an achievement. One of the most striking features of the New Right ascendancy has been the pilfering and deployment of leftist vocabulary by the forces of the right. Prime Minister John Major's claim to be seeking a 'classless society' was remarkable enough for its mere utterance, but more remarkable still for its going almost wholly unnoticed and unchallenged. This silence was eloquent evidence not of a lack of resistance, but of the lack of a vocabulary with which to express it. Virtually the entire rich crop of political speech has been harvested by the right and invested with meanings which suit its intentions. Like a ventriloquist's dummy, the left now does not speak but, rather, is spoken. The intention here is to begin to reconstruct a language for the left.

### **The second and third stages: relegitimation and transformation**

In these respects socialists and Greens need to emerge from their stockade and look to creation rather than conservation. If rapprochement was the necessary first stage, then there are second and third stages as well, and both of them involve a creative relationship between socialism and ecologism – one which eventually takes them (and particularly socialism) into the new territory demanded by a progressive politics suited to the late twentieth century.

The anatomy of this new politics has many dimensions but having begun to speak of language I want to continue to do so, not least because it anticipates postmodern themes developed later. Postmodernists argue that reality is irreducibly 'linguistic', or that we are constituted by discourse, or that our experience is only as rich as our conceptualisations of it allow. I do not want to defend these positions here, and nor am I wholeheartedly in favour of them. For one thing they have no room for political economy or for an analysis of the material conditions for social change. These are serious *lacunae* – and particularly in the context of the political and social transformations which I want to speak about here.

I am persuaded, though, that it is wrong to relegate language and the power that resides in it to superstructural irrelevance. Politically, it is worth spending time thinking about how language that is important to a movement, and which has been lost to it, might be recovered. We would be wrong to underestimate not only the symbolic but ultimately the *material* force of John Major's appeal to a classless society. There is a battle to be fought on the terrain of language, then, that is worth fighting in its own political and material right, and what follows is written in that vein.

First I would like to show how, in the second stage of the relationship between socialism and ecologism, ecologism can contribute to a relegitimation of the language of socialism. This amounts to reinvesting socialist political language with socialist meanings and intentions, and thus wresting back some or all of that language from those who have appropriated it.

If the second stage is about relegitimation, then the third stage concerns the deployment of ecologism with a view to creating a new vocabulary with which to legitimise a contemporary progressive politics. This will involve – speculatively, tentatively, all too briefly – taking the old (and hopefully relegitimised) language of socialism and investing it with new meanings inspired both by the ecological critique and by the informing principles generated by our post-Fordist and postmodern material and cultural contexts.

In this way, ecologism becomes the necessary condition for the reinvention of a radical and progressive politics. It is both that which will breathe new life into the language of an old project, and that which can turn the old project into a new one. On the terrain of language, this will mean providing a vocabulary with which to speak a new world – a language as yet untainted and unappropriated and therefore confident of its transformative potential. I shall refer to the second stage as one of relegitimation, and to the third as one of transformation.

I think that these processes of relegitimation and transformation could probably be applied to the whole of the political language of socialism, but I shall restrict myself here to the central themes of liberty, equality and 'fraternity' (to which I shall refer from now on as 'sociality'). Some will object that these are not specifically socialist words, and of course listed so bluntly they are not. But as we know, there are specifically socialist inflections and understandings of

them, and it is these that I shall explain and defend. Schematically, then, the second stage involves taking these themes whose socialist meanings have been maligned and delegitimised and which have been invested with meanings helpful to socialism's opponents, and relegitimising them with the aid of politico-ecological insights. The third stage involves taking up these themes once again and showing how they can be transformed (without being wholly abandoned) into a new vocabulary. Again, this will be done by investing them with meanings inspired by the ecology movement, and I shall hint at how these meanings also accord with the aspirations generated by our post-Fordist and postmodern context.

### **Liberty: relegitimation**

Liberty is an expansive concept and has been interpreted in many ways by different political traditions. The most common and familiar distinction is that between 'negative' and 'positive' liberty. A signal change took place sometime in the nineteenth century in this respect. The classical liberal tradition relied on a notion of liberty that had to do with freedom from restraint or intervention. This negative notion was mobilised as a means of arguing against, specifically, restraint and intervention by the state, beyond that which was necessary to preserve internal and external peace, and to provide for works and institutions which would not be profitable for private enterprise.

Social liberal and other theorists reacted to this prospectus by advancing a positive conception of liberty which involved not so much freedom from restraint, but rather being in a position to do things that were considered desirable or worthwhile. This positive notion of freedom was, in turn, mobilised to aid arguments in favour of that which classical liberals had wanted to minimise: state intervention. The argument ran (and runs) that only the state could provide the conditions within which positive liberty could be exercised. Put differently: the exercise of freedom now involved not only a guarantee of 'legal' security from molestation by other people, but also a 'social' security from which, and within which, positive freedom could be pursued. This social security was to be provided by the collectivity with the state as its agent.

The move from negative to positive liberty can be seen as a widening of the preconditions for the exercise of liberty – more particularly, a widening from abstract to concrete conditions. In the beginning the preconditions have an almost exclusively legal dimension, and then they come to include a social one. Now we need to understand that a further concrete dimension is required: an ecological one. No exercise of liberty of any sort is possible without ecological security. In the same sense in which it is said that there is no point in being free to have tea at the Ritz (abstract) if you don't have the money to pay the bill (concrete-social), so it is true to say that a Nepalese is not really free to eat (abstract) if the nearest source of firewood is two days' walk away (concrete-ecological).

In recent years the idea of concrete conditions for the

exercise of liberty has come into disrepute and negative conceptions of liberty have been dominant. Now, though, there may be a chance to relegitimise the provision of concrete conditions for positive liberty by mobilising the ecological imperative. The notion of ecological security as a precondition for the exercise of liberty cannot be dealt with within the confines of currently popular notions of negative liberty. The imperative of ecological security both finds such notions wanting (because abstract), and also provides new ground on which to argue for public provision. In this way the contemporary legitimacy of the political dimensions of ecology might be mobilised to relegitimise the positive dimensions of liberty.

### **Equality: relegitimation**

There was a time not so long ago when equality (in some form or another) seemed as secure a political aspiration as democracy. The onslaught of anti-egalitarians, though, has been so fiercely successful that equality is now a word to utter, *sotto voce*, behind the bike sheds. Arguments in favour of inequality have shifted: it used to be argued for by the right in terms of its naturalness, and in terms of its being attached to disparities generated by historical and inherited tradition. Now the stress is on 'earned' inequality in the context of a meritocracy, but either way, inequality as political aspiration is now a piece of political furniture that the left seems unable to shift. Is there, though, any way of relegitimising equality by mobilising political-ecological concerns?

John Baker writes in *Arguing for Equality* that 'Some of the central political issues of our time are only indirectly connected with equality',<sup>6</sup> and goes on to suggest by way of example that 'there is no essential conflict between equality and either peace or ecology or feminist values. How strongly they reinforce each other is a question I leave open.'<sup>7</sup> One way in which I believe political ecology and equality *do* reinforce each other is in the former's focus on 'needs'. Political ecologists have employed theories of need in order to counter what they see as industrial society's reckless wastefulness. A basic tenet of deep green politics is that, in view of the limited nature of the planet's resources, rates of consumption among the relatively well-off in 'developed' countries will need to be reduced. The distinction between needs and 'wants' is then used to argue that we could reduce consumption without compromising the satisfaction of needs. Needs should be satisfied, they suggest, but greed should not.

This has had the effect of reintroducing the concept of need to the political debate at the same time as many have become acutely aware that the 1980s was a bad decade, judged by the satisfaction of basic needs. Globally, the proportion of people in absolute destitution increased during the 1980s, and in Britain, at least, beggars have appeared on the streets for the first time in my living memory. But from the point of view of equality the mere reappearance of need as a legitimate topic of political conversation is not enough. We have also to know whether this can be pushed towards

an obligation to satisfy basic needs (an aspiration which unites all egalitarians). Further, the meeting of basic needs only satisfies a weak egalitarianism. This might keep beggars off the streets but it would do nothing to counteract vast disparities of wealth. Can we find another element in political ecology which, combined with the notion of basic needs, allows us to press towards a stronger sense of equality of outcome?

It is a fundamental maxim of Green politics that the planet is of finite size and that, therefore, both resources and the space in which to dispose of our waste are limited.<sup>8</sup> This finitude and these limits combine to place scarcity at the heart of Green politics, thus distinguishing it from the implicit or explicit cornucopian contexts of most other modern political ideologies. In these latter contexts, equality need not be of particularly pressing moment because there is a sense in which there is more than enough for everybody, and everybody will get something. On the other hand, in a context of scarcity there is a stronger intuitive sense (and it may be no more than that) that equal distribution is the fundamental point of departure.

Of course, people will always be able to produce 'compelling reasons' against equality, and one of the most potent would involve distribution according to merit. But the point is that by placing scarcity in the foreground and asking us to consider social and economic relations in that context, Greens can say that the onus of justification in respect of arguments over egalitarianism has shifted. To explain: normally (and especially nowadays) inequality is the 'rest point' from which such discussions begin. Thus the onus of justification is placed on those who would want to argue in favour of equality. Once scarcity becomes the ground on which the debate takes place, however, the onus of justification is reversed, i.e. equal unless proved otherwise.

It might be objected that in a country or community where, on most accounts, basic needs had been satisfied for the majority, this kind of argument has no purchase. Yet needs are largely historically and culturally determined, and as long as scarcity can be demonstrated – even if it is 'relative' scarcity, as in a wealthy country – then there may still be an intuitive dispensation in favour of equality.

For instance in Britain the standard of health care has risen to the point where the ability of the medical profession to deliver health care has outstripped (on some readings) society's ability to pay for it. In other words there is a perceived scarcity of resources in the health service – even in a wealthy country like Britain. While this has led to suggestions that we should not expect the health service to provide everything that it is in principle capable of providing (e.g. hip replacements for everyone who needs them within six months of asking), only very rarely has it led to suggestions that some should have access to treatment while others should not.<sup>9</sup> This may be an unarticulated example of the intuitive sense of equality in conditions of scarcity to which I referred above.

Of course our society allows for the buying of plenty in the midst of scarcity, and expensive health insurance is a case in point. But this is a description of the way things are

rather than a prescription for the way things ought to be, and my point is that consistent deployment of the equality/scarcity relations would make two-tier health services harder to justify.

In this way, the political-ecological resurrection of scarcity makes possible not only the reintroduction of equality as a topic for debate, but also begins to provide a context within which it can be argued for. This is the basis for the relegitimation of equality.

### **Sociality: relegitimation**

Sociality is presently an uncomfortable word from a New Right point of view because it runs counter to the accepted wisdom that 'there is no such thing as society; there are only individuals and their families'.<sup>10</sup> Moreover there is evidence that the mud has stuck, and that people are increasingly inclined to construct their social identities on the ground of a primordial sense of individuality rather than sociality. Assuming we can agree that sociality as description and prescription runs through most traditions of socialist thought, can political-ecological concerns provide a ground on which it can be reasserted?

In recent months there has been much talk of employing either economic incentives or 'command and control' techniques to encourage sounder environmental behaviour. The former involve modifying the market, to a greater or lesser extent, to promote those activities which are less damaging to the environment than others. Command and control techniques, on the other hand, involve governments in deciding on a desired end and enacting legislation in order to bring it about.

This is not the place to enter the debate as to the respective merits of economic incentive vs. command and control strategies, but I would like to say something about the latter in the context of sociality. In the absence of a community-wide sense of what we might call 'environmental citizenship', individuals seem to view new environmental laws in the same light as they view tax laws, and most do their very best to get round them. It is important to see that this does not amount to a criticism of command and control as such, but more of the culture into which it is introduced. There is reason to suspect that in a culture boasting an environmental citizenship component, command and control would work better because people would embed their personal decisions in a widely-accepted collective enterprise. This, then, is the political-ecological contribution to the resurrection of sociality – the notion that in the absence of a sense of environmental citizenship, measures to halt the degradation of the environment aimed at unreconstructed individuals will be found wanting. In other words if there *are* only individuals and their families, then the environment as a target of public policy will always come off second best. This argument needs to be made not only for the sake of the environment, but also in order to relegitimise the third term in the socialist triad: sociality.

The objection to this is that unreconstructed individualism and its economic and political accoutrements – e.g. well-

defined and enforceable property rights – just *are* the best way of halting environmental degradation. People are more likely to look after their own property than property held in common, and especially when they realise that long-term profitability depends on running a clean environmental ship.

There are too many objections to such a view to be dealt with here but it is clear that fully-fledged versions of this argument cannot do the job required of them. For example, some pieces of property are in their nature environmentally damaging – such as the car – and no amount of care and attention will stop them from being so. In this context, and in many others, individualism needs embedding in the collective enterprise that I have called environmental citizenship.

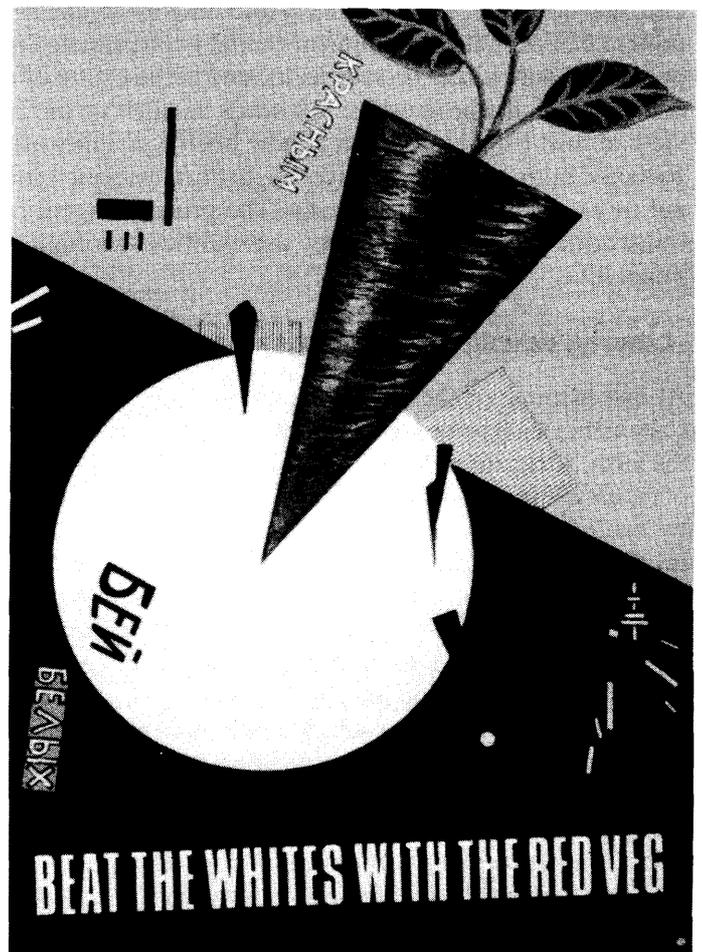
The tentative and sketchy programme for the re-legitimation of three socialist principles is thus complete. The present popularity, or legitimacy, of political-ecological concerns can be mobilised in order to reinvest these principles with meanings which are recognisably socialist. Put differently: they can be mobilised to argue that socialist interpretations of liberty, equality and sociality are relevant (indeed *necessary*) to the construction of a society which would meet certain political-ecological demands.

Put differently again: contemporary rightist meanings of these words (or their wholesale rejection) cannot meet widely-accepted environmental demands and conditions. Negative liberty fails to take account of the need for ecological security as a precondition for the exercise of liberty. The finite nature of the planet as the ground for discussions of social and economic relations propels us towards an egalitarian sensibility. Finally, the apparent need for the development of an ‘environmental citizenship’ calls the bluff of unreconstructed individualism.

In the sense that socialism and ecology work together here, the present paper is a contribution to that school of thought which holds that there can be a constructive tension between the socialist and ecologist traditions. However, I would not want this to be read as suggesting that either partner can be seen as the dominant one, and certainly not that ecologism’s role in the contemporary world is limited to kissing socialism back to life. Beyond legitimisation, in any case, there is a third stage: transformation.

### Transformation – some general remarks

The need to consider transformation derives from the changed and changing nature of the social and cultural contexts within which political projects are presently constructed. Broadly speaking, the French Revolutionary triad of liberty, equality and ‘fraternity’ have been interpreted and deployed (on the left) in the context of an industrial society with largely ‘modern’ aspirations. Residual but powerful images of sameness and uniformity dominate our intuitions both of industrial society and the universalising projects of modernity. These images, in turn, are reflected in the freight that equality and sociality (in particular) have come to carry: equality is popularly associated with



sameness, and sociality is rejected as a totalising project that stresses what is common at the expense of suppressing what is different. As well as being unpopular, these images do not suit the changed material and cultural conditions within which a progressive political vision must now be forged. The process of re-legitimation carried out above hardly calls these images into question, but now it is time to do so.

Again broadly speaking, the changed conditions to which I refer revolve around post-Fordism and postmodernity. Progressive politics must respond to these new conditions and the aspirations that they engender. There are myriad ways to characterise post-Fordism and postmodernity, but both seem to be associated with changes in ‘advanced’ societies from homogeneity and mass production to more flexible, segmented and differentiated production. In terms of political aspirations one characteristic of what have come contentiously to be called ‘New Times’ stands out: the substitution of difference and particularity for uniformity and universality. My suggestion is that a transformative and progressive socialist politics, intent on a project of self-conscious emancipation, will have to take the incorporation of the former pair of terms extremely seriously.

Indeed, it is striking to note how far some feminisms have already proceeded down this road. Much contemporary feminist thinking is not now organised around egalitarian demands aimed at what would turn out to be (in one form or another) an androgynous society, but around the mobilisation

of sexual difference both as description and as an organising principle of aspiration. Feminism should not be isolated in this, but should rather be seen as located at the centre of a debate which the progressive left needs to catch up on. In view of this, I shall try to hint at how liberty, equality and sociality, born in the modern age, might be transformed and put to work in a postmodern one. The principal agent of transformation is, once more, the political-ecological imperative.

### **Liberty, equality and sociality – transformation**

At one extreme of the Green spectrum of pictures of the sustainable society lies 'bioregionalism'. As the coiner of the term, Kirkpatrick Sale, explains: 'A bioregion is a part of the earth's surface whose rough boundaries are determined by natural rather than human dictates.'<sup>11</sup> As far as social relations between people in a bioregion are concerned he writes that 'truly autonomous bioregions will likely go their own separate ways and end up with quite disparate political systems'.<sup>12</sup> Of course not all Greens will subscribe to the letter of such a programme, but they will all note and support the strong sense of self-determination at work in it. This is an understanding of liberty which involves not only freedom from restraint and/or the positive freedom to do things considered worthwhile, but also the idea that emancipation must be self-emancipation, developed and acted out primarily by the community and individuals themselves.

This might sound more like the reactivating of an old liberal notion of liberty than the developing of an entirely new one, but the response to difference suggested by political ecology is other than this. If the liberal attitude to difference is characterised by tolerance, then the political-ecological attitude is characterised – in principle – by celebration. This response to difference is the one demanded by compelling contemporary feminist arguments, and can no longer be ignored by leftist politics.

Many postmodernists suggest that the desire to erase difference has been at the heart of the dark side of the modern project. Greens themselves derive the celebration of difference from the scientific-ecological maxim that diversity in an ecosystem is a source of sustainability, and, increasingly, movements in the developing world argue for development that respects local cultures and traditions. Even the rise of the 'new social movements' themselves suggest a desire to pursue forms of particularity for which political parties are particularly unsuited. It seems that any progressive politics in the contemporary world that fails to take account of this insistent demand for the recognition of difference does so at its peril.

It needs to be stressed that this is not to recommend a thoroughgoing relativism, but merely (yet significantly) to ask that difference be a factor in (for example) theories and practices of political development. A politics of difference might appear to allow the practice of 'undesirable' politics, but the celebration of difference provides its own policing, in that only those politics which do celebrate difference are

legitimate. This is the meaning of the following observation from Jean-François Lyotard: 'Absolute injustice would occur if the pragmatics of obligation, that is, the possibility of continuing to play the game of the just, were excluded. ... Thus, obviously, all terror, annihilation, massacre etc., or their threat, are, by definition, unjust. The people whom one massacres will no longer be able to play the game of the just and the unjust.'<sup>13</sup> So, for example, if a regime allows a fascist political presence it would appear to be celebrating difference, but it does so at the cost of denying life and legitimacy to that which fascism defines itself against. This is the suppression of difference, not its celebration.

Liberty, then, must be conceived as concrete self-determination, or as the emancipation of particularity – and equality (to take the second term) must be seen as the enabling of it. Once again, a formal liberty of self-determination makes no sense unless it is reinforced by the possibility of actually practising that liberty. In this new context of transformation, equality plays the same role as it does in the old contexts of legitimisation and re-legitimation: it provides the concrete conditions for the fulfilment of the promise of liberty. At its simplest, this can be read (for example) as a justification for the funding of those 'alternative' groups and organisations for which some London boroughs are so famous, and which are the butt of the popular press.

Earlier, I suggested that the re-legitimation of sociality could involve the development of a notion of environmental citizenship. The transformation of sociality might mean mining this notion for its various implications and focussing on one in particular: the international dimension. The experience of environmental degradation has left us in no doubt as to the transnational nature of its disruption. Almost more importantly, we are in no doubt, either, as to the interdependent nature of both intranational and international relations. Such interdependence constitutes the skeleton on which the flesh of difference, or particularity, is hung. Interdependence is important too in avoiding the flattening effects of old-fashioned internationalism while retaining its sense of community. In this role it can act in concert with Lyotard's principle (above) to check the possibly centrifugal tendencies of a politics of difference.

In this way we can see how the transformed terms of liberty, equality and sociality support and inform each other in a manner analogous to that of the original set. Roughly, the exercise of liberty presupposes the existence of equality, and sociality constitutes the web into which the practice of liberty is woven. The difference, in circumstances of transformation, is that the three terms speak to new demands and new conditions: the political-ecological imperative, postmodernity and post-Fordism. In meeting these demands and confronting these conditions the terms take on new resonances while remaining recognisably a part of a lengthy tradition.

## Conclusion

Working on the twin assumptions that it is essential to have a language to speak an alternative politics, and that such a language is presently only dimly visible, I have tried to show how socialism and political ecology can act together to begin to provide one. The argument assumes, and seeks to benefit from, the widespread concern for environmental problems and the legitimacy they therefore have as objects of political discourse. This legitimacy can be mobilised as a means of reinvesting key concepts in the socialist tradition with recognisably socialist meanings. This is done by showing that confronting the environmental problematic involves employing socialist understandings of liberty, equality and sociality.

But the development of a radical and progressive politics for the next century will involve more than the re-legitimation of an old tradition. The signs are that such a politics will revolve around the central concept of difference. Political ecology is just one example of a contemporary politics that stresses difference, and perhaps it can be put to work with socialism to help develop the language with which to speak such a politics.

Either way, for both academics and activists, the debate between socialism and ecogism needs to be pushed beyond the search for common ground.

## Notes

- 1 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'A Critique of Political Ecology', *New Left Review*, 84, 1974.
- 2 Of course there are traditions within socialism that do not conform to this stereotype, as I point out below, but the general thrust of socialist concerns is as I describe it. For a useful recent discussion of the relationship between Marxist, Frankfurt School and New Left socialism and emergent political ecology. see

Robyn Eckersley, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: towards an ecocentric approach*, London, UCL Press, 1992.

3 Martin Ryle, *Ecology and Socialism*, London, Radius, 1988, p. 31.

4 The political history of ecogism is of course more chequered than this adjective would seem to suggest, and it has become fashionable recently (on both the left and the right) to say so; see, for example, Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century*, New York and London, Yale University Press, 1989; Andrew McHallam, *The New Authoritarians: Reflections on the Greens*, Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies, Occasional Paper No. 51, 1991; and John Gray, *Beyond the New Right: Markets, Government and the Common Environment*, London, Routledge, 1993.

5 For a particularly detailed and provocative presentation of this argument see Keekok Lee, *Social Philosophy and Ecological Scarcity*, London, Routledge, 1989.

6 John Baker, *Arguing for Equality*, London, 1987, p. 150.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 151.

8 Indeed the very idea of 'disposal' in a more or less closed system is problematic.

9 The furore surrounding the recent case of the patient refused immediate treatment because he was a smoker reveals two things: first, an increasingly inegalitarian culture helps to legitimise such a refusal; and second, all the more need to reverse the legitimising trends of such a culture.

10 Margaret Thatcher's aphorism is a neat and ideologically successful attempt to bridge the gap between libertarian forms of the new right (individuals) and conservative forms of the new right (the family).

11 Quoted in Andrew Dobson (ed.), *The Green Reader*, London, Andre Deutsch, 1991, p. 78. From Kirkpatrick Sale, 'Mother of All', in Satish Kumar (ed.), *The Schumacher Lectures Volume 2*, London, Blond and Briggs, 1974.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

13 Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud, *Just Gaming*, Manchester, MUP, 1985, pp. 66-7.

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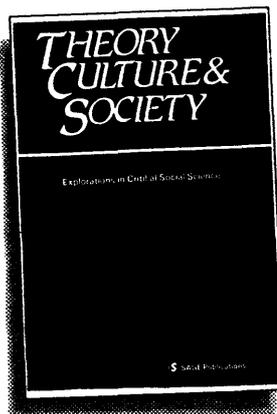
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