



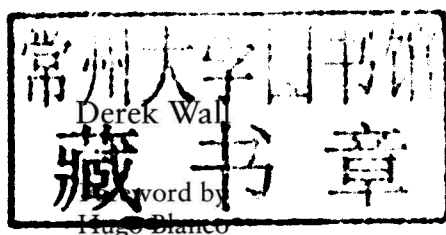
# THE RISE OF THE GREEN LEFT

INSIDE THE WORLDWIDE  
PROSOCIALIST MOVEMENT

FOREWORD BY DEREK WALL FOREWORD BY HUGO BLANCO

# The Rise of the Green Left

Inside the Worldwide  
Ecosocialist Movement



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## The Rise of the Green Left

## PRAISE FOR *THE RISE OF THE GREEN LEFT*

‘For too long the official left has ignored, even attacked ecology. We should be grateful to Derek Wall for his book, *The Rise of the Green Left*. It is time to recognise that the rights of people rest on the rights of Mother Earth. And this book helps us move in that direction.’

**Vandana Shiva, Director of the Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology, New Delhi; author, activist, and winner of the Alternative Nobel Prize**

‘There is no one more tuned in to the great range of struggles for ecosocialism across the world and more capable of presenting them in practical and down-to-earth terms than Derek Wall.’

**Joel Kovel, author of *The Enemy of Nature* (2nd Edition, 2007)**

‘With our planet in the grip of a severe environmental crisis we should never tire of seeking fresh alternatives. And, with so many of our environmental problems being caused and sustained by an unrelenting demand for economic growth, Derek Wall’s *The Rise of the Green Left* sets out a new political agenda of huge significance. Highly recommended.’

**Caroline Lucas, MP, Leader of the Green Party of England and Wales**

‘Easily the most important book on this subject – *The Rise of the Green Left* provides an essential guide for anyone interested in how politics and ecology can come together to solve the most pressing issues of our times. It’s important that the ideas in this book get the maximum attention and coverage!’

**Salma Yaqoob, Leader of the Respect Party, UK**

‘Mandatory reading for social, labour, and environmental activists and every concerned person, perhaps no place more than in the politically circumscribed and insular United States. The growth of the global Green Left is hopeful news and coming just in time.’

**Howie Hawkins, co-founder of the Green Party in the United States and editor of *Independent Politics: The Green Party Strategy Debate* (2006)**

‘A guide to activism and a manifesto that deserves to be read by everyone who wants a better world. Wall’s insightful work clearly shows what ecosocialism is, how it has grown and how it can mount a real challenge to capitalist ecocide.’

**Ian Angus, editor of *ClimateAndCapitalism.com*; author of *The Global Fight for Climate Justice* (2009)**

‘For some years now I have been following the prolific writing and political organising of Derek Wall, a trailblazer of the Green Left in the UK. The Cochabamba People’s Climate Summit held in April 2010 is evidence of the accelerated coming together of ecological and social activists. Derek Wall has done us all a great service by documenting this urgently important development in world politics.’

**Derrick O’Keefe, Co-Chair Canadian Peace Alliance and Contributing Editor to *SocialistVoice.ca***

*To Sarah Farrow*

Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the earth. They are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations as *boni patres familias* [good heads of the household].

Marx 1981: 911 (<http://tiny.cc/xrHUv>)

I was reading about the reasons for the disappearance of song birds in Germany. The spread of scientific forestry, horticulture, and agriculture, have cut them off from their nesting places and their food supply. More and more, with modern methods, we are doing away with hollow trees, waste lands, brushwood, fallen leaves. I felt sore at heart. I was not thinking so much about the loss of pleasure for human beings, but I was so much distressed at the idea of the stealthy and inexorable destruction of these defenceless little creatures, that the tears came into my eyes.

Letter from Rosa Luxemburg to Sophie Liebknecht,  
2 May 1917 (<http://tiny.cc/TfMi5>).

# Acknowledgements

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# Foreword

*Hugo Blanco*

This book clearly and conclusively shows the incompatibility between the capitalist system and the protection of the environment. The capitulation of many green parties to capitalism has converted them into anti-ecologists.

The book also highlights the fact that in today's world it is impossible to have a coherent socialism which does not incorporate ecology. In this respect, we see how the Ecuadorian government, which has been put forward as one of the practitioners of 'twenty-first-century socialism', has surrendered to the idea that nature is there for us to exploit. This has led to a confrontation with Ecuador's indigenous population, who are defending the environment.

The book shows us once again that if humanity remains being led by the big multinational corporations, the direct result will be the liquidation of the human species, in the same way that we have already exterminated many other species.

Another aspect worth highlighting is Derek's observation that 'The most important area of discussion must be how can we stop the train before it leaps the rails. The question of how ecosocialists fight for change is the one we must ask and re-ask.'

Further along Derek tells us: 'The political system has been better at changing radicals than the radicals have been at changing the system.' With responsible prudence, he points out that 'This chapter examines strategy and makes some

suggestions, it does not claim to provide “the answer”; however, if it encourages discussion which leads to focused and effective action, it will have achieved something.’

Further on, Derek talks about the struggle of indigenous peoples in defending the environment, including the case of Bagua, Peru.

I should point out that this focus on indigenous struggle is not just of theoretical interest to Derek. He shows solidarity in practice and has organised and promoted many events in support of not only Bagua, but also indigenous peoples around the world.

He calls attention to the words of Elinor Ostrom, the 2009 Nobel laureate in Economics:

Our problem is how to craft rules at multiple levels that enable humans to adapt, learn, and change over time so that we are sustaining the very valuable natural resources that we inherited so that we may be able to pass them on. I am deeply indebted to the indigenous peoples in the U.S. who had an image of seven generations being the appropriate time to think about the future. I think we should all reinstate in our mind the seven-generation rule. When we make really major decisions, we should ask not only what will it do for me today, but what will it do for my children, my children’s children, and their children’s children into the future.

It is significant that he has asked me to write this foreword, rather than a distinguished academic. He sees me as one of the representatives of the indigenous struggle.

In Europe, the concept of a socialist society existed long before Marx. In this respect, one of Marx’s great contributions was that socialism would be achieved, not by convincing the rulers, but through the struggle of the sector directly oppressed by capitalism: the working class. It is not Marx’s fault that social democratic and Stalinist working-class leaders should

have betrayed that struggle, halting its success, which would have led to socialism.

Now, thanks to the victory of capital, it is not only the working class that is being sacrificed by neoliberalism, but the vast majority of the global population. But still, as Derek shows, humanity is on the border of extinction because of the aggressions of capital against nature. The most affected sectors are the indigenous peoples, and to a slightly lesser extent, non-indigenous peasants (the alternative meeting to the farce in Kyoto in 1997, *Vía Campesina*, was an infamous example).

We should point out that the system not only attacks nature, but also, aware that the defence tool of indigenous struggle is communal and collective organisation, directs its actions to dissolving it. Indigenous people struggle collectively, sacrificing lives in the defence of Mother Earth. In defence of their own life and of the survival of the species, many indigenous activists are well aware of the latter. We must not forget that the first international meeting, 'Against Neoliberalism and for Humanity', was hosted by indigenous people in Chiapas, Mexico in 1996. It is also noteworthy that the indigenous people of Chiapas have been governing themselves in a horizontal structure for 15 years, and that their relations with urban, national and international, movements are equally horizontal.

Another characteristic of the indigenous movements of the world is what has become known as 'good living'. This idea, suggesting that living good is what is satisfactory, counters the capitalist ideology that states that money, and what you can buy with it, brings happiness, and that life should be dedicated to production and consumption. It is precisely this ideology that is increasingly quickly leading to the disappearance of the human species.

In the American hemisphere, this confrontation has been present for over five hundred years, but lately it has grown significantly with the increased aggression of capital against nature and collective organisation. This makes indigenous struggles ‘ecosocialist’, in European terms. In indigenous terms, they are struggles in defence of the indigenous community and of Mother Earth, who both bear different names in different languages. In my language, Quechua, it is a struggle in the defence of the ‘ayllu’ (community) and of ‘Pachamama’ (Mother Earth).

In my opinion, following Marx’s logic, the most important task of the ecosocialist is to defend those at the vanguard of the struggle, the indigenous peoples and peasants in general. Of course, all sectors promoting collectivism and anti-capitalism should be supported. Many of these can be found amongst the urban population. A noteworthy example is the project, ‘Sewing the Future’, which starts with cotton production by Argentinean farmers, focusing next on a textiles factory taken over and administrated by its workers, continues via packing cooperatives, and culminates with the participation of the Italian consortium of fair-trade organisations, CTM Altromercato.

In this book, what Derek has made us think about is what roads of action ecosocialists should take. My opinions form a path, others will appear. Derek’s concern is that talking is not enough, we must act because time is warning us; to repeat from above: *‘how can we stop the train before it leaps the rails?’*

Hugo Blanco, a contemporary of Che Guevara, led a peasant revolution in Peru in 1961. A former leader of Trotsky’s Fourth International (USFI), he is today a prominent ecosocialist and publishes the newspaper *Indigenous Struggle*.

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Foreword</i> by Hugo Blanco	x
1 Why Ecosocialism?	1
2 The Real Climate Change Swindle	23
3 An Ecosocialist Manifesto	49
4 The Ecosocialist Challenge	70
5 Ecosocialism in Latin America	105
6 Slow the Train!	122
7 Resources for Revolution	149
Appendix 1 The Belém Ecosocialist Declaration	161
Appendix 2 The Headcorn Declaration from Green Left	168
Bibliography	170
Index	180

# 1

## Why Ecosocialism?

The modern economy is structurally reliant on economic growth for its stability. When growth falters – as it has done recently – politicians panic. Businesses struggle to survive. People lose their jobs and sometimes their homes. A spiral of recession looms. Questioning growth is deemed to be the act of lunatics, idealists and revolutionaries.

But question it we must. The myth of growth has failed us. It has failed the 2 billion people who still live on less than \$2 a day. It has failed the fragile ecological systems we depend on for survival. It has failed spectacularly, in its own terms, to provide economic stability and secure people's livelihoods (Jackson 2009: 14).

Of course, the big problem facing all discussions of alternatives to capitalism is that there do not seem to be any alternatives. Throughout the Cold War, the alternative was state socialism or communism, but this alternative is fading fast around the globe. Asked about alternatives to capitalism today, most people draw a blank. Some would add: 'for good reason' (Speth 2008: 188).

Ecosocialism is an emerging political alternative that links socialism and ecology, arguing that ecological problems cannot be solved without challenging capitalism, and that a



1. Climate Camp, London, 2009 (Amelia Gregory)

socialism which does not respect the environment is worthless. Ecosocialism is to be found amongst green parties, social movements, socialist groups and indigenous networks. I would argue that it can be traced back to Karl Marx and lives not just in formal organizations of the left but increasingly amongst indigenous networks. Wikipedia provides a good introductory definition:

Eco-socialism, green socialism or socialist ecology is an ideology merging aspects of Marxism, socialism, green politics, ecology and alter-globalization. Eco-socialists generally believe that the expansion of the capitalist system is the cause of social exclusion, poverty and environmental degradation through globalization and imperialism, under the supervision of repressive states and transnational structures; they advocate the dismantling of capitalism and the state, focusing on collective ownership of the means of production by freely associated producers and restoration of the commons. (<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eco-socialism>>, accessed 21 February 2010)

## CRISIS, WHAT CRISIS?

This book looks at why ecosocialism is necessary and how it can be encouraged to grow. This title is a call to action, not an academic text. The ecological crisis is an appropriate starting-point for the discussion. Our planet is in the grip of a severe environmental crisis and to solve it we need to construct an ecosocialist alternative. Climate change and the other ecological problems that threaten us are, above all, products of economic growth. As economies grow, the demand for oil, coal and gas to power industrial expansion is increasing and such growth tends to degrade the global environment. While it would be possible to improve living standards with less waste, our present economic system – capitalism – only works if we produce, consume and waste at ever-increasing levels. Capitalism is a system that depends on rising economic growth, so it is intrinsically linked to environmental damage. It is vital to create an alternative to capitalism that allows humanity to prosper without devastating the environment. Ecosocialism seeks to provide an alternative that is ecologically viable, socially just and meets human needs. This chapter outlines the argument for ecosocialism.

It is possible to argue that there is no environmental crisis in a fundamental or serious sense. There are many arguments that can be put forward to challenge ecosocialism. One is the notion that humanity has a long history of damaging the environment, creating horrible problems but none the less continuing to prosper. It is also true that the environment is almost constantly changing; therefore, to look for some kind of stable ecological equilibrium is likely to be misleading. Species come and go, we don't mourn the dinosaurs and the conservation of the woolly mammoth was a lost cause



10,000 years ago. The idea, implicit in some forms of green politics, of a lost Eden of pristine untainted wilderness, is a myth. The literary critic Raymond Williams argued that each generation of humanity believes that it is damaging a natural order and looks back to a previous environmental golden age; he traces examples of this approach back to Thomas More's publication of *Utopia* in the sixteenth century and beyond (Williams 1993: 11).

It is clear that environmental damage has occurred throughout much of human existence. Human beings have changed the environment for thousands of years and often caused severe problems as a consequence. Ancient civilisations in Iraq were destroyed partly because of salinisation: using irrigation systems for crops led to increased evaporation of water; as the water evaporated, salt was drawn to the surface of the soil. Eventually the soil was too salty to grow crops and disaster struck; one writer referred to the salt-white landscapes as a 'satanic mockery of snow' (Goudie 1981:113).

There is evidence that the madness of several Roman emperors was caused by lead pollution from their food: acidic sauces contained in tableware made from pewter, an alloy of lead, would leach lead which was then ingested by diners, contaminating their blood and brains (Wall 1994: 33). There are numerous other examples of environmental problems from the past; for example, Tobias Smollett described the rank pollution of Bath in the eighteenth century and the toxic quality of London's water supply in his novel *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*:

If I would drink water, I must quaff the maukish contents of an open aqueduct, exposed to all manner of defilement; or swallow that which comes from the river Thames, impregnated with all the filth of London and Westminster—Human excrement is the least offensive part of the