

# Recycling & Reforms?

**We Want A Revolution!**

D.M. Borts

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## **How a radical community confronts a complexity of ecological contradictions**

Unlike the Green backsliding politicians denounced by Saral Sarkar in the adjoining article, no party in the U.S. has ever taken a principled stand on ecological issues. Even groups willing to make an effort to reform capital's and technology's worst abuses are few and far between. This absence causes a dilemma for radicals.

The appallingly destructive decisions made by society's managers compel us to respond, yet it's never been our ambition to solve this society's problems, for instance, how to dispose of its garbage. We do have a couple of answers to the sneering question of what our solution to the waste problem is: "Stop manufacturing the stuff!" and "Abolish plastics," for starters.

We are convinced that these slogans give the correct answer to a growing environmental problem, but they are far from adequate as an expression of our social goals. Nevertheless, for nearly ten years, many in our community linked these slogans to a vigorous effort to prevent the Detroit trash incinerator from being built.

Our creative and concentrated campaign ended in defeat. The huge stack now emits toxic smoke day and night. Even when we can't see them, the fumes and the smell of rotting garbage offend our sensibilities, both physical and mental.

We opposed the facility's construction from the early planning stage in significant numbers, and our objections were made both through conventional and unconventional channels. At the outset, some protesters had confidence in the responsiveness of the system. And even some of the more cynical protesters became convinced the city bureaucrats would back down on this clear-cut issue. For technical and financial reasons the planned facility was impractical, even leaving aside the radical opposition, yet the inertia of capitalist society kept it, as they say, on-line.

Now, new indignities are on the horizon: a medical facility equipped with its own incinerator is being built near the Fifth Estate office. Its fires will dispose of a mountain of medical waste, most of it plastic and some of it nuclear. In the western part of the state, the energy utility plans to bury radioactive waste from the Palisades nuclear reactor under sand dunes 150 yards from the shore of Lake Michigan.

## **Recycling No Panacea**

We haven't evolved a practice that quiets our malaise at being part of the minority that consumes the majority of the world's resources. We try to distance ourselves from the people who take for granted that the light will go on when the button is pressed, but we too are implicated in the system that sends garbage to lands inhabited by the poor and powerless [See "The Third World: Dumping Ground for the West," FE, #341, Spring, 1993]. Boatloads of

toxic wastes are shipped to Africa, and the mountains of plastic bottles we flatten for our recycling bins end up in China or Indonesia, either in landfills or in factories where recycling procedures poison the workers.

Much of the problematical waste is collected through local recycling endeavors. Originally considered a civic-minded, principled activity, it can now be seen as an essential practice if urban centers are to dispose of the mountain of cardboard, plastic, Styrofoam and metal that come with all commodities.

## The Ill-Effects of “Doing Good”

Recycling is not the only example of a well-meaning project turning sour. C Logre in the accompanying short article from Mordicus recounts how preservation of a tropical forest came at the expense of dislocating peasants who lived from the forest’s bounty. Contradictions such as these make us grateful that we are far from the seat of administrative decision-making. Saral Sarkar maintains that the German Green politicians who fear to articulate a program which would roll back the level of industrial technology will find themselves stymied. The same can be said of the social administrators of all countries.

## Contradictions Closer to Home

We consider the assurances of some technocrats that industrial know-how will eventually cope with the threat to the planet’s ecosystem to be wishful thinking, if not spurious lies. In conversations, we have examined the changes in living situation that a more balanced relation to nature will require. We think we’re prepared to renounce inter-continental travel and central heating, especially if there’s a prospect of being rid of A-bombs and toxic dumps.

Until our renunciation has any prospect of offering the social benefits we anticipate, we make constant concessions to our principles to obtain the “material” benefits capital provides. Thus the *Fifth Estate* is getting a computer to make it easier to propagate a primitivist critique, other dissident journals come wrapped in plastic, while their—and our—pages devour trees; and wildlife advocates send four-color promotional brochures for our monetary support to reclaim for Nature at least a corner of the globe. The contradictions have become blatantly clear but how to surmount them remains complex and difficult.

## Poster text

**Don’t let valuable resources go to waste!**

RECYCLE THE RICH

COMPOST CAPITALISM!

\* **Reduce**

Studies show that the top 1% of the population controls 34% of the wealth in the U. S. Experts agree that this amount can be reduced dramatically. The Dept. of Social Ecology has set a target of 80% wealth reduction for this group by the year 2000.

\* **Reuse**

Many items currently used for the exclusive pleasures of the rich can be re-used for more constructive purposes. Mansions can house the homeless, golf courses can become Spotted Owl habitat, etc.

\* **Recycle**

Most of the wealth presently controlled by the rich can be recycled back into society, to be used for education, health care, cleaning up the environmental damage caused by people trying to get rich, etc.

WARNING: Eating the rich can cause indigestion or food poisoning and is not recommended. The rich are also high in carbohydrates.

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