

Recycling & Liberal Reform

reprint from FE #334, Summer 1990

Bert Wirkes-Butuar (Peter Werbe)

On the one hand, fighting solely for reforms has historically had the function of affirming and extending the system's power; while on the other, waiting only for the final revolutionary conflagration can dictate an isolated existence confined to issuing angry tracts denouncing everything.

When recycling becomes a permanent feature of the economy, it will probably be utilized mainly as a technique to deal with a significant portion of urban garbage, but in itself won't stop the destruction of the natural world. All the recycling efforts in the country can't stop the clear-cut logging of the remaining old-growth forests of the US Northwest when a conglomerate which bought out a logging firm with junk bonds needs quick cash to meet its debt service.

One only need look at the start-up picture for a massive recycling industry to realize that it would mean more factories, more machinery, more energy, more waste, refuse and garbage, more workers going to more work on more roads in more cars, with additional suppliers, ad infinitum. Such is the nature of capitalist expansion.

For now our ideas and actions may only be a negation--opposition to petrochemical production, to any more growth, to wage work, to hierarchy, to the state, to the patriarchy. From these negations/oppositions should come a material, geographically coherent community of resistance that refuses a vision that encompasses anything less than a free and green world.

For some, recycling may act as a perceptual gateway to understanding the deeper problem of production and consumption in this society. But this realization should only be a small step in a journey to a world in which there is virtually no waste to recycle.

fifth Estate

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