



What Is Ecosocialism?



System Change
not Climate Change

an ecosocialist coalition

systemchangenotclimatechange.org

Ecosocialism

Basic tenets

In a nutshell, ecosocialists start with the premise that **environmental degradation** and **social injustice** stem from the same source: a world where profit is the highest goal. This implies that the **emancipation of people** from capital and its masters goes hand-in-hand with the **emancipation of the earth** and its biosphere from the cancer of **capitalism**.

What do ecosocialists (and other socialists) mean when they say “capitalism”? In brief, capitalism is a political/economic system that, like earlier systems, affects all aspects of life in the places that are subject to it. In its modern form, it has four main features:

- All economic decisions are made by an elite with no public accountability, based on **maximizing profit**.
- **The state** functions to shore up and protect the economic elite; elections are designed to keep power in the hands of the capitalist parties.
- **Education**, mainstream **news**, and **advertising** encourage wasteful consumption, patriotism, and faith in the free market.
- Imperialism maintains the dominance of the elites of the Global North, control over resources, access to cheap labor, and growing markets for consumer goods. Similarly entrenched patriarchy and racism help maintain the status quo within the Global North, making it difficult for working people to see their common enemy in the capitalist class.

To accept that we live in a world that is almost completely dominated by a system with these properties is to make some strong conclusions about how the environment got in its current state and what we should be doing about it.

The most important point is the first. The competition for profit drives industries relentlessly to grow production, to invent and produce more and more goods and services whether they are actually needed by people or not, to cheapen the cost of production by driving down workers' living standards and offloading the environmental costs of production onto society, to shorten the usable lifespan of products by designing in obsolescence and creating disposable commodities, and to maximally expand the luxury consumption market. The effect of these processes on the environment should be clear: wasteful and ever-increasing resource consumption, pollution, and massive production of the greenhouse gases that are the byproduct of nearly every component of the economy.

The second point matters because without the state – its laws, its enforcers, its prisons, its semblance of democracy – it would be impossible for the corporations to maintain the destructive system referred to in the previous paragraph. But it also matters when it comes to what we can do about the crisis. If the main function (though of course unstated) of “our leaders” is to uphold this system, then we cannot expect them to do anything about it, other than minimal reforms that will come too slowly in any case. In the United States, the political system is dominated by two parties, and the environmental crisis has continued to worsen, whichever party happens to be in power. As ecosocialists, we believe in working outside the dominant two-party framework in the United States. In Canada, in addition to the two corporate parties, there is a nominally Left party, the New Democratic Party, but the NDP has a policy of supporting expansion of oil refineries, justifying this as a question of “jobs”. Official Left political party politics in Canada is a long way from advocating an end to the fossil fuel economy and the capitalist expansion drive that fuels it.

The third point is also crucial to the maintenance of the economic system described under the first point and the political system described under the second point. This system goes along with a world-view, and that world-view is transmitted to people through the media, education, and advertising. People are taught, directly or indirectly, that our economic/political system is fundamentally democratic and that participation in the political system consists of voting and possibly writing to elected representatives or signing petitions. They are taught that people’s place in society is determined mainly by their ability and their effort rather than the circumstances they live in. They are taught that racism and patriarchy are either a thing of the past or a matter of individual attitude rather than basic features of the system itself. They are taught that the actions of the state are actions on behalf of all citizens rather than the ruling class and that devotion and allegiance to the state is among the highest virtues. They are taught that there is no viable alternative to the system we have; this is in effect the “end of history”. Of course there are alternative sources of information and knowledge, and part of our task is to figure out how to expand on these sources and use them to cut through the myths that stand in the way of system change.

The fourth point concerns the ways in which powerful states in the Global North exert control over those in the Global South and compete with one another for this control. Most explicitly imperialism involves the use of military force or the threat of such force, but it goes far beyond this, including the domination of international institutions such as the UN and the World Bank, relations of economic dependency based on foreign “aid” and the work of NGOs, and “free-trade” agreements. In addition to the ruthless exploitation of workers in the South, the results of this system are massive environmental degradation in areas where mining, factory farming, and chemical factories operate in the South with few restrictions. Militant opposition to imperialism and its environmental consequences in particular is growing in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, and as ecosocialists we must stand in solidarity with these struggles. Environmental racism within the US and European countries works similarly. Resources are extracted from indigenous lands with no regard for the people who have lived there for thousands of years, and

toxic waste ends up in city neighborhoods populated by people of color or on indigenous land. As in the Global South, resistance to this exploitation is growing, and ecosocialists must find ways to become more involved in these struggles.

A little history

As socialists, ecosocialists have a long tradition of theory to learn from and activism to be inspired by. This brief overview just touches on some of the people and events that are most relevant to ecology.

As the most important figure in the history of socialist thought, **Karl Marx** has obviously had a great influence on thinking within ecosocialism. Although there is no way Marx could have foreseen the climate crisis and the scale of environmental devastation that we face in the early 21st century, he did observe and discuss how capitalism resulted in the disruption of the long-standing relationship between people and nature, which he calls “metabolism”. In particular the growth of cities that resulted from industrialization left the countryside impoverished. He wrote that “all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil.” In a future socialist society he envisioned the possibility that a free association of producers would “govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, ... accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature”. That is, he recognized the importance of planning in a democratic sustainable society. At the same time Marx knew that the transition to socialism would not necessarily result in this sort of sustainability.

Later in the 19th century, the English artist, writer, and revolutionary socialist **William Morris** went further, arguing that only socialism could create the conditions required to achieve a sustainable society. He also championed the notion of limits to growth that is so antithetical to capitalism. Some call Morris the first ecosocialist. Thus, already by the turn of the 20th century, forward-thinking theorists were saying that capitalism was incompatible with a sustainable world, that socialism held out the only hope for humankind.

The first half of the 20th century witnessed the triumph of revolutions in Russia and China. Though these revolutions held out the hope to many around the world of a socialist future, the result was otherwise. Socialists, and ecosocialists, disagree on how to describe the societies and political systems that resulted from these revolutions and their aftermath, but one thing is clear: in their fanatical drive for rapid industrialization, they failed when it came to the hopes of Marx, Morris, and others of a socialism that took the intricate relationship between the earth and humans into consideration. In fact one of the legacies of the Soviet Union is environmental disasters such as the Chernobyl nuclear accident, the destruction of the Aral Sea, and the Norilsk nickel-palladium mining and smelting facility, which remains in post-Soviet Russia one of the most polluted places on earth. These disasters and the negligence that led to them have for many people come to be associated with socialism itself, and one task of modern ecosocialists is to make it clear that the policies that led to Chernobyl and the Norilsk mine have nothing to do with

socialism and are completely rejected by ecosocialists.

In Europe and the North America in the latter half of the 20th century, with the publication of books such as **Rachel Carson's** *Silent Spring*, the public began to be aware of the dangers of the environmental damage that capitalism had created. But not surprisingly the explanations offered for the crisis rarely mentioned capitalism itself.

An influential approach, still seen today, was galvanized by the writings of Paul and Anne Ehrlich: the idea that population is the source of the problem. "Solutions" starting from this approach have often taken racist turns, with proposals and policies that restrict births of poor people, especially in the Global South, or limit South-to-North immigration. This misguided perspective was countered by the writings of the American ecologist and sociologist **Barry Commoner** in the 1970s. Commoner elucidated the relationship between poverty and colonialism on the one hand and population growth on the other, arguing that the solution lay in redistribution of global wealth. (See FAQ #2.) In other writing, he showed that the industries with the most negative effects on the environment consumed the most energy. Commoner is often seen as the father of the modern environmental movement.

During the final decades of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, there were several important developments that bear on the ecosocialist movement today. As a response to the growing neo-liberalism being imposed on (or by) governments around the world, the **anti-globalization** movement emerged. This movement, which came together especially at the World Social Forums and regional social forums that began in 2001, linked neo-liberalism, imperialism, as enforced by the international financial institutions, the increasing impoverishment of the Global South, and environmental devastation in Latin America, Africa, and South and Southeast Asia. At the same time, and in alliance with the anti-globalization movement, we see the emergence of grassroots movements such as the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil and the organizations united in Via Campesina worldwide, dedicated to fighting the land grabs, unwanted mines, and deforestation that are devastating vast regions of the South. Finally, climate scientists came increasingly to recognize that global warming, caused by the increase in atmospheric greenhouse gases emitted by human beings, would lead the world to a catastrophic climate crisis within this century unless drastic steps were taken. Environmentalists began to turn their attention to climate change, in addition to environmental degradation.

What we can think of as modern ecosocialist theory came together in the first years of the 21st century in the writings of people such as US scholars Joel Kovel and John Bellamy Foster, the French-Brazilian sociologist Michael Löwy, and the Belgian agronomist Daniel Tanuro. Despite differences of emphasis, these writers agree that capitalism is the "enemy of nature" (in Kovel's words), that only socialism is capable of solving the climate crisis, that other proposed solutions such as population control, lifestyle activism, and "green capitalism" are doomed to fail. For these writers, ecosocialism is a new movement, bringing ecological consciousness to socialism and the insights of Marxism to

environmentalism.

A significant step forward was the second gathering of the Ecosocialist International Network in Belem, Brazil in 2009 following the World Social Forum in that city. The meeting brought together 110 activists and scholars, including many from Latin America. Many at the meeting and many others later signed the **Belem Ecosocialist Declaration**, a document that more than any other defines ecosocialism. Unfortunately the active Ecosocialist International Network that many of the signers hoped for has not yet materialized.

Status today

Besides System Change not Climate Change, there are several organizations, coalitions, or political parties, especially in North America and Europe, that are explicitly ecosocialist. These include Ecosocialist Horizons, the Réseau Ecosocialiste in Quebec, the Green Left and Socialist Resistance in the UK, the Red-Green Alliance in Denmark, and the Initiative for Catalonia Greens in Catalonia.

Beyond these groups is a large number of organizations around the world that can be called environmental justice or food justice organizations. These are typically grassroots groups organized around local campaigns, often involving environmental racism. Within North America there are many such groups, especially in cities such as New York City, Chicago, and Oakland and within indigenous communities in Canada and the US. Many other such groups exist in the Global South, as already mentioned. Environmental and food justice organizations, even if not openly socialist, are the natural allies of ecosocialists because they confront capitalism and imperialism directly and because they represent struggles of those most affected by the environmental crisis, usually people of color.

Another wing of the larger environmental movement that shares the anti-capitalism of ecosocialism is one that may be called green anarchism, social ecology, or deep ecology, depending on the particular organization or philosophy. These groups usually emphasize direct action, and unlike ecosocialists, they may downplay the role of theory and the importance of challenging, and ultimately, taking over the state.

The mainstream environmental movement of today remains committed to the capitalist system, proposing reforms that are supposed to provide incentives for the fossil fuel industry to transition to renewable energy sources and working within the two-party political system. But among these organizations are those, such as 350.org, Greenpeace, and Friends of the Earth, that agree with ecosocialists on some of the steps that must be taken now: fighting destructive and dangerous practices such as fracking, mountaintop removal mining, the shipping of crude oil by rail, and the patenting of food. In order to build a broad movement, ecosocialists must form coalitions with reformist organizations like these.

SCNCC

System Change not Climate Change: an Ecosocialist Coalition is a North American organization that is committed to the principles of ecosocialism, as explained elsewhere in this pamphlet. SCNCC grew out of a very successful conference on April 20, 2013 at Barnard College in New York City. Endorsed by 28 local and national organizations, the conference featured speakers from across the leftist spectrum: academics, journalists, labor leaders, and frontline activists. Among the speakers were those who would go on to form the SCNCC.

In SCNCC, we strive for a deeper theoretical understanding of the environmental crisis as well as involvement in activism and movement building. Many of SCNCC's members belong to other political organizations, in particular, the **International Socialist Organization, Solidarity**, and the **Green Party**. Others are independent. As a coalition, we recognize that there are differences between our members; we focus on the areas of agreement, embodied in the points of unity listed in the next section. We believe that our efforts to bring socialists from different theoretical backgrounds and organizations together to fight for environmental and social justice is important in its own right, as a step towards overcoming the sectarianism that has dogged the Left.

SCNCC is organized around chapters based in different cities or regions of the US and Canada. As of this writing, there are 13 of these. See below for help with starting and running a new chapter in an area that doesn't currently have one. We hold monthly continent-wide conference calls to coordinate our activities and discuss the future of the organization.

SCNCC activists have organized and participated in all of the key environmental conferences and actions since our founding, including the Earth Day to May Day 2014 events across the US; actions against the Keystone XL pipeline in Washington, DC and San Francisco; anti-fracking actions in California, Illinois, and New York; the Left Forum; the Labor Notes Conference; and the Power Shift Conference.

Points of Unity

Capitalism.

The current ecological crisis results from the capitalist system, which values profits for a global ruling elite over people and the planet. It must therefore be confronted through an international mass movement of working people around the world. Capitalism is the problem because it is structured around profit for a small elite, because it is inherently wasteful, and because it is obsessed with growth at any cost (see FAQ #1).

Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia.

We are for building a multi-racial, multi-ethnic left united against the ecological destruction spawned by capitalism. Movements for sustainability and against ecological

denigration must be led, to the fullest extent possible, by those who are most directly affected and who therefore have the highest stake in the outcome of the struggles we engage in. We recognize that the exploitation and destruction of the planet is intricately linked to the exploitation and oppression of human beings. We oppose all forms of oppression including racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia. We support efforts, in communities and workplaces, to overcome these barriers to collective empowerment.

The society we strive for.

We are for workers' power and sustainability; for a society that is free, just, and equitable; that fosters human creativity and productivity while healing the rifts generated by capitalism among people and between human society and the earth's ecology. In an ecosocialist society, the economy will be planned so that resources can be allocated in the best way possible for people and planet. Because we will be producing to meet people's needs rather than to enrich a small elite, it should be possible to reduce the work week, freeing people to develop their talents and enjoy more leisure time.

Reform and revolution.

We fight for reforms to mitigate the effects of climate change and other ecological calamities, but recognize that social transformation is our only hope to solve the worsening crisis. As we build movements that address immediate ecological concerns, it is with this revolutionary objective in mind. As revolutionaries, we think systemically, going beyond the narrow focus of reformists on particular demands and short-term fixes, challenging the state as well as the corporations. Although we must be willing to work in coalitions with reformist groups, we must not compromise on our demands. (See our Demands below.)

Alternative politics and green capitalism.

We support grassroots movements and political formations that operate independently of the capitalist-controlled two-party system and oppose corporate, market-driven solutions to the climate crisis. (See FAQ #1.)

Sectarianism.

We are a nonsectarian coalition, maintaining a flexible and open approach to organizing in order to build as strong an environmental movement as possible. While asserting that a change to the current social and economic system is the only way out of our planet's ecological crisis, we work with groups and individuals who have not reached the same conclusions but who nonetheless are fighting for the vital reforms necessary to mitigate the effects of capitalism's assault on our biosphere.

Demands

1. Ban fracking and tar sands extraction and implement an immediate transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. The technology is available, and more

research can only make solar, wind, and hydroelectric power cheaper; the problem is the political system standing in the way.

2. Realize public ownership and democratic control of production, starting with the energy and financial industries. Corporations can't make the changes we need to save the planet, so we need to nationalize/socialize large-scale industry. In the interim, we favor increasing taxation of the 1% and the corporations most responsible for the economic and environmental crises.
3. Create a new type of economy, planned democratically according to social need and ecological sustainability. The only way to gear production to the needs of the people is for the people to plan it and organize themselves.
4. Provide full employment, transitioning millions from military and fossil-fuel related jobs to union jobs creating a renewable energy infrastructure. In the fight to save the environment, working people must not be left behind. In any case we can never expect workers to support the changes needed to save the planet and their children unless they are provided with other jobs, at least as good with at least equivalent pay and benefits, as the ones they are losing.
5. Bring about environmental justice.
 - Remove waste sites, incinerators, polluting industries, generators, transportation hubs and highways from oppressed communities.
 - Provide access to clean drinking water, adequate sanitation facilities, green spaces and fresh, nutritionally dense foods at low cost.
 - Protect and empower communities most vulnerable to climate catastrophes.
6. Make agriculture and fishing ecologically sustainable, oriented towards the production of healthy foods.
7. Reduce waste and toxic products at the source.
8. Fully develop public transportation, including a national rail system and a bicycle-friendly infrastructure.
9. Restore full sovereignty to indigenous peoples, recognize their right to self-determination, respecting all treaty obligations, and grant full reparations for historic injustices.
10. Protect biodiversity, including species diversity and genetic diversity within species.
11. Defund the Pentagon.

FAQs

Can't we just solve the environmental crisis within capitalism by making sustainable energy profitable?

This is probably the most important question of all because how you answer it determines whether you remain a reformist, working within the capitalist system, or whether you are committed to revolution and the overthrow of capitalism. Ecosocialists answer the question by focusing on how capitalism is fundamentally incompatible with sustainability. First, under capitalism, individual businesses and the national economies that bring them together measure success in terms of growth. But growth is exactly what we do not need at this point in history. Second, while waste obviously conflicts with

sustainability, in the form of planned obsolescence, manufactured needs, and elaborate packaging, it is profitable. Third, fossil fuels are not just the business of the companies that extract and refine them and the transportation industry that burns. They turn up everywhere in our economy; just consider all of the uses of plastic. This means that a transition to a fossil-fuel-free economy would involve nothing short of an economic revolution, going far beyond the retooling of US industry that took place during World War II. In the process, millions of jobs would be lost. It is inconceivable that capitalists or the state that represents their interests would be willing to undertake such a radical process. Fourth, when measures have been taken to make fossil fuel production more costly or renewable energy more economical, capitalists have invariably insured that there are loopholes. In spite of some limited successes, for example, the expansion of wind power in Germany, two decades of attempts to legislate a reduction in greenhouse gases have not made a dent in the increase in their production and their concentration in the atmosphere.

What about population? Isn't it the cause of the crisis?

The idea that there are too many people is an old one, going back at least to the end of the 18th century. Until recently it was mostly associated with poverty and hunger, but since the growth of the environmental movement in the mid-20th century, it has come to be blamed for pollution and global warming as well. The appeal of over-population is simple: if there were only, say, one billion people rather than seven billion people in the world, then the average amount of food available to each person and the average amount of fossil fuel consumed by each person would be much less. The problem with the idea is three-fold. First, thinking in terms of averages makes no sense when it comes to the consumption of resources such as food and fuel. As is well-known, famine and poverty are concentrated in the Global South, whereas the emission of greenhouse gases is concentrated in the Global North. Within nearly all countries, there is the same skewed distribution, with a small, rich segment of the population having easy access to food and being responsible for most of the fossil fuel consumption. Indeed, rather than thinking of a world with too many people, it makes more sense to think of one with too many rich people. Second, even if it we did agree that there were too many people for a sustainable world, how would we go about bringing the population down? Most of the efforts to date have focused on bringing down the birth-rate, and because the birth-rate tends to be highest in the poorest parts of the world, the result has been policies that are at best paternalistic and at worst openly racist, with governments and NGOs of the Global North pressuring governments in the Global South to bring the birth rates down among their populations, in some cases by forced sterilization. In other words, the rich end up punishing the poor for their own excesses. Finally, arguments about over-population fail to consider why the birth-rate tends to be high among poorer populations. Numerous studies have shown that birth-rates decline once a population has access to social services and a secure income. Poor people have lots of children because they need them: to help support the family by bringing in extra income and to care for their parents when they can no longer care for themselves. What is behind the hunger that billions suffer from and the global warming that is altering the planet's climate is not over-population; it is a global economic system that has these crises as its inevitable outcomes. As Barry

Commoner put it, solving the social and environmental problems of the world by cutting the birth-rate is “equivalent to attempting to save a leaking ship by lightening the load and forcing passengers overboard”.

Aren't there technological solutions?

This is really two separate questions. One concerns the technical feasibility of replacing fossil fuels with renewable sources of energy. The work of Mark Z. Jacobson is informative. He shows that it is theoretically possible to provide worldwide energy for all purposes from wind, water, and sunlight. What he does not show is how our economic system could be transformed into one relying on these energy sources. In fact he argues that this is fundamentally a political question. Thus the technology does not really solve the problem; it only gives us clues about how we will provide the energy we need once we have figured out the hard political questions. A second technology-related question concerns the possibility of using geo-engineering to directly reduce or eliminate global warming, for example, by the mass sowing of aerosols in the atmosphere to produce an artificial cloud cover. The problem with these desperate measures is that their effects cannot be easily predicted; they could have disastrous unintended consequences for particular regions or even the larger climate system.

Why can't we just drop out of this destructive economy and form our own local sustainable communities?

Groups of people around the world are struggling to create new ways of growing their food, of running factories that have been abandoned by their owners, of educating their children, of providing support for one another within their communities. There are many examples, including urban community garden projects in North America, settlements created by the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil, and, most dramatically, the territory in the Mexican state of Chiapas that is controlled by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. These grassroots efforts are significant, first, because they represent the dissatisfaction of people with the dominant neoliberal, capitalist system, and second, because they “prefigure” in various ways the kind of society that we want to create. The limitation of all of these prefigurative experiments is that they still exist within a global capitalist system. To the extent that they fail to challenge that system, including the states that support it, they will be constrained in various ways by market forces. If and when these communities spread and begin to represent a serious threat to the power of the capitalists, the ruling class will do everything in its power to destroy them. The point is that alongside prefiguration, we must confront the system and ultimately replace it everywhere with ecosocialism. We can learn a great deal from the experiences of the prefigurative efforts, but by themselves they cannot create the sustainable and just world we need.

Don't consumers have the ultimate say? What if we all change our wasteful, unsustainable behaviors?

The idea that ordinary people run the economy through the decisions they make about what to buy and what not to buy is called “consumer sovereignty”. It permeates all main-stream discussion of what is wrong with our society; “we” are blamed for everything. So

the climate crisis is “our” fault: it is our selfish and wasteful patterns of consumption that result in the burning of massive amounts of fossil fuels. But consumer sovereignty is a myth. It rests on the absurd assumption that producers simply wait for us to say what we want and then go out and produce it. In reality the opposite is true. Capitalists create the demand for their products through marketing and planned obsolescence. To believe otherwise is to imagine that US corporations knowingly throw away the more than one trillion dollars a year that they spend on marketing. The sad fact is that advertising works. And planned obsolescence so dominates some fields, such as electronics, that consumers no longer have the option of getting a product repaired; they must replace it with a new one. So the only way to change the destructive economy is to take charge of it, to overthrow the capitalist system that is behind the crisis.

We can't wait for a revolution. Don't we have to solve the problems now?

It's true that there is an urgent need to take measures to slow the global warming that will otherwise lead to disastrous climate change in the decades to come. At the same time, it would be foolish to imagine that the revolution we are hoping for is around the corner. For these reasons, our work is twofold. First, together with elements of the larger environmental movement that are not corrupted by corporate influence, ecosocialists fight for short-term victories, like the banning of fracking in communities or a halt to the construction of a pipeline that would carry synthetic crude from the Canadian tar sands. Second, we work to build the broad-based movement that is required for an ecosocialist revolution because we recognize that only such a revolution can save the planet from ultimate catastrophe. These two forms of work are not mutually exclusive: as we take part in local struggles, we are also building the alliances that will form the core of the revolutionary movement that is our goal.

Chapter Building How-to

Getting started

How each chapter is built will vary depending upon the circumstances around where the chapter is located (campus or community), what other environmental justice issues/groups are around, and the number of people involved in helping to build the chapter. Chapter members do need to agree to the Points of Unity (listed above and at <http://www.systemchangenotclimatechange.org/about>), although not everyone who attends a chapter meeting needs to be a SCNCC member. Here are some basic guidelines to getting started.

Do your research

Find out what all the environmental justice issues are in your area. Be realistic about which ones the chapter can most effectively relate to and help build. This could mean getting involved in one or more struggles: supporting the fight of indigenous peoples to their lands, joining the fight against fracking, petcoke piles, water pollution, the building of yet another pipeline, etc. Which ones and how many you take on will need to be decided by the local chapter.

Education

An important aspect of any chapter is the self-education of its members. Understanding what it means to be an ecosocialist versus a mainstream environmentalist is important because it will influence how we intervene in whichever struggle we choose. The beginning of this pamphlet describes the basic tenets of ecosocialism. However, the SCNCC website contains many more resources and in-depth articles to reference (<http://www.systemchangenotclimatechange.org/resources>). Additional readings are listed below.

Campus versus Community

If there is an opportunity to have a campus-based chapter, then go for it. Many, if not most, campuses still have the image of 'bastions of radicalism', and there is generally more openness to radical politics. Campuses also have a more concentrated level of activism around many different issues, with events happening on a continuing basis, and there may be other environmental groups to relate to. If possible, get the status of student organization so the chapter can get access to student funding to help promote meetings, events and speakers.

If building on a campus isn't realistic, then establish a regular meeting place in the community that is convenient for most members to attend. It can be at a sympathetic community/activist center, public library, or coffee house, depending upon the number of people you expect to attend.

Once a group of people have decided to form a chapter, establishing regular meetings is important.

Conducting Meetings

General guidelines

Keep in mind that each chapter is its own, autonomous group that can decide on how to run the chapter as long as the members adhere to the basic principles established in the SCNCC bylaws. Below are some guidelines for chapters starting out.

Before the meeting...

SCNCC chapters need to decide when, where, and how often to meet. If members are spread across a wide area, consider rotating the location, making sure that all members are aware of when the location changes. Members can decide on weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly meetings, depending upon ongoing activities and events and members' schedules. Meetings should last between 1½ to 2 hours, depending upon local circumstances.

Decide the purpose of each meeting ahead of time. We encourage chapters to schedule at least one meeting per month for a study group, an educational meeting where a specific topic is discussed in depth. This could take up the entire meeting, or if the chapter meets only once a month, a sizeable portion of that meeting. Otherwise, meetings can be focused on organizing/planning around issues affecting the local chapter or nearby area.

Another possibility is public forums, which are organized more broadly to get more people involved in a specific campaign or action. These need to be publicized well, through posters or leaflets that include the date, time, place and topic. Public forums should be a place to share ideas and strategies, and get contact information for people who are interested in getting involved in the future.

Establish and distribute an agenda of the main points to be discussed prior to each meeting. It would be best if this was decided collectively. It would be helpful if someone either was elected or volunteered to chair each meeting. It would also be good to rotate this role, but it's up to the chapter to decide.

-The agenda is a guide to let members know ahead of time what is to be discussed at the meeting. If possible, it should also include background info (links to web pages, articles, etc.) related to each point.

-The agenda should have approximate time limits listed for each point.

-It is helpful to have someone take a few minutes at the beginning of each point to introduce the topic, in case not everyone had a chance to prepare ahead of time.

At the meeting...

1. Start the meeting on time (if possible). Have the chair introduce themselves and welcome everyone to the meeting. It's good to have everyone go around and also introduce themselves at this point. Announce the agenda and see if there are any changes, additions or deletions to the agenda.

2. Try to be brief and to the point. Keep comments to 3 minutes or less, unless it's the person presenting. You can speak more than once, but allow others to also have their input.

3. Encourage full participation and make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak and their voice gets heard. Members can take turns through the keeping of a running stack (raise your hand and the chair will acknowledge when it's your turn to speak). Don't interrupt or talk amongst yourselves while others are speaking. Please be respectful of other people's views, and be calm and polite when disagreeing. Full discussion and debate is welcomed. Consider using a progressive stack, where speaking priorities are given to negatively impacted communities, communities of color and women. Use gender-neutral terms when addressing members.

4. Have a sign-up sheet so the chapter can keep in touch with new people that come to the meetings.

5. At the end of each meeting, have a plan to follow up with new members, actions decided and the next meeting.

Readings

Ecology and Socialism: Solutions to Capitalist Ecological Crisis

By Chris Williams

Paperback and Ebook, Haymarket Books, June 2010

Too Many People?: Population, Immigration, and the Environmental Crisis

By Ian Angus and Simon Butler

Paperback and Ebook, Haymarket Books, October 2011

Marx and Nature: A Red and Green Perspective

By Paul Burkett, Foreword by John Bellamy Foster

Paperback, Haymarket Books, June 2014

Ecosocialism: A Radical Alternative to Capitalist Catastrophe

By Michael Löwy

Paperback, Haymarket Books, May 2015

The Enemy of Nature: the End of Capitalism or the End of the World? (2nd Ed.)

By Joel Kovel

Paperback and Ebook, Zed Books, Dec. 2007

What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know About Capitalism: A Citizen's Guide to Capitalism and the Environment

By Fred Magdoff and John Bellamy Foster

Paperback and Ebook, Monthly Review Press, 2011

Beyond Growth or Beyond Capitalism?

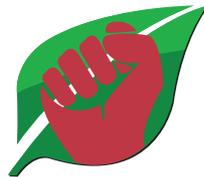
By Richard Smith

www.truth-out.org/news/item/21215-beyond-growth-or-beyond-capitalism

Green Capitalism: The God That Failed

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