



A Review of Joel Kovel's *The Enemy of Nature.* (London & New York: Zed Books, Revised Ed. 2007)

COMMENTARY

BY: Theresa Wolfwood LE NOUVEAU MONDE VERT, Vol.1, No.1, 2008

Kovel, a USA activist-scholar and one of the most original sociopolitical thinkers in that country, has written many thoughtful and challenging books on subjects ranging from Nicaragua to political witch hunting in the USA.



Joel Kovel at Small World Social Forum,
Victoria, Canada. TW photo.

The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?, not exactly a cheerful title, is an analysis and action plan to create an ecological socialist society.

Although Kovel admits the obstacles to creating such a society are enormous, he says that we really have little alternative. Capitalism has alienated and disconnected us from nature, and as Susan Hawthorne says in *Wild Politics*, "Disconnection is critical for a system based on profit." This disconnection is rapidly leading to major military and social conflict, as well as depletion and fouling of the earth's ecosystems. To defy and change

the world's dominant mindset and dominant power structure seems a hopeless task.

The author says "capital's power is so uncontested because the conditions for seriously changing it are far too radical for the great majority of people to contemplate, much less support." (p.50) His analysis of capitalism is eloquent and convincing, but unlike many he articulates a framework for change and offers us specifics for committing to activism for change.

His medical background provides the context for the change. Kovel says a physician doesn't brood about how serious an illness is, but does everything possible to help. In other words, we must do what we can. We have his excellent diagnosis of capital's strength and power to control humanity and nature; many others have also written about that dominant paradigm of the world. Now it is time to envision change, envision another possibility, and to envision the social organization needed to create

the change.

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Ecosocialism is what he names as the "necessary and sufficient transformation of capitalist society for the overcoming of the ecological crisis." Kovel makes clear that much current thinking and action that responds to the ecological crisis does not consider political or social systems as part of the problem. The socialism of the last century disregarded the natural world and based its success on a 'growth' model similar to that of capitalism. But this new way of proceeding connects human society to nature. That is what is so vital and important in this book.

He ends the book with very hopeful and useful ways to connect small actions as an opening to greater awareness. He relates the great inequities in wealth that underlie today's racism, the immigration and economic refugees who pour out of poverty and conflict, to the power of capital -- stopping capital will allow poor areas to control their own subsistence and their relationship to nature, instead of being victims of capital's institutions like the World Bank. Cooperative systems, the seeds of which already exist in many places, give people, particularly

women, control over their own lives. Involvement in electoral politics, especially at the local level, by those wanting ecosocialism helps realize the possibility of change for citizens. We have to work to show in concrete examples and public dialogue that the possibility for change not only exists, but is already being enacted. Cooperative, eco-sustainable ecosocialism is being born in many gardens and communities worldwide from the steady disintegration of the WTO to fair trade to the movement for cooperative living to the acceptance and spread of renewable energy sources.

Then we can see the answer to the question he poses in his final paragraph: "Can there be such a society? Only if we get moving right away. Everything depends on making the building of ecosocialism proceed in advance of ecological breakdown...There is no time to lose, and a world to win."

I recommend reading this book in conjunction with *Wild Politics* by Susan Hawthorne and *Ecofeminism* by Mies and Shiva. Then...make a commitment to lifelong activism, talk to others, and start changing the world !

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