Dimensions of Democracy

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Brief introduction to this compilation

These 10 essays extracted from *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary,* show various dimensions of democracy as practiced or conceived of in different parts of the world. In all of them, the original meaning of democracy (demos=people; cracy=rule), i.e. rule by the people, are brought to life.

For too long now liberal 'democracies', in which power is concentrated in representatives elected by the people rather than in the public at large, have been the order of the day. While these are most certainly preferable to dictatorships and fascist regimes, they usually stop far short of being truly democratic in the original sense of the word. In some of them, for instance in those countries swinging to the political right, what should be a clear, hard dividing line between democracy and dictatorship (or some would say, fascism), is getting to be quite fuzzy. Even where left-wing parties have been in power, as in many parts of South America, in Greece, etc, severe violations of the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, and of the environment, have continued in the pursuit of extractivist, growth-led economies and the failure to significantly decentralise power.

These essays present radical alternatives to both dictatorships and to liberal, centralized democracies. They include grassroots initiatives from very local to larger scale, such as with examples of indigenous self-rule in India and Latin America, the Zapatista in Chiapas in Mexico, and the Kurdish autonomous region in central Asia; as also (and connected to the practical initiatives) conceptual and visionary approaches such as radical ecological democracy, swaraj, ecosocialism, eco-anarchism, and others. Essays on autonomy and revolution stress that these notions cannot be restricted to the take-over of the state by progressive parties, but rather a rethinking of the state itself, and of western, colonial, or modernist approaches that underlie nation-states and liberal democracies. Going beyond the nation-state, re-imagining political boundaries from ecoregional or biocultural perspectives becomes a key long-term goal. The essay on open localization makes the essential link between radical democracy and economic democratization. And through the essays, the foundation of ecological wisdom, resilience, and sustainability are stressed.

We present this set of essays from Pluriverse as a contribution to the dialogue on what directions democracy should take in our countries or regions.

Zapatista Autonomy

Xochitl Leyva-Solano

Keywords: Zapatismo, autonomous practices, good government, anti-capitalist struggles

Zapatista Autonomy is a central element in the practices of resistance and rebellion of the Zapatista movement. It comprises modes, processes, and networks of struggle, government, and rebel life that together constitute a radical alternative to the established system and its institutions. Zapatista autonomy emerges from the bottom and the left in times of war. It involves multiple angles.

As resistance. The long resistance of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN) has been mentioned in the First Declaration of the Lacandon Forest on January 1st, 1994: 'We are the product of 500 years of struggle'. Then, the EZLN declared war on the government and called on the Mexican people to join its struggle for labour, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace. In 1994, the ELZN also announced the creation of thirty-eight rebel municipalities, and thus broke the military siege and politically confronted the counter-insurgency strategy implemented by the government.

As good government, dignified, and rebel. The EZLN found support for its initial actions in Article 39 of the Mexican constitution, which establishes that 'the people have, always, the inalienable right to alter or to modify its form of government'. The appeal to this article became stronger after the government's unwillingness to fulfil the San Andrés Agreements signed in 1996 with the EZLN. Failing these agreements, the government did not generate a new constitutional framework that would have made the exercise of autonomy and self-determination by indigenous peoples possible in all domains and at all levels.

Confronted with the crescendo of an extended war of attrition, the Zapatista movement mobilized practices and networks of autonomous governments knitted out of people's townships, resulting in The Zapatista Rebel and Autonomous Municipalities (Municipios Autónomos Rebeldes Zapatistas, MAREZ) and Zapatista regions and zones. All of these are organized under the principle of 'governing by obeying', including the following basic premises:

- To serve and not to be served
- To represent and not to supplant
- To build, not to destroy
- To obey, not to command
- To propose and not to impose
- To convince, not to defeat
- To go down, not up.

These foundations in action bring ethics back into the heart of politics and expose the practices of 'bad government' of the Mexican political system including corruption, violence, and impunity.

When 'people command and the government obeys' this involves permanent 'duties' and 'obligations' from both the people and the government. The election of authorities takes place, in general, through assemblies. The authorities of the different levels are the following: the autonomous agents and commissars; the members of municipal and regional autonomous councils; the coordinators of the various work areas; and the members of the different commissions and of the Good Government Councils (Juntas de Buen Gobierno, JBG), which operate at the level of each zone and are located in the Caracoles Zapatistas.

The Zapatista autonomous government is organized according to 'work areas' that change over time and from municipality to municipality, but usually include the following: health, education, agroecology, women, agrarian issues, justice, communication, commerce, transportation, administration, and civil registry. In these areas and at other levels of government, the various positions are rotational, collective and unpaid. Each person who participates is connected to others on the basis of his or her own potential and capacity to be, to do, to learn and to unlearn. By doing so, they challenge the dominant forms of social organization

and power on the basis of individual ranking and specialized wage labour.

As a radical, comprehensive and life-creating alternative. The Zapatista grassroots support comprises indigenous campesinos (as) who cultivate the land for their livelihood and reproduction, and thus generate the material conditions for their autonomous struggles. Women occupy a central place, just as the land/territory and the Mother Earth, as creators and givers of life. The Revolutionary Women's Law incorporated women into the revolutionary struggle by insisting on, and looking after, their political and social rights and their physical and moral integrity. The content of this law would have been meaningless were it not for the women at grassroots support level who – in dialogue with armed EZLN women – came to embody these struggles in every sense: in relation to the army of occupation, by daily cultivating the land with their own hands, by recuperating lost territory, by re-socializing their own sons and daughters, in the organization of cooperatives, as teachers of autonomous education, as promoters of autonomous healing and as radio and videomakers. There is no doubt that the Zapatista struggle grew its roots through the women and men at the grassroots level. Through their support, Zapatista politics gained a strength that many other revolutionary experiences could not achieve, because they did not manage to connect their struggles with the spheres of everyday life and take on board the dimensions of women, the family, the community, ordinary life, collectives and transnationality.

As a central reference to the ongoing globalization from below. Twenty years after the first Zapatista Intergalactic Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, Alejandra, a young guardian of the Little Zapatista School (Escuelita Zapatista), summarizes the Zapatista glocal planetary consciousness:

> [A]s we know, the capitalist system does what it wants, they decide how to govern, how we should live, and that is what we do not want …. We are not only struggling for our own sake … we want freedom for all. … As Zapatistas we are not using weapons. … we are using our words, our politics. … we want to defeat the system, that is our main goal.1

Note

1 Available at Rebeldía Zapatista 1, 2014, p. 53.

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Social Ecology

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Keywords: direct democracy, ecology, confederation, hierarchy, community, assembly, social movements

Social ecology offers a revolutionary and reconstructive political outlook, challenging conventional views of the relationships between human communities and the natural world, and offering an alternative vision of free, confederated and directly democratic cities, towns and neighbourhoods seeking to re-harmonize those relationships. Social ecology was initially developed by the social theorist Murray Bookchin, working in the United States during the 1960s to early 2000s, and has been further elaborated by his colleagues and many others throughout the world. Social ecology has been influential in various social movements, including the 1970s campaigns against nuclear power, elements of the worldwide alter-globalization and climate justice movements, and the present struggle for democratic autonomy by Kurdish communities in Turkey and Syria.

Social ecology begins with an understanding that environmental problems are fundamentally social and political in nature, and are rooted in the historical legacies of domination and social hierarchy. It is rooted in both anarchist and libertarian socialist currents, questioning capitalism and the nation state and viewing institutions of local democracy as the best antidote to centralized state power. Murray Bookchin was among the first thinkers in the West to identify the growth imperative of capitalism as a fundamental threat to the integrity of living ecosystems and argued that social and ecological concerns are fundamentally inseparable. Through detailed inquiries into history and anthropology, Bookchin challenged the common Western notion that humans inherently seek to dominate the natural world, concluding instead that the domination of nature is a myth rooted in relationships of domination among people that emerged from the breakdown of ancient tribal societies in Europe and the Middle East. Social ecologists are also influenced by elements of Indigenous North American thought and various schools of critical social theory, including the historically rooted approach to ecological feminism pioneered by social ecologists Ynestra King and Chaia Heller.

Following these influences, social ecology highlights various egalitarian social principles that many indigenous cultures – both past and present – have held in common, and elevates these as guideposts for a renewed social order. Such principles have been elevated by critical anthropologists and indigenous thinkers alike, and include concepts of interdependence, reciprocity, unity-in-diversity, and an ethics of complementarity, that is, the balancing of roles among various social sectors, especially by actively compensating for differences among individuals. The inherent conflict between these guiding principles and those of increasingly stratified hierarchical societies has shaped the contending legacies of domination and freedom through much of human history.

Social ecology's philosophical inquiry examines the emergence of human consciousness from within the processes of natural evolution. The perspective of dialectical naturalism examines the dynamic forces of evolutionary history and views cultural evolution as a dialectical development influenced by both natural and social factors. Social ecologists question prevailing views of nature as a 'realm of necessity,' suggesting that, as natural evolution has advanced qualities of diversity and complexity, and also seeded the origins of human creativity and freedom, it is imperative for our societies to fully express and elaborate those underlying evolutionary tendencies.

These historical and philosophical explorations provide an underpinning for social ecology's political strategy, which is described as libertarian or confederal municipalism or, more simply, as 'communalism', stemming from the roots of key ideas in the legacy of the Paris Commune of 1871. Social ecology reclaims the ancient Greek roots of the word 'politics' as the democratic self-management of the polis, or municipality. Bookchin argued for liberated cities, towns and neighbourhoods,

governed by open popular assemblies, freely confederate to challenge parochialism, encourage independence and build a genuine counter-power. He celebrated the lasting Town Meeting traditions in Vermont and throughout the New England region of the United States, describing how the region's Town Meetings assumed an increasingly radical and egalitarian character in the years prior to the American Revolution.

Social ecologists believe that whereas institutions of capitalism and the state heighten social stratification and exploit divisions among people, alternative structures rooted in direct democracy can further the emergence of a general social interest towards social and ecological renewal. People inspired by this view have brought structures of direct democracy and popular assemblies into numerous social movements in the US, Europe and beyond, from popular direct action campaigns against nuclear power in the late 1970s to the more recent global justice/alter-globalization and Occupy Wall Street movements. The prefigurative dimension of these movements – anticipating and enacting the various elements of a liberated society – has encouraged participants to challenge the status quo and also advance transformative future visions.

Social ecologists have also sought to renew the utopian tradition in western thought. The Institute for Social Ecology co-founder Dan Chodorkoff argues for a 'practical utopianism', combining social ecology's theoretical insights and political praxis with advanced principles from green building and urban redesign, together with eco-technologies to produce food, energy and other necessities. Ecological design concepts such as permaculture that encourage a more profound understanding of the patterns of the natural world resonate with social ecology's view that human beings can participate in nature in creative, mutually beneficial ways, while seeking to overturn historical legacies of abuse and destruction.

The outlook of social ecology has profoundly influenced international social movement actors, from the early years of Green politics to recent campaigns for local empowerment through popular assemblies in several European and Canadian cities. Social ecologists have influenced efforts towards greener urban design and neighbourhood power in many parts of the world. Perhaps the most striking

current influence is on militants in the Kurdish regions of the Middle East, where ethnically diverse populations, long marginalized by colonial and state powers, have created institutions of confederal direct democracy in one of the world's most war-torn regions. Despite persistent sectarian warfare and religious violence, Kurdish towns near the Turkish-Syrian border are working towards gender equity and ecological reconstruction, significantly informed by social ecology and other critical social outlooks rooted in a wide variety of cultural perspectives.

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Revolution

Eduardo Gudynas

Keywords: revolution, development, ontology, capitalism, socialism

A revolutionary shift away from development is an idea whose time has come. It is indispensable to us as we face the current social and environmental crisis; it is urgent given the accelerated pace of destruction of the environment and people's livelihoods; and it is immediate in the sense that it is possible to practise it in the here and now. A new meaning of revolution must be capable of questioning radically the conceptual basis of development and moving beyond modernity.

The concept of revolution invokes a number of substantial political and cultural changes. Considering the French Revolution as the best known example, revolution is seen as indispensable to break away from an unfair order and to transform the institutions and forms of political representation, including the social and economic fabric of society. With different degrees and emphases, this concept was used to describe radical change in Mexico, Russia, China, and Cuba, among others.

The idea of revolution has also been instrumental in promoting conventional development practices. Such is the case of the industrial, technological, internet, and consumer revolutions. Such revolutions reinforced the core ideas of development even while achieving substantial changes in the structure of society.

More recent events confound the concept. In some regions there are still significant social movements defending traditional conceptions of revolution, for instance, as a means to break away from capitalism and move towards socialism. In Central and Eastern Europe, the exit from 'Real Socialism' was presented as a revolution, albeit in the opposite direction, towards market economies. Conversely, socialist revolutionary experiences, for example, in China or Vietnam, maintain such a discourse but their development strategies are functional to capitalism. And whereas Islamic revolutions reinforced the criticism of development by attacking its eurocentrism, they endorse economic growth.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Latin America witnessed a left turn with several governments describing themselves as revolutionary – Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. But these countries they adopted neo-developmentalist styles that fuelled economic growth through the intensive appropriation of natural resources.

Therefore, we are confronted with a variety of events that have been described as revolutionary, particularly referring to the political dimension, but also affecting cultural, economic, and religious aspects of society. In all of these cases, however, the basic components of development survived, such as economic growth, consumerism, the appropriation of nature, technological modernization, and democratic weakness. There is a paradoxical situation whereby classic revolutions such as in Russia or China, and recent revolutions such as twenty-first-century socialism in South America, whether secular or religious, all gravitated around the idea of development. Some of these revolutions showed positive results regarding political representation and social equality, but remained trapped in instrumental ends geared towards capturing the state (particularly the Leninist, Trotskyist, and Maoist versions). They all failed to promote alternatives to development.

This could be explained by the fact that all modern political traditions share the same background. Indeed, the idea of revolution matured along with other categories of modernity, such the state, rights, democracy, progress, and development.

The persistence of developmentalism has led many activists and academics to become disillusioned with revolutionary experiences, and to argue that the concept is no longer applicable to present-day realities, favouring instead a focus on local practices. Yet, this position creates an important hurdle, given that proposals for radical alternatives to development imply a set of revolutionary transformations.

Given that all of the current varieties of development are unsustainable, any radical

alternative must question their shared conceptual bases in modernity. The radicalism involved in such effort requires a revolutionary practice and spirit. A revolution in the modern sense might foster, for example, a change in state regime, or replacing one variety of development with other. It thus becomes necessary to create a new interpretation of the idea of revolution capable of exceeding modernity and of imagining an alternative to its ontology.

This concept of revolution entails a rebellion vis à vis modernity, highlighting its limits while exploring alternatives to it; it summons an innovative imagination in order to outline and rehearse other rationalities and sensibilities, as well as an expanded politics involving multiple social sectors, practices, and experiences.

This understanding of revolution possesses substantive similarities with the Andean idea of pachakuti. Pachakuti refers to the dissolution of the prevailing cosmological order, while installing a state of disorder that allows for another cosmovision to emerge. Therefore, a revolution in terms of pachakuti does not aim at destroying modernity, but at provoking the disorganization and dissolution of its structures while generating other understandings and effects. It involves a significant re-creation.

The practices of this kind of revolution have many antecedents. The experience of disorder and re-creation is nourished both by rational ideas such as the overwhelming evidence of the social and environmental crisis, as well as by affective, artistic, spiritual, and magical experiences. This revolution does not endorse monocultures but a diversity of expressions, is collective, and requires personal transformation, particularly in restoring the value of life – Mahatma Gandhi or Ivan Illich, zapatismo or buen vivir, offer models of this. Revolution in this sense allows for a rupture with utilitarian values, re-claiming multiple ways of assigning value – aesthetic, religious, or ecological, while accepting the 'intrinsic value' of the non-human world.

As development is a performative construct, constantly produced and reproduced by all of us through daily practices, this revolution interrupts that performativity. For instance, it suspends the commodification of society and nature. These and other features of modernity thus become disorganized, leading to an unavoidable and sometimes uncomfortable consequence: a revolution that breaks away both from capitalism and socialism.

This revolution's prefigured political practices intertwine synergistically, while disseminating throughout society, becoming concretized in actions, affects, and other styles of doing politics, particularly through the interstitial rebelliousness that stems from dignity and autonomy. This is a revolution with the co-participation of non-human actors, including animals and other living beings. It reinterprets the meaning of society. Consider the possibility of an 'animal proletariat'.

This kind of revolution disorganizes the duality between society and nature, while allowing for the recreation of relational worldviews that re-embed society in nature and vice versa; it extends notions of 'the subject' to non-humans.

In sum, while modernity presents itself as a self-contained universal domain, hiding its limits and neutralizing the search for alternatives to it, this revolution disorganizes, exposes and fractures modernity's limits by opening them up to other ontologies. The revolutionary act consists in creating the conditions of possibility for new ontological openings.

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Radical Ecological Democracy

Ashish Kothari

Keywords: decentralization, localization, community, eco-swaraj

In the midst of the socio-economic inequities and ecological collapse we see around the world, there are a growing number of initiatives practising or conceptualizing ways of achieving human well-being that are just and sustainable. Some of these are assertions of continuing lifestyles and livelihoods that have lived in relative harmony with the Earth for millennia or centuries. Others are new initiatives emerging from resistance movements or encounters with the destructive nature of currently dominant economic and political systems. While incredibly diverse in their settings and processes, many of these initiatives and approaches exhibit some common features that enable the emergence of broad frameworks or paradigms.

One such framework that has emerged from grassroots experience in India, but is beginning to see more global resonance, is Radical Ecological Democracy (RED), locally also called eco-swaraj.[1] This is an approach that respects the limits of the Earth and the rights of other species, while pursuing the core values of social justice and equity. With its strong democratic and egalitarian impulse, it seeks to empower every person to be a part of decision-making, and its holistic vision of human well-being encompasses physical, material, socio-cultural, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions.[2] Rather than the state and the corporation, swaraj puts collectives and communities at the centre of governance and economy. It is grounded in real-life initiatives across the Indian subcontinent, encompassing sustainable farming, fisheries and pastoralism, food and water sovereignty, decentralized energy production, direct local governance, community health, alternative learning and education, community-controlled media and communications, localization of economies, gender and caste justice, rights of differently abled and multiple sexualities, and many others.[3]

Radical Ecological Democracy encompasses the following five interlocking spheres:

Ecological wisdom and resilience. This including the conservation and regenerative capacity of the rest of nature – ecosystems, species, functions, and cycles, and its complexity, building on the belief that humans are part of nature, and that the rest of nature has an intrinsic right to thrive.

Social well-being and justice. This including lives that are fulfilling and satisfactory physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually; where there is equity in socio-economic and political entitlements, benefits, rights, and responsibilities across gender, class, caste, age, ethnicities, 'able'ities, sexualities, and other current divisions; where there is a balance between collective interests and individual freedoms; and where peace and harmony are ensured.

Direct or radical political democracy. This is where decision-making power originates in the smallest unit of human settlement, rural or urban, in which every human has the right, capacity, and opportunity to take part; building outwards from these basic units to larger levels of governance that are downwardly accountable; where political decision-making takes place respecting ecological and cultural linkages and boundaries. This implies challenging current political boundaries including those of nation-states; and where the role of the state eventually becomes minimal, for functions such as connecting across larger landscapes, and whatever welfare measures may still be necessary.

Economic democracy. In this democracy local communities including producers and consumers, often combined in one as prosumers, have control over the means of production, distribution, exchange, and markets; where localization is a key principle providing for all basic needs through the local regional economy; larger trade and exchange, as necessary, is built on and safeguards this local self-reliance; nature, natural resources, and other important elements feeding into the economy are governed as the commons; private property is minimized or disappears; where non-monetized relations of caring and sharing regain their central importance; and indicators are predominantly qualitative, focusing on basic needs and well-being.

Cultural and knowledge plurality. In this democracy diversity is a key principle; knowledge including its generation, use and transmission, is in the public domain or commons; innovation is democratically generated and there are no ivory towers of 'expertise';

learning takes place as part of life and living rather than only in specialized institutions; and, individual or collective pathways of ethical and spiritual well-being and of happiness are available to all.

Seen as a set of petals in a flower, the core or bud where they all intersect forms the following set of values or principles, which too emerges as a crucial part of the alternative initiatives. These can also be seen as the ethical or spiritual foundation of societies, the worldview(s) that its members hold.

- Ecological integrity and the rights of nature
- Equity, justice, and inclusion
- Right to and responsibility of meaningful participation
- Diversity and pluralism
- Collective commons and solidarity with individual freedoms
- Resilience and adaptability
- Subsidiarity, self-reliance, and eco-regionalism
- Simplicity and sufficiency (or the notion of 'enoughness')
- Dignity and creativity of labour and work
- Non-violence, harmony, and peace.

The broad components and values of eco-swaraj have been under discussion across India through an ongoing process called Vikalp Sangam or Alternatives Confluence.4 This process brings together a diverse set of actors from communities, civil society, and various professions who are involved in alternative initiatives across all sectors. A series of regional and thematic confluences that began in 2015, enable participants to share experiences, learn from each other, build alliances and collaboration, and jointly envision a better future. Documentation of alternative initiatives in the form of stories, videos, case studies, and other forms provides a further means of disseminating learning, and spreading inspiration for further transformation, through a dedicated website5, a mobile exhibition and other means.

Beyond India, this approach is also linking up to radical alternatives in other parts of the world. In 2012, several civil society organizations and movements signed onto a Peoples' Sustainability Treaty on Radical Ecological Democracy;6 subsequently a discussion list has kept alive the dialogue, and opportunities have been found for mutual learning with approaches such as degrowth, ecofeminism, cooperative societies, and social/solidarity economy

in Europe, buen vivir, and its other equivalents in Latin America, and others.

Eco-swaraj or RED is an evolving worldview, not a blueprint set in stone. In its very process of democratic grassroots evolution, it forms an alternative to top-down ideologies and formulations even as it takes on board the relevant elements of such ideologies. This is the basis of its transformative potential.

Notes

1 For the meaning of swaraj, please see essay Prakriti Swaraj in this volume.

2 See Kothari 2014; Shrivastava and Kothari 2012.

3 See www.alternativesindia.org for several hundred examples.

4 Information on the process and its outputs is at http://kalpavriksh.org/index.php/alternatives/alternatives-knowledge-center/353-vikalpsangam-coverage.

5 Vikalp Sangam, www.vikalpsangam.org.

6 Radical Ecological Democracy, http://radicalecologicaldemocracy.wordpress.com.

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Prakritik Swaraj

Aseem Shrivastava

Keywords: swaraj, swadeshi, democracy, liberty

Do not consider this Swaraj to be like a dream.

– M.K. Gandhi

Speaking of swaraj in the twenty-first century, one feels assured that one is aiming to recover and revitalize a vision which belongs to a strong indigenous stream of Indian philosophical thought, culture, and political practice.

Let us contemplate the word swaraj. Its etymological origins in Sanskrit are simple and obvious: swa (self) + rajya (rule) = swaraj (self-rule). The adjective prakritik can be understood as 'natural', or as expressing human nature so as to remain in rhythm with the natural world around us.

A notion such as swaraj did not swim in a historical and cultural vacuum. There is evidence of face-to-face political assemblies – including at the village level – in ancient India. Sources – both oral and documented – reveal traditions of governance through discussion and consultation and sometimes of decisions taken by dialogue and consensus.

The important thing to remember is that notions such as swaraj – in Sanskrit or Pali, from which some of the vocabulary of modern Indian democracy is drawn. These words predate the colonial era by centuries, often by millennia, and are, by no means, translations of concepts imported into India from the Western world. It means that these were notions in use in one period of Indian history or another and became substantially dormant, especially with the coming of colonial rule in the modern period. So Gandhi did not dream up the idea of 'village republics', or gram swaraj, out of thin air. In 1909, he published his most important work Hind Swaraj. Gandhi's use of the term built upon earlier usage during the freedom struggle. Tilak1 deployed the term during the early phase of the Indian freedom struggle in the 1890s. Swaraj seemed to become virtually equivalent to the modern Western notion of liberty and independence. In 1906, when Dadabhai Naoroji, as President of the Indian National Congress, declared swaraj to be the goal of the national movement, he had this very limited meaning in mind.

Gandhi's vision went well beyond this. Aware of its ancient lineage, Gandhi, in 1931, wrote in Young India of swaraj as 'a sacred word, a Vedic word' (Gandhi 1931). He hoped that India and the world could recover the old idea of swaraj, and realize it one day.

For Gandhi, authentic self-rule is possible if and only if the self is capable of being its own sovereign. Gandhi was religious. He believed that without transcendence, it was impossible for the self to become sovereign over its life. For him the notion was as spiritual as it was political. But, importantly, the causation works only one way. Ultimately, for Gandhi, swaraj was a divine imperative, with fruitful consequences for human affairs. Spiritual mastery and self-possession can also yield the marvels of political sovereignty as a by-product, but not the other way around.

Politically, self-rule, as Gandhi understood it, was anything but modern parliamentary or representative democracy. In Hind Swaraj, he mocked modern parliaments as 'emblems of slavery'. It is unfortunate that swaraj is frequently translated as 'democracy'. In fact, in its representative form democracy has been adopted in most countries, but their cognitive premises could not be more different.

First, swaraj is inconsistent with mass politics, an everyday fact of democracies today. Where finite, face-to-face neighbourhood assemblies are not viable, swaraj cannot function. Crowds can serve as the grease for political parties in democracies, not for swaraj. Numbers and their comparisons are as crucial to modern democracies as they are irrelevant to swaraj.

Second, modern democracy is focused on the individual's direct, unmediated relationship to a state that guarantees her rights of citizenship by law. The setting 'assumed' for this relationship is one of an atomized society in which human

alienation is normalized. What swaraj needs for its nourishment, by contrast, is a community in which the individual can come into her own through filial, cultural, social, political, economic, and ecological relationships with those including sentient beings other than the humans around her.

Third, in a modern democracy, an individual is, almost indifferently, and in the name of 'freedom', left to his tastes and desires – all of modern economics rests on this assumption, the community playing no part in making him/her scrutinize them. There is no obligation for the individual to consider his/her desires in a critical light, unless and until their realization interferes with the fulfilment of another's desires. In fact, such is virtually the very definition of 'freedom' in modern liberal democracies, often understood in terms of the notion of 'negative liberty'.

Gandhi's idea of swaraj has to do with an individual's or a community's autonomy to 'create' their choices, rather than passively accepting the menu from which they must 'choose'. Applied to our market-driven, media-prompted world, it would first require us to take ecological and cultural responsibility for our desires and explore their origins in passions stoked by advertising. Such a manipulation of desire, in which virtually everything is at stake, is antithetical to freedom for any advocate of swaraj. Desire, which is at the philosophical heart of the notion of freedom in modern consumer democracies, has to be critically scrutinized under swaraj, especially given the context of an ecologically imperiled world. One implication of this is that Gandhi's idea of swaraj is inevitably bound up with swadeshi, which brings in the necessity of economic localization.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the idea of swaraj continues to inspire social, political and ecological movements in India. The resistance against displacement by development, undertaken by several movements that are part of the National Alliance of Peoples' Movements, the recently formed Swaraj India party which aims to empower people at the grassroots, the movements for food sovereignty and adivasi or indigenous self-rule, and others, are initiatives attempting to creatively adapt the notion of swaraj in today's context.2

Notes

1   Bal Gangadhar Tilak, prominent freedom fighter and social reformer of late 19th century.
2   For Swaraj India, see https://www.swarajabhiyan. org/; for National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), see https://napmindia.wordpress. com/; see also Food Sovereignty Alliance https:// foodsovereigntyalliance.wordpress.com/

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Direct Democracy

Christos Zografos

Keywords: direct democracy, self-governance, autonomy, socio-ecological transformation

Direct democracy is a form of popular self-rule where citizens participate directly, continuously, and without mediation in the tasks of government. It is a radical form of democracy that favours decentralization and the widest possible dispersal of power, eliminating the distinction between rulers and those governed. It is premised upon the principle of political equality, understood as the requirement that all voices in society are equally audible. Its key institution is the deliberative assembly. These assemblies involve meetings where citizens make decisions by listening to, and discussing, different views on a matter, reflecting on each view, and trying to arrive at a common decision without coercion. Direct democracy is distinguished from representative democracy, which involves electing representatives who decide on public policies. Nevertheless, elements of direct democracy, such as the referendum, are also present in existing representative democracies.

The practice of direct democracy is very old, indeed ancient. Ancient, 5 th century BCE Athens is the oft-quoted example of direct democracy where adult, male citizens participated directly in public decision-making. The exclusive character of Athenian democracy that barred slaves, women and foreigners from participation in decision-making suggests that it was a very limited form of democracy, although relevant in terms of its direct democracy institutions and forms of participation. If we think of democracy as 'government by discussion', one can also trace its roots in a long, non-Western tradition outside and roughly contemporary to Athens, such as the northern Indian experiences of the city of Vesali and the Sabarcae/Sambastai people recorded by both ancient Indian and Greek sources. In terms of intellectual origins, a key modern influence is Jeanne-Jacques Rousseau and his ideas on representation and government. For Rousseau, handing over one's right of self-rule to another person was a form of slavery; he thus rejected binding legislation on issues that citizens had not previously deliberated and agreed upon. A key related concept is autonomy. According to Castoriadis, autonomy involves the capacity of society to collectively and continuously question and change its norms and institutions, which is based on the belief that society itself is the only legitimate source for doing so. Castoriadis criticized dogmas that pose external rules which limit autonomy or that justify and determine collective decisions by ascribing them to some authority outside society (e.g. God, historical necessity, etc.), a condition he termed as heteronomy. In sum, direct democracy allows citizens to control decisions over their own destinies, educates them in participatory decision-making instead of relying on self-serving politicians, and produces highly legitimate decisions (Heywood 2002).

With regard to post-development (Rahnema and Bawtree 1997), the transformative potential of direct democracy can be considered in two ways: on the one hand, it helps challenge the hegemony of single ways of thinking and the colonization of minds by a heteronomous imaginary; on the other hand, it helps to build alternatives to development in the practice. This potential can be evidenced in the way in which contemporary social movements but also non-state polities around the world bring direct democracy into play.

In Spain, assembly-based decision-making processes popularized during the indignados movement have empowered 'right-to-housing' social movements to disrupt the urban capital accumulation dynamics of Spanish capitalism (García 2017), as well as municipal governments to pursue more equitable and environmentally sustainable models of the city through binding citizen consultations. In India, radical ecological democracy initiatives, such as the Arvari River Parliament of 72 riverine villages in Rajasthan, signal attempts to achieve transitions towards a bioregional vision of ecological units governed democratically by local communities, at the core of which lies a pledge to cultural diversity, human well-being, and ecological resilience. The governance model of the Kurdish autonomous

canton of Rojava, which emphasizes gender equality in political office and participation, incorporates direct democracy into its decision-making; its aim is to transform society on the basis of the principles of Murray Bookchin's social ecology, thus becoming an exemplary organization for future democratic confederalist systems of regional governance. And throughout the American continent, many indigenous, campesino, and Afro-descendant communities practise self-governance and assembly-based decision-making in their efforts to materialize into life projects the principles of autonomy, communality and respect for diverse forms of life that stem from their cosmovisions.

Conversely, a 'darker' side of direct democracy lies precisely in its capacity to prevent transformation. The Appenzell-Innerrhoden Swiss canton that is celebrated as an example of direct democracy conceded voting rights to women only in 1991 when forced by the Swiss Federal Supreme Court. Moreover, the canton has registered the highest Swiss canton vote in favour of banning minarets. Another criticism against direct democracy is that supporters romanticize it, overlooking that states may be better vehicles for achieving radical transformations due to their capacity to coordinate and mobilize resources across larger areas, something crucial in a globalized world. Critics also question the willingness of citizens to be constantly engaged in the governance of everyday life, and criticize direct democracy as a romantic nostalgia of a 'liberal left' by pointing to historical examples like the 1871 Paris Commune to argue for its inability to sustain itself and as proof of its limitations.

Other critics draw attention to limitations related to central traits of the deliberative process that characterizes direct democracy, pointing out that those traits limit its capacity to pursue radical socio-ecological transformations. For instance, critics contend that the emphasis on decisions taken on the basis of consent downplays the importance of conflict, dissent and difference for effecting such transformations; that the role of reason and rational argumentation used to arrive at consensual decisions underplays the crucial role that emotions, imagination, narrative, socialization, and bodily activity play in producing transformation; and that past evidence suggests that strong leadership might be more crucial than horizontality, a central tenet of direct democracy, for achieving transformations.

Despite these criticisms, it seems certain that the ideal and practice of direct democracy has historically inspired and still motivates individuals and communities to boldly attempt to create worlds which are different and better to those they inhabit. In that sense, direct democracy holds promise for helping in decolonizing minds and challenging hegemonic ways of thinking, acting, and being. At its best, direct democracy becomes a different way of being.

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Democratic Economy In Kurdistan

Azize Aslan and Bengi Akbulut

Keywords: democracy, ecology, gender emancipation, needs

The thread of the Kurdish Movement that follows the ideology developed by Abdullah Öcalan, which can be traced back to the founding of PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) in 1978, has moved away from its initially declared aim of an independent Kurdish state to defending Democratic Confederalism and Democratic Autonomy as primary organizational models. The project of Democratic Autonomy implies a process of organization within multiple aspects such as law, self-defence, diplomacy, culture, and ecology. It includes the construction of a communal and 'democratic economy' based on principles of gender emancipation and ecology. The Project re-embeds the economy within social processes, ensuring the access of all to the means of social reproduction – a reconfiguration defined by needs.

The main intellectual ground for the Kurdish project is provided by Abdullah Öcalan's critical writing on capitalist modernity. Öcalan deepens the Marxist analysis of capitalism by probing the universality of industrial/accumulationist capitalism. The project is also inspired by Murray Bookchin's ideas of social ecology and libertarian municipalism. Building on these intellectual roots, democracy, gender emancipation, and ecology are defined as the principles along which all economic relations are to be organized. Democracy implies that decision-making regarding what to produce and share, how to manage resources, and how distribution should be participatory and egalitarian. Among the means of societal decision-making are communes and councils at different scales and themes – neighbourhood, town, city; youth, women, education, economy, ecology, etc. – as well as venues such as energy cooperatives and water councils. Gender emancipation denotes the discursive and material subversion of the invisibility and devaluation of women's labour and knowledge, and the reconstruction of economic relations in ways to ensure women's participation in all decision-making processes. Ecology signifies the

recognition that all nature is the common heritage of humans and non-humans and that all economic activities should be constrained by ecology as well as by society.

A democratic economy is a non-accumulationist economy wherein activities are not oriented towards an unquestioned imperative of economic development, but to fulfilment of the needs of all. This means the prioritization of use-value over exchange value, ensuring collective and equal access to land, water, and other local resources, and the positing of non-human nature as the non-commodifiable common heritage of all living creatures. Collective and equal rights over the means of social reproduction are upheld over efficiency and profit-orientation. The concrete proposals associated with this vision include realizing justice in land tenure, the reorganization of agricultural production on the basis of need, socialization of women's unpaid labour responsibilities by day-care centres and communal kitchens and local self-management of resources through energy cooperatives and water councils.

A notable example among the steps taken to operationalize this project is the municipal initiatives of providing land access to landless families. Plots in urban peripheries have been opened to collective cultivation by landless families, some 10 to 40 per plot, with technical and equipment support. The plots are linked to seedling camps, where indigenously developed seeds are being conserved. Production in these units is mainly subsistence-oriented, but they are also connected to direct producer–consumer hubs in urban centres for marketing surplus production. Another example is the network of women's cooperatives that the Kurdish women's movement spearheaded. Interlinked with production and distribution, these cooperatives are engaged primarily in agro-processing and textile manufacturing, and they market their products directly to consumers via the cooperative distribution hubs, Eko-Jin's. Most of the agro-processing cooperatives stem from and are linked to existing urban farming collectives. The

cooperatives are further networked with municipal officials, activists, academics, and civil society groups under the broader umbrella of the women's movement, the Free Women's Congress (KJA) – a venue of debate and decision-making.

The Democratic Autonomy project foresees the organization of a self-sustaining autonomous economy as an indispensable aspect of political autonomy. It aims to organize the production of goods and services communally in order to pre-empt the functionality of the state within this field. In that sense, the project carries a close parallel with other autonomous movements such as the Zapatistas. It also resonates with the larger solidarity economy movement worldwide, as it deconstructs the imperative of capitalist development and prioritizes self-management, social justice, and ecological integrity.

Although much remains to be seen in how the project of democratic economy will further concretize a number of challenges can be discerned. Existing inequalities, such as those in landownership, are likely to imply challenges in organizing the economy along collective and egalitarian fulfilment of needs. The tension between the fulfilment of the needs of all as an organizing principle and the non-accumulationist stance of democratic autonomy is another node of challenge. While what constitutes needs is to be deliberated democratically, needs beyond self-production will inevitably pose the issue of how much surplus is to be 'accumulated' to meet them and if, collectively, such needs are seen as legitimate. More importantly, the escalation of armed and political violence from the Turkish state as well as the intensified diffusion of capitalist relations within the region, pose significant difficulties. Yet, what has enabled and continues to sustain this project are the solidarity networks found within the Kurdish people. While collectivism, sharing, and solidarity have always been strong cultural codes, the collective history of struggle has strengthened these networks most significantly. They have, in turn, served as the ground on which an autonomous democratic economy could be organized. In this sense, the commitment and the solidarity-based organization of Kurdish people is an invaluable opportunity.

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Autonomy

Gustavo Esteva

Autonomy today alludes to attitudes, practices, and positions across the entire ideological spectrum, from the self-rule of sovereign individuals to real movements that adopt radical democracy as an emancipatory horizon beyond capitalism, the industrial mode of production, western modernity and patriarchy. Rather than autonomy, there are autonomies, both in reality and as political projects, as mobilizing myths and as horizons – as what is not yet.

Consequently, I exclude from this essay two schools of thinking and action that in my view are not real alternatives to the dominant regime:

- The individualist school, sometimes called 'libertarian', and its voluntary unions of egoists (Stirner), which usually operate within capitalist pseudo-anarchism.

- The socialist school, Leninist and supposedly anti-capitalist, which reduces autonomy to a decentralized form of administering the vertical powers of the state within structures of domination justified as requirements for the transition to socialism. Autonomy as the self-activity of the multitude (Negri, Virno) belongs to this school, as all approaches dealing with masses, not people.

Let us turn to the heart of the matter and to alternatives that offer real possibilities.

The word 'autonomy' is very old. In the seventeenth century, in Europe, the Greek term could either be used to allude to the liberty granted to Jews living according to their own laws, or to discuss the Kantian autonomy of the individual will. Several European schools of thinking and action adopted the word in the twentieth century to characterize their positions and aspirations. In the rest of the world, other notions, attitudes, and practices that today would be called autonomic have

existed since time immemorial. To understand current debates, we can differentiate between ontonomy, the traditional, endogenous norms still in force everywhere; autonomy, referring to the processes by which a group or community adopts new norms; and heteronomy, when the rules are imposed by others. Autonomic movements attempt to widen as much as possible the spheres of ontonomy and autonomy.

A new semantic constellation arising from emancipatory social and political movements shares, at least in part, the following elements:

It goes beyond formal democracy. Both Greece, which coined the word 'democracy', and the United States, which gave to it its modern form, were societies with slaves. During the last 200 years, softened forms of slavery were fostered or hidden in regimes that the great black intellectual W.E.B. Dubois correctly characterized as democratic despotism. Participatory democracy fails to eliminate the verticality of democratic societies, ruled by professional dictatorships in which professionals assume legislative, executive, and judiciary powers in each field and prevent the participation of common people in the functions of government.

Disenchantment with democracy is today universal. The wake-up call of the Zapatistas, in 1994, put autonomy at the centre of the political debate. 'Enough! All of them should go!' said the Argentinians in 2001. 'My dreams don't fit into your ballot box', affirmed the Indignados in Spain. Occupy Wall Street, in the US, enabled millions of people to finally acknowledge that their system is at the service of the 1 per cent. There are still attempts to reform it, but many struggles try instead to widen, strengthen, and deepen the spaces in which the people can practise their own power. They are literally constructing democracy from the roots, in which common people can assume the power of the Leviathan, free to speak, to choose and to act (Lummis 1996). Attempts of this kind are

innumerable and all over the world. On January 1, 2017, for instance, the National Indigenous Congress of Mexico, with the support of the Zapatistas, launched a proposal to create a Council of Government based on both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous autonomies. Instead of trying to seize the state apparatus, conceived and operating for control and domination, they are attempting to dismantle it and create institutions where the practice of commanding by obeying can thrive.

Beyond economic society. Autonomic movements, widely visible in Latin America, are not only challenging neoliberal globalization, but are also acting explicitly against capitalism without becoming socialist. Some are not only attempting to end their dependence on the market or the State, but are also breaking with the 'premise of scarcity' that defines economic society: the logical assumption that human wants are great, not to say infinite, while his means are limited. Such assumption creates an economic problem par excellence: resource allocation through the market or the plan. These movements, by contrast, adopt the 'principle of sufficiency', thus avoiding the separation of means from ends in both economic and political terms. Their struggles adopt the shape of the outcome they want to bring about.

Beyond western modernity. An increasing number of people painfully disassociate themselves from the truths and values that define western modernity and in which they came to believe. Most of these people cannot yet find a new system of reference. Confronted with such a loss of values and orientation some may become fundamentalists. Others, however, may acknowledge the relativity of their previous truths, immerse themselves in different forms of radical pluralism, and practise new forms of knowing and experiencing the world, participating in the insurrection of subjugated knowledge. Inspired by Raimon Pannikar, they substitute nouns creating dependence – education, health, food, home, and so on – for verbs that bring back their personal agency, their autonomy: learning, healing, eating, dwelling. They acknowledge the individual as a modern construction from which they disassociate themselves, in favour of a conception of persons as knots in nets of relationships, which constitute the many real we's defining a new society.

Beyond patriarchy. Several feminist schools participate in autonomic movements that go beyond conventional visions of post-patriarchal societies. A clear example is the Zapatista society, where politics and ethics, and not the economy, are at the centre of social life, and caring for life, women and Mother Earth has the highest priority. In these societies, autonomous practices characterize all areas of daily life, ruled through democratic processes that organize communally the art of hope and dignity.

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Eco-Socialism

Michael Löwy

Keywords: capitalism, eco-socialism, Marxism, consumption, authentic needs, qualitative transformation

The capitalist system cannot exist without unlimited 'development', 'growth', and 'expansion'. A radical post-development alternative must therefore be a post-capitalist one. Eco-socialism is one such system alternative. This is a current of ecological thought and action that builds on the fundamentals of Marxism, while shaking off its productivist dross. Eco-socialists see both the logic of markets and the logic of bureaucratic authoritarianism as incompatible with the need to safeguard the environment. Thinkers such as Rachel Carson or James O'Connor (USA), André Gorz (France), Frieder-Otto Wolff (Germany), and Manuel Sacristan (Spain) are among the pioneers of eco-socialism. More recently, works by Joel Kovel, John Bellamy Foster, and Ian Angus have developed the eco-socialist argument.

The rationality of capitalist accumulation, expansion, and development – particularly in its contemporary neoliberal form – is driven by short-sighted calculation and stands in intrinsic contradiction to ecological rationality, and the long-term protection of natural cycles. Ruthless competition, the demands of profitability, a culture of commodity fetishism, and transformation of the economy into an autonomous sphere beyond the control of society or political powers – all destroy nature's balance.

A radical alternative economic policy would be founded on the non-monetary criteria of social needs and ecological equilibrium. The replacement of the micro-rationality of profit-making by a social and ecological macro-rationality demands a change of civilizational paradigm, concerning not only production, but also consumption, culture, values, and lifestyle.

In an eco-socialist society, entire sectors of the productive system would be restructured and new ones developed, so that full employment is assured. However, this is impossible without public control with democratic planning over the means of production. Decisions on investment and technological change must be taken away from banks and capitalist enterprises in order to serve the common good. An economy in transition to eco-socialism should be 're-embedded' as Karl Polanyi would say, in the social and natural environment. Democratic planning means productive investments are chosen by the population, not by 'laws of the market', or an omniscient politburo. Far from being 'despotic', such planning is the exercise of a society's freedom, its liberation from alienation and from reified 'economic laws'.

Planning and the reduction of labour time are the two most decisive human steps towards what Marx called 'the kingdom of freedom'. A significant increase of free time is, in fact, a condition for the participation of working people in the democratic discussion and management of both economy and society. The passage from capitalism's 'destructive progress to socialism, is a historical process, a permanent revolutionary transformation of society, culture, and subjectivity. This transition would lead not only to a new mode of production and an egalitarian society, but also to an alternative 'mode of life', a new eco-socialist civilization, beyond the reign of money. Such a revolutionary transformation of social and political structures cannot begin without active support of an eco-socialist programme by a majority of the population. The development of socialist consciousness and ecological awareness is a process, whereby the decisive factor is people's own collective experience of struggle through local and partial confrontations.

Some ecologists believe that the only alternative to productivism is to 'stop growth' altogether, or to replace it by negative growth – what the French call décroissance. This is based on a drastic reduction of consumption, cutting by half the expenditure of energy as individuals renounce central heating, washing machines, and so on. Eco-socialists emphasize instead a 'qualitative transformation' of production and consumption. This means putting an end to the monstrous waste of resources by

capitalism, based on large-scale production of useless and/or harmful products such as the armaments industry. Many of the 'goods' produced by capitalism have inbuilt obsolescence; they are designed wastefully for rapid replacement to generate profit. From an ecosocialist perspective, the issue is not so much one of 'excessive consumption' therefore, but the 'type' of consumption. An economy based on mercantile alienation and compulsive acquisition of pseudo-novelties imposed by 'fashion' is simply incompatable with an ecological rationality.

A new society would orient production towards the satisfaction of authentic needs, beginning with those described as 'biblical' – water, food, clothing, housing – and basic public services such as health, education, and transport. Authentic needs are clearly distinguished from artificial or ficticious needs induced by a manipulative advertising industry. Advertising is an indispensable dimension of the capitalist market economy but it has no place in a society transitioning to socialism. Here, people's information on goods and services would be provided by consumer associations. The test for distinguishing authentic from artificial needs, is to see whether they persist after the suppression of advertising.

Eco-socialists work to build a broad international alliance between the labour movement, the ecological, indigenous, peasant, feminist, and other popular movements in the global North and South. These struggles may lead to a socialist and ecological alternative, but not as an inevitable result of contradictions of capitalism or 'iron laws of history'. One cannot predict the future, except in conditional terms. What is clear however is that in the absence of ecosocialist transformation, that is to say, a radical change in civilizational paradigm, the logic of capitalism can only lead the planet into dramatic ecological disasters, threatening the health and even lives of billions of human beings, perhaps even the survival of our species.

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Eco-Anarchism

Ted Trainer

The conventional definition of 'development' in terms of striving endlessly for growth and affluence inevitably creates and accelerates ecological destruction, inequality and poverty, social breakdown, and armed conflict over resources and markets. As argued in Abandon Affluence! (Trainer 1985), the key to eliminating this potentially fatal predicament is to recognize how mistaken and vicious the dominant conception of development is, and to replace it with The Simpler Way vision, as we call it in Australia. This perspective on the global situation focuses on the largely unrecognized fact that in a sustainable and just society, per capita resource consumption would have to be cut to around 10 per cent of present rich world levels. This basic 'limits to growth' case is outlined on the website.1 The analysis is now overwhelmingly strong and has huge and inescapable implications for development ends and means. In rich and poor countries, the goal has to be mostly small-scale settlements, highly self-sufficient, and self-governing, informed and driven by a culture of simplicity, frugality, and non-material sources of life satisfaction. Only communities of this kind can get per capita resource consumption down sufficiently while enabling a good quality life for all the world's people.

What is easily overlooked is the fact that these arrangements must be eco-anarchist. Only thoroughly participatory self-governing communities can run small-scale local economies well. There would still need to be some centralized and state-level systems, but the national economy would be reduced to a fraction of current production, trade, and GDP. The economy would be zero-growth and geared to provisioning towns and regions with small quantities of basic inputs such as cement, irrigation pipe and light machinery. Communities would be in control of their own affairs through citizen initiatives, with minimal dependence on officials or bureaucracies. There would be voluntary citizen committees, working

bees, informal discussion, commons, spontaneous action, and town meetings. There would not be the surplus resources for centralized states to run local systems. More importantly, bureaucracies possess neither local knowledge nor the capacity to support the grassroots energy and cohesion needed for change across the board. Unless political procedures are thoroughly participatory empowerment, solidarity, and right decisions, actions will not result.

Above all, genuine development cannot be driven by the quest for wealth; non-material sources of life satisfaction must replace individualistic, competitive acquisitiveness. International acknowledgement of this is essential to help peasant and tribal societies avoid identifying affluence with progress. And that, in turn, enables the preservation and celebration of traditional cultures as a further bulwark against the onslaught of Western consumerism. Despite the progress being made by rich world movements such as Voluntary Simplicity, Eco-Village, Downshifting, and Transition Towns, the eco-anarchist revolution will probably be led by peasant and tribal peoples. It is critical not to regard this alternative as inferior or a consolation alongside the supposedly superior consumer-capitalist path. Large numbers of people around the world are more or less already on this path, for instance, within La Via Campesina, Chikukwa, and Zapatista movements.

In addition to strongly asserting a particular vision regarding social goals, The Simpler Way has direct implications for means. It becomes very clear that strategy must be eco-anarchist, once the standard 'eco-socialist' theory of transition is examined. Eco-socialists seek to take state power in order to implement post-capitalist arrangements from the political centre. They do not try to enable the kind of alternatives discussed above; they are strongly inclined to work to 'release the industrial system from the contradictions of capitalism in order to raise everyone to high living standards'. Eco-anarchist strategy gives priority to grassroots agency and the cultural revolution whereby ordinary people come to embrace alternative ideas, systems, and values.

As Kropotkin and Tolstoy realized, taking state power is a waste of time unless and until people come to appreciate the need for self-governing participatory communities. The emergence of that vision and commitment is in effect the revolution, and it makes possible the subsequent change of structures. Taking or eliminating state power are consequential to that.

A major concern of The Simpler Way project2 is to provide practical detail showing how this vision of eco-anarchist development can be realized in both rich and poor countries. In addition to this, a 53-page report3 explains how a suburb in an affluent city such as Sydney might be remade to cut resource, dollar and ecological costs by 90 per cent. City suburbs, rural towns and Third Word villages can easily meet most of their basic needs via local resources and cooperative arrangements. Instead of feeling compelled to compete in or purchase from the global economy, the concern is to maximize independence by collective living. The Simpler Way transition strategy focuses primarily on working within Transition Towns, De-Growth, Permaculture, and Eco-village movements, and especially Third World villages, where many already model localist solutions, community self-government, and 'prefiguring'.

Notes

1 The Limits To Growth Analysis Of Our Global Situation, www.thesimplerway.info/LIMITS.htm.

2 The general vision is found at http://thesimplerway.info/THEALTERNTIVELong.htm.

3 http://thesimplerway.info/RemakingSettlements.htm.

Further Resources

Kropotkin, Peter (1912), Fields, Factories and Workshops. London: Nelson.

Sarkar, Saral (1999), Eco-Socialism or Eco-Capitalism? A Critical Analysis of Humanity's Fundamental Choices. London: Zed Books.

The Simplicity Institute, www.SimplicityInstitute.org.

Trainer, Ted (F.E) (1985), Abandon Affluence! London: Zed Books.

Transition Towns, www.TransitionNetwork.org.

Via Campesina, https://viacampesina.org/en/.

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This publication brings together 10 essays on various dimensions of democracy, extracted from *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*, which present radical alternatives to both dictatorships and to liberal, centralized democracies. They include grassroots initiatives from very local to larger scale, such as with examples of indigenous self-rule in India and Latin America, the Zapatista in Chiapas in Mexico, and the Kurdish autonomous region in central Asia; as also (and connected to the practical initiatives) conceptual and visionary approaches such as radical democracy, swaraj, eco-socialism, eco-anarchism, and others.

This compilation is a contribution to the dialogue on what directions democracy should take in our countries or regions.

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