A Great Dilemma Generates Another Great Transformation: Incompatibility of Capitalism and Sustainable Environments

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Abstract
This article makes a couple of explorations in the relationship between the environment and capitalism. The first exploration culminates into yet another set of conclusions that reinforce a body of evidence showing that a livable environment and capitalism as we know it cannot coexist in the future. The second exploration investigates a different set of questions regarding the heretofore hostility between such progressives as radical labor and deep ecologists. The article concludes with movement towards a rapprochement between the two in terms of not only a blue-green alliance (i.e., blue collar labor and environmentalists), but also a red-green alliance.

Keywords
capitalism, eco-technologies, economics of scarcity, ecological degradation, destructo-industrial technologies, deep ecologists, delimitation of consumption, Karl Marx

Introduction
Let’s start with what is hopefully obvious: the environment cannot sustain capitalism and capitalism certainly cannot sustain the environment. Either the environmental crisis has to be addressed with eco-technologies, though doing so threatens the productive relations of capitalism, or the advancement of such technologies can be fettered in an attempt to protect those relations, though that move ironically undermines the entirety of both capitalism and nature. Either way, capitalism will be fundamentally transformed or it will be replaced by a qualitatively different economic system (Speth 2008). As Kovel (2007) starkly framed the issue, either we stop capitalism from destroying nature or we allow capitalism to destroy the world. This article is an exploration of prin-
cipal contradictions and dilemmas of capitalism induced directly or indirectly by environmental stress. While these contradictions and the synthetic technological revolutions of eco-technologies and info-technologies threaten capitalism, they simultaneously enable a vastly different economic system, one marked for the first time by an economics of abundance and ecological sustainability as opposed to what humans have only known hitherto, namely, economics of scarcity and ecological degradation.

The principal contradictions of capitalism are associated with labor and the environment (Jorgenson 2006). Regarding the first contradiction, corporations drive technological advancement in part to de-skill labor and to push for offshoring production in low-wage countries, all to reduce labor costs and increase profits. When a limited number of enterprises do this, they gain advantage over competitors who do not. But when such an approach is universally pursued, the entire system is threatened by the inability to reap profits as domestic workers have insufficient wages to purchase goods. Hence, when workers don’t have sufficient income to purchase products they may want to consume—whether needs are from the gut or are manipulated needs by clever marketers—the system grinds to a halt.

As for the second contradiction, corporations seek to appropriate nature for private gain while the costs of environmental abuse are shared commonly. Again, when a small number of industrial enterprises do this they experience a temporary advantage over their rivals, but when corporations universally devour nature in a mode of continuous growth with non-eco-technologies, capitalism, humanity, and other sentient beings are put in peril. The never-ending Schumpeterian gales of creative destruction continues throughout the economy to satisfy existing and future needs means more and more scooping up of natural resources, processing them with climate-altering technologies and dumping their toxic wastes back to the Earth. The cumulative ill-effects of pollution, mineral depletion, and disruption of ecosystems have now generated a new consciousness that eco-technologies must become deeply and extensively embedded in the economy, thereby forever altering its character.

Some big capitals have vested narrow, intermediate-term interests in maintaining the destructo-industrial technologies pioneered over the past two centuries. Destructo-industrial technologies are those that degrade nature in lock step with production and consumption (Patterson 2008). Big Oil is the most conspicuous example of entities that fetter advanced renewable energy away from destructo-industrial technologies. Solar energy holds the potential of every citizen of the planet acquiring endless sources of non-environmentally damaging energy. Since the days of the Reagan administration, the state has been captured at higher orders of magnitude than before by fettering