



## Governance

**Western democracy, as it functions today, is diluted fascism.  
True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre.  
It has to be worked from below, by the people of every village.  
Mohandas K. Gandhi, 1940**

The 'state' or government as we know it in advanced capitalist countries today purports to respect universal rights of citizens, 'freedom' and to tolerate difference through democratic structures. However, this state is a creature of capital and has the effect of standardising normalities, which is evidenced by the experiences of people pursuing alternatives more capable of achieving socially just conditions and sustainable natural and built environments. These experiments point in the direction of a compact society, offering building blocks for an alternative society based on the principles of social justice and environmental sustainability.

## State

In capitalist societies the state has evolved hand-in-hand with capital as its servant — 'the state' simply being the name of a characteristic set of governance processes and 'capital' the generic term for all those structures and agents who are involved in production for the market. The political structures of parliamentary democracies that typify capitalist societies, such as political parties and houses of parliament, have developed to support capitalism as it has progressed in intensive as well as expansive ways. Capitalist states specifically encourage economic growth and are considered failures if they do not. For instance, in many countries the preparation of meals (fast food), childcare, sports and leisure are increasingly organised by capital while imperialist adventures, which marked the first centuries of capitalist expansion, continue too.

Capitalist governments with parliamentary democracies that give all adults a vote are supposed to represent and act for all, moving society in directions on which there is common agreement. However, while the concepts of democracy and democratic governments make great claims to choice and freedom, these familiar political institutions tend to support capital. They do not facilitate anti-capitalist revolutions even when the majority of people support socialist or other alternatives. Refer, for instance, to the rise and demise of the Allende government in Chile, the Manley government in Jamaica and the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

When voters chose socialist governments that proceeded to restrict capitalist powers and moved towards instituting communist forms of production and exchange (such as in Allende's Chile, Castro's Cuba and the Sandinista government in Nicaragua) anti-democratic international capitalist forces challenged these governments, using military violence and economic means to destabilise the socialist forces through disinvestment and trade embargos. Again, global market forces insisted on maintaining state power and used anti-democratic means to support market-oriented counter-revolutionary forces. (See [References](#).)

Within democratic movements during the latter half of the 20th century there have been liberating reforms that centred on lobbying at a political, state level – such as women and black people gaining greater access to opportunities once available only or mainly to men and white people. However, racist and anti-feminist currents had used the state to suppress these sectors before equality was promoted by the state – ‘the state’, of course, simply being the name of a characteristic set of governance processes. Further, it is arguable whether these reforms succeeded despite capitalism rather than because of it. Such movements tend to be limited by the constraints of capitalism, which by definition requires social inequality and conflicts associated with divisions in qualifications, ability, and experience in order to function.

Leftists – progressive social activists, a heterogeneous conglomeration of people with values emphasising social fairness and broad democratic participation in organising society – continue to struggle within and outside parliamentary democratic and trade union structures to achieve reforms and in the hope of precipitating the conditions for a revolution. Many revolutionary-minded activists acknowledge the potential for political activities within political parties, factories and unions in order to share knowledge and skills to make daily life fairer and more equitable. At the same time, new purposes, relations and spaces of work will be necessary to achieve fairer and more sustainable societies.

How to synthesise tactics within mainstream structures and strategies pursued outside them and create a bridge, a continuum, between reforms and revolution is the greatest challenge for Leftists today. The argument here is that such a synthesis is possible only by focusing on a common strategy of instituting non-monetary forms of political, social and cultural relations with a vision of a money-free society, which will enable people to produce and exchange in a transparent way on the basis of use-values, directly expressing principles related to social justice, and enabling the establishment of environmentally sustainable practices.

There is the 20th century model that sought to introduce revolution through communist states, such as in Soviet Russia, Communist China and Fidel's Cuba. In Cuba and Russia there were great national debates as people toyed with dispensing

with money (see **Prices**). In fact maintaining money and market systems supported the growth of state-based elites, restricting political and economic power. None of these models gave priority to or addressed environmental sustainability challenges satisfactorily. Indeed Soviet Russia provided an example of runaway environmental exploitation, although, commendably, Communist China pursued population control and Cuba has progressively attended more to environmental matters.

## Compact society

Replacing production for the market with production for the people and the planet requires alternative forms of political relations and structures to the dual acts of state and the market. Such institutions have been experimented with in non-capitalist societies and in counter-cultural or alternative forms, as well as non-profit community organisations marginalised within capitalism. The most relevant of such experiments are referred to here as aspects of a nascent – indicative rather than substantive and conscious – ‘compact movement’. In other words, at the time of writing there is no self-proclaimed compact movement in existence. What exist are the basic elements for such a movement to become conscious of its collective potential and the pressures to make such a development a social and environmental necessity. Networks of compacts have the potential to replace current governments and international political and economic structures and to offer direct power to people to nurture the earth as well as one another.

The concept of the ‘compact’ is akin to a contract but involves no monetary, financial elements as are common in current contracts. Compacts have the potential to provide the political and economic building blocks of a world free of monetary relations and values. Compacts would commonly involve at least two parties agreeing, for instance, to share the use-rights and responsibilities of a resource base or to provide one another with goods and or services. In other words compacts would express agreements over the use and management of resources necessary to enable people to exist modestly and to share responsibilities as stewards of the earth and all its natural communities.

The capacity and skills to develop such compacts and networks of compacts have developed apace in the last few decades as people have recreated and remodelled traditional forms of community organisations as well as experimenting with new models. Such organisations, typically developed to achieve environmental and/or social goals, have provided incubators for empowering modes of working and sharing power, involving consensual decision-making and so on. Electronic communication has also provided techniques enabling and facilitating collaborative activities.

The following discussion identifies qualities and weaknesses of current alternatives, arguing that overcoming their actual limitations requires developing networks of compacts to structure and enable such organisations to comprise socially just and environmentally sustainable forms of governance, compact movement and ultimately a compact society.

## Current alternatives

The World Scientist's Warning to Humanity indicated that voluntary measures, such as access to contraception and safe abortions, would be sufficient to halt the increasing human population of our planet (see [References](#), Union). Also, even though calling for new values and approaches, the end of poverty, and new environmentally friendly practices, the message did not argue outright to overturn capitalism. In fact, it was simply a 'warning', urging the need to act, identifying challenges and the risks of pursuing business as usual.

Over the last half a century many people have not only become active participants in organisations to promote social justice and environmental sustainability but a minority have devoted their lives to this movement, including focussing on time-consuming experimental activities such as establishing eco-villages, permaculture ventures, organic and biodynamic farming, and applying alternative small technologies to produce quality goods and services. Some of them believe that capitalism, or at least a reformed system of trade and production for trade, is sufficient to produce social justice and environmental sustainability.

Many others remain querulous, believing that the system of values must change radically but are demoralised by the power of capital. As such the Left has become a ragged army fighting too many struggles on separate fronts without any clear vision of what a victory might constitute let alone how to strategise in a united way. There is a lot of needless self-flagellation, demoralisation and the constant distraction of single issues, which result naturally from a society based on specialisation and the division of economic, professional and political powers, but severely fragment and disorganise the Left.

The position taken here is that capitalism, indeed any conceivable market monetary system of production and exchange, is incapable of producing social justice and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the key characteristic and strategy of a successful transition to a non-capitalist society enabling social justice and environmental sustainability is to dispense with money as a tool to rationalise exchange and production. Monetary exchanges and production for the market must be remodelled into exchanges that focus not only on the use-values of the produced and exchanged goods and services but also on the parties to such exchanges. Thus production and exchanges would be formally planned, centre on collective sufficiency based on bioregions managed for environmental sustainability and would only marginally involve production and exchange for identified, specific, external groups and environments.

Existing activities, structures, organisations and movements contribute models and experiential knowledge and skills to inform this direction, some mentioned in [References](#). What follows is a series of brief discussions of certain achievements and limitations of selected examples in the context of the vision of a compact society.

## Permaculture

The now international movement known as permaculture was co-originated by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the island state of Tasmania, Australia, in the mid-

1970s as presented in *Permaculture One* (1978, Corgi, Ealing/Melbourne). The best recent reference is *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability* (2002, Holmgren Design Services, Hepburn), and the Holmgren Design Services website (<http://www.holmgren.com.au>) Holmgren (2002) points out that permaculture is not simply about permanent, i.e. sustainable, agricultural practices but also cultural ones and he offers 12 permaculture design principles as ways to think about, plan, strategise and act to create a world that is socially just as well as environmentally sustainable.

Following such principles to achieve a low energy use future is a practical response to environmental crises associated with economic growth and overconsumption of non-renewable fuels. Thus reading about and, better, practicing permaculture is a great antidote to fears that global warming signals the end of our species. The emphasis is on self-reliance, on production for direct use, minimising exchanges and concentrating them in the local area, working collectively and with nature rather than competitively and to 'control' nature.

The structure of Holmgren's 2002 (ix) book follows the 12 design principles: observe and interact; catch and store energy; obtain a yield; apply self-regulation and accept feedback; use and value renewable resources and services; produce no waste; design from patterns to details; integrate rather than segregate; use small and slow solutions; use and value diversity; use edges and value the marginal; creatively use and respond to change.

While permaculture offers ways to empower people and for us to support ourselves materially in much more environmentally sustainable ways, and has a communal focus in terms of its principles, most applications have been at an individual or small grassroots collective level. Also, even though it is clear that a permaculture approach is incompatible with large-scale ventures and involves minimal consumption, few within the movement either question in an intrinsic way producing for the market or see monetary exchange as an obstacle to achieving collective self-sufficiency in a bioregional context. As such permaculture includes small business ventures, niche markets, Schumachean approaches (see [References](#)) and extensive experimentation with the LETSystem (Local Exchange and Trading System).

## LETSystems

The LETSystem (Local/Labour Exchange Trading System) provides an interesting model for discussion with respect to our argument here that social justice and environmental sustainability require non-monetary production and exchange because the LETSystem has been variously defined – by some as non-monetary exchange and by others as quasi-monetary exchange! Who is correct? And, does experimentation with LETSystems offer a solution to our conundrum?

LETSystems are neighbourhood or regional schemes for exchanging goods, such as garden produce, jam and art works, as well as services, such as baby-sitting, gardening and painting, in a multilateral way on the basis of locally created units of credit. Facilitated by electronic developments, Michael Linton designed LETS, which was first tried in Canada in 1982. The model simply involves transactors exchanging things on the basis of a mutually negotiated worth in terms of a locally nominated LETS unit, say a 'nugget'. As a result transactors develop debts for goods and

services received and credits for goods and services provided to another transactor. Every transaction is formal, noted in records held by both transactors and registered with the local LETSystem coordinator who enters the negotiated settlement as a debt and credit in terms of nuggets on a computer system tallying everyone's balances.

Is the nugget quasi-money? It is 'money' in terms of evolving as a common standard and measure of the worth of transacted goods and services. However, nuggets exist only in a circumscribed local market bounded by LETSystem membership, and activities with nuggets are transparent and involve specific protocols. Further, a key distinction from normal currencies is the lack of government support or regulation. Governments have investigated LETSystems in terms of their tax implications, as a form of tax evasion where goods and services taxes apply, and have evolved stances and directions with respect to these exchanges. LETSystem organisers have responded cheekily to governments to take their share in local LETSystem units. Furthermore, it is not possible to lend nuggets especially to earn interest from them. Therefore the LETSystem unit has less functionality than ordinary currencies and its power is specific to its membership and their control.

One of the most interesting aspects of LETSystems centres on how transactors decide on the worth of the goods and services transacted. This is a matter decided by both transactors with respect to each transaction, but it is not unusual for those involved to calculate in terms of nuggets as if they were dollars so that the negotiated figures mirror prices in the mainstream market economy. For instance, if babysitting is normally remunerated with \$10 per hour in the dominant economy, the transactors decide to negotiate in terms of 10 nuggets debt and credit. Thus, if transactions within a LETSystem replicate prices in the dominant economy the system itself offers little more than formalising erstwhile informal agreements made between friends and relatives on an ad hoc basis but with the significant advantage of enabling multilateral transactions with a wider range of people.

However, the LETSystem model has naturally attracted members who were interested in issues of social justice, such as the inequity in remuneration of different kinds of work. Thus, a decade or so ago, one minority group in a LETSystem that was well established in Victoria, Australia, agreed to exchange all services on the basis of 10 units per hour regardless of whether the transaction involved a medical or architectural consultancy hour or a gardening or painting hour. At this point, if involving this kind of protocol, the LETSystem and its unit become distinct from mainstream market transactions and currencies. However, they exist within a dominant economy and the potential and limits of the innovation seem strongly determined by the social context. Does this innovation offer participants anything more than a marginal and charitable way to address social injustices associated with different wages rates and conditions in the mainstream economy? Is it a reform or version of LETSystem that offers a transitional form to a more socially fair and environmentally sustainable future? Experimenting with new ways of organising everyday exchanges, especially when it is a single act of trying to introduce greater social equity in a context of social injustice, highlighted and raised issues of inequity of a different order, such as those associated with costs of qualifying and training in skills and the knowledge necessary to do distinct tasks as well as the different degrees and kinds of effort involved in distinct kinds of work. What is socially fair and equitable and just?

In fact a LETSystem established in the 1980s in Adelaide, South Australia, by lesbians dissolved into a more civilised if informal state when they decided that they did not need the formal structure of a debt-credit system and simply agreed to engage in mutual support, trusting that what 'went around came around', that they would gain back what they gave. This kind of system is traditional in families, though the advance of capitalism is sometimes best measured by the dissolution of kinship generosity and generational mutual support into insurance schemes, social security, pensions and superannuation. At the same time there are instances of LETSystems involving thousands of participants from slums in Asia and Latin America that have enabled neighbourhoods to more easily engage in purposeful activities, empowering them as individuals and groups to survive at the margins, or to enter the mainstream economy.

Some advocates have claimed that the LETSystem could evolve as a fully-fledged system of currency and exchange controlled at the grassroots. However, it is limited in terms of certain functions, as already mentioned, and in terms of certain forms of transactions, such as investing in means of production. I have not heard of a LETSystem producing a factory, though I have heard of members contributing to building a mud-brick practice, yet it did not entirely develop on LETS members's efforts. Nevertheless LETSystems have a degree of tolerance for going into debt or credit; by the very nature of the case obsessive behaviour around a neutral balance simply restricts exchanges.

As it exists, as a minority practice within capitalism, LETSystems provide opportunities for exploitative practices, for instance, buying comparatively cheaply in the local exchange system and selling in capitalism. Here aspects of developing means of production are especially relevant.

Critics have suggested simple ways to engage in micro-credit operations: in his *The Conserver Society: Alternatives for Sustainability* (1995, Zed Books, London/New Jersey: 98), Ted Trainer offers the example of a café whose managers raised investment funds by pre-issuing vouchers to dine at the café at certain, staggered, times in the future. Thus they received money for the vouchers to set up the café and then paid in dinners at a steady pace once the café opened. Although unusual, this example is an innovation entirely compatible with capitalism, rather than upsetting it.

In fact LETSystems have flourished and faded, reappeared and appeared anew in many regions and locales over the last two decades without substantially impacting on capitalism or offering new practices for more socially just and environmentally sound ways of living. This is not because their members have failed in terms of aims or visions but rather that the LETSystem is a limited model, it only involves aspects of certain exchanges and has been trialled within a dominant capitalist context that has adverse impacts on it. Informal mutual support and more formal multilateral exchange require broader and stronger structures involving enduring and strong compacts between households and communities in order to operate effectively and efficiently.

## Residential and working cooperatives

Cooperative ways of working have a long history in all cultures. However, existing productive and trading cooperatives are generally formalised under state regulations, which require them to conform to business practices and government requirements such as taxation. Many productive and commercial cooperatives are capitalist enterprises except that their management tends to be less hierarchical, their decision-making is more broadly shared, and they are more accountable to other members than is the common experience of a worker in relation to management. Mondragon, Spain, is the much-touted example of a region based on cooperative structures established to enable more local enterprise and worker participation than is regularly experienced within advanced capitalist societies.

The 1970s was characterised by an upsurge in living (residential), as well as working, cooperatives as disenchanted and utopian people experimented with communal living and self-sufficient gardening and farming. During the last few decades concerns to establish more sustainable ways of living by forming eco-villages in urban as well as rural areas all over the world have added to the number and variety of such experiments. (See the International Communities site: <http://www.ic.org> and the site of the long-established Twin Oaks Intentional Community: <http://www.twinoaks.org>).

Experiences of communalists have offered valuable lessons for those determined to find more socially just and environmentally sound ways of living. They have confirmed the power of state bureaucracies and politicians as well as capitalist practices in structuring our society and limiting choices to live in alternative ways that aim to avoid consumerism, full-time waged work and social welfare. Owning land and homes jointly is not too difficult if you have the money to buy them in the first place but banks don't lend to support someone to be a member of a shared property, thus restricting the number of those who have been involved in communal property. Still, such restraints pressured communal aspirants to build cheap homes out of mud brick and salvaged timber, providing models that are more sustainable and accessible than conventional homes.

The importance of designing and building low-energy, self-sustainable homes, with gardens featuring productive and indigenous vegetation, has also been a prime focus of the alternative movement. Indeed many of the environmentally friendly innovations and initiatives that characterise urban programs and policies being introduced in this first decade of the 21st century were pioneered by people frustrated and ridiculed by bureaucrats and private industry and farmers as in the previous decades as they experimented with and refined the best processes for collecting and storing water off roofs, developing composting toilets and grey-water systems, and re-using, recycling and minimising waste. In the 1970s and 1980s most urban and many rural councils prohibited such practices and contributed to the production of waste through, for instance, certain unnecessary health and sanitary regulations.

Meanwhile collective living encourages and demands particular social skills and practices, which have been widely discussed and analysed, some overlapping with techniques used by political activists for long-lived protest actions. These skills focus on ways to make decisions and work collectively: to respect and listen to other

people's positions, feelings and arguments while asserting your own clearly and effectively; to share knowledge and skills; to encourage and absorb learning related to holistic ways of living; to contribute and take part in collective celebrations and personal rituals; to be creative not only in terms of the arts but also in philosophical and political ways; to know when to brainstorm, scope and be open to new ideas and ways; and when to analyse and criticise to settle on a course of action and monitor its progress without being sentimental.

However complex and self-sustaining a living cooperative is it cannot be, nor probably would its members ever want it to be, wholly autonomous from mainstream society even though critical of capitalist practices. Thus efforts to improve communications and relationships within cooperatives and their supportive networks have continuously been influenced by the context within which the cooperative has been established. Specifically how members sustain working and trading outside and within a cooperative involves tensions focusing on differences between people's distinct circumstances, skills, aims, strategies and beliefs. Thus the cooperative and its members take part in monetary transactions, work and produce for, and consume goods and services in, the mainstream capitalist market. However, the aims of the cooperative and its members are necessarily in conflict with the external organisation and their lived reality is somewhat contradictory.

Some cooperatives have developed protocols around the concept of a 'common purse' so that monies gained from all work and transactions outside the cooperative pass into a common pool and are drawn on according to collective as well as personal needs. Such cooperatives must have protocols and mechanisms for deciding on what is acceptable and unacceptable in terms of each member's contribution and use of the common purse.

Other cooperatives, by far the majority, sidestep tensions between members that are implicit in the common-purse model. They allow members to develop and exercise personal protocols in participating with 'the world out there' or integrate formal or informal protocols associated with mutual financial support and solidarity along with expectations relating to capacity to work, to produce and to trade. Many of these structures and positions alter through the course of a cooperative's life and mirror tensions and practices common in households, nuclear and extended families, and jointly owned and managed small businesses. Such tensions often make and break cooperatives, leading members to leave or to make compromises that distort their intentions and deplete them of energy.

Again the failure and fragmentation of many cooperatives cannot be analysed as the outcome solely of the structure, processes of communication, and relationships within the cooperative. The keen observation of Peter Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902, Heinemann, London) is that: 'Mutual aid and support cannot be limited to a small association, they must spread to its surroundings, or else the surroundings will absorb the association.' This conclusion is most relevant to complex joint households, experimental living units and residential cooperatives in terms of the financial pressures internalised and external to, but impacting on, participants. Cooperatives embody compacts between participants that often erode because they all too frequently fail to gain the level of external support necessary to enable the cooperative to survive and flourish as a semi-autonomous organisation based on non-monetary values, principles and missions. Thus the need for networks

to support compacts, networks of cooperatives to support other cooperatives and like structures based on the values of social justice and environmental sustainability.

## Women's liberation

Radical activist organisations, such as the women's liberation movement, have experimented with and developed many useful processes for catalysing and incorporating behaviour and social change. In the late 1960s women's liberation resurged throughout the world: women asserted equal rights of opportunity with men in all spheres; specific rights with respect to their bodies, such as sexual activity and issues related to reproduction; and questioned how and why 'patriarchal' structures and processes had developed within so many economic, political, social and cultural practices and what it might mean to redress an overwhelmingly masculine approach to living. Many discussions within this movement focussed on how women could most effectively initiate, facilitate and support change.

The organisation of women's liberation copied and contributed to many of the broader Leftist organisational models but tended to take on and innovate radical forms. By the mid-1970s this radicalism had become the defining characteristic of women's liberation, in contrast to the reformist and responsive movement of feminism. The feminist movement followed a narrower suffragette tradition, which sought limited reforms within capitalism, copied its organisational forms and had conciliatory overtones. In contrast, women's liberation was a profoundly challenging and unsettling movement – including for the women participating in it – because the conclusions reached by women liberationists called for revolution, not simple reforms. Not 'we want what men have' but 'we want a new world' where men and women relate differently.

Many women took seriously the implications of making this kind of revolutionary demand, especially that 'the personal is the political'. They clustered in 'consciousness raising groups', which replicated aspects of age-old political resistance cells in terms of solidarity and discussion, but were infused with specifically feminine qualities of sharing, self-disclosure and mutual support. Such groups – typically comprised of several women meeting regularly – enabled discussion about everyday events, challenges and strategic options to effect change in close relationships with relatives, partners, male and female friends and colleagues. Emphasising the importance of these informal groups, which were neither accountable nor formal in mainstream ways and centred on 'private' rather than public change, was itself an act embodying social change.

Other characteristics of the women's liberation movement were demonstrated in its more action-oriented 'public' structure. There was no formal membership. If you identified with and supported the women's liberation movement then you belonged. Equally, in an effort to preserve diversity within unity and sidestep time-consuming decisions over numerous issues, workshops or collectives evolved around issues and events. Contacts were nominated but again these groups took a flat non-hierarchical form based on direct decision-making and initiatives by immediate participants. As such to be an effective member you had to participate.

For sure voting occurred at general meetings where representatives of workshops and collectives turned out to report on progress or identify and thrash out differences.

Numerous models of discussion, conflict resolution, and mediation were employed. But the only formality of the general meeting in an organisational sense was a designated space and time. When the women participating assembled, they chose a coordinator (a revolving and temporary position) and agenda on the spot. If you wanted to be in it, if you wanted to be part of the decision-making, anyone could be but they had to be there.

The volunteers who ran the women's liberation centres recorded activities in a book open to all. When media statements were made or media requests responded to, a woman spoke out as a women's liberationist and representative in the vaguest sense of the term, without any reference to a formal ongoing position because they rarely existed. This meant revolving and interacting leaders who rose and fell by their immediate powers of persuasion, skills and support based on demonstrable confidence of active participants. They were known by their works and they were personally responsible.

In these ways the movement avoided the sluggish and top-heavy aspects of mainstream organisations with a signed up, subscription-paying membership whose direction was most often determined by a small and tight committee whose members were often removed from grassroots discussions and opinions and where power was limited to nominating committee members and occasional changes to rules at special and general meetings. Again women's liberation developed forms appropriate to mass mobilisation, effective and substantive democracy. Some of these forms of organisation have been adopted by and aspects shared with environmental movement organisations, especially those that typify its most radical wings, such as Friends of the Earth, and the social and environmental NonViolence Network.

Popular analyses of the women's movement define women's liberation as unnecessarily radical and less effective than the feminist movement which, in turn, often takes responsibility for the last few decades of reforms that have improved women's opportunities, strengthened their rights and taken greater account of women's views and interpretations. However, this is a moot point. It is not convincing to suggest that the hard line of women's liberationists was not crucial in achieving reforms; without the challenging, strident behaviour of women's liberationists it is unlikely that reforms would have been achieved. As pressures developed to address women's concerns government and industry simply supported the less challenging organisations and demands.

Not surprisingly, many of the changes that occurred over the last couple of decades turn out to be convenient to business interests yet when analysed as less than beneficial to women, and men, women's liberation is blamed! Only a critique of capitalism makes real sense of these processes and outcomes. Women's liberationists questioned working as a not necessarily desirable state of being, while feminists fought for training and jobs. Today working parents often struggle in terms of financial and time budgets to bring up a couple of children while their grandparents lived off one wage, spread it around four children, enabling one parent to devote time to household and child rearing duties. This circumstance is not the result of one social pressure or political-cum-cultural movement but rather of the dominant economic structure within which such organisations struggle to survive.

It seems that today's parents have more money for consumption but housing accessibility alone indicates how fluid capitalist structures are, at the same time as

producing uniform, necessary outcomes. Today, in Australia, it seems more difficult for younger couples to work towards owning their own home than it was for their grandparents. One distinction is that the grandparents had lower expectations in terms of home size, and used less disposable income on white and electronic goods, which are now seen as necessary. The enduring result is a sense of never being good enough or able to catch up. Similarly childcare is a perpetual problem for working, and particularly sole, parents. The state and business have been more capable of reforming mothers and housewives as burdened workers than in addressing the fact that most male and female workers have responsibilities for childcare that are most easily and effectively delivered collectively in neighbourhoods and workplaces and through allowing flexible and part-time work patterns as a norm.

The organisational forms developed, refined and used by women's liberationists typify effective ways of achieving change that has the potential to leap beyond simple reforms. These forms, and the social skills that they nurture, naturally complement the development of structures and processes through which communities living with environmental uncertainties and damage can effect mass mobilisation and rapid changes in values and relations necessary to institute social justice and environmental sustainability. Through involvement in such social and environmental organisations many people have been slowly and surely building experiential learning in terms of skills and tacit knowledge about how social and environmental change can be effectively and efficiently achieved.

## Nonviolence

Alternative ways of living, organising and working are not only challenged and frustrated by established processes and positions of power that define mainstream economic and political structures. The state has authority in terms of police and the military, powers that are deemed to protect civil society from individuals and groups who break the law. Criminal law has evolved in concert with capitalism to centre on the protection of multiple kinds of property as well as personal security. Military forces have developed to spearhead or passively support imperialist ventures and to protect countries and their nationals from invasions. Both, however, are also charged with protecting capital, governments and citizens from subversive protesters.

Right through the 20th century, certain groups and individuals have objected to wars, to conscription, and to anti-social and anti-environmental policies, practices and programs developed and implemented by various states. Their campaigns have included political lobbying, media publicity, peaceful rallies and sit-ins. Key strategic issues have revolved around the potential for protesters to interfere, intervene or frustrate business-as-usual enough to gain the attention of those whose practices or positions they wish to change or power holders in a position to regulate or restrain them. Although advanced capitalist societies are characterised more by formal than substantive democracy, the threat of losing elections has pressured many parties and politicians to respond to vocal and disruptive opposition in semi-conciliatory ways. At the same time the easier response has been to demonise such groups and enhance the state's powers to curb such actions, the publicity emanating from them, and the terms and conditions allowing for protest in public spaces.

Facing physical power, armed guards and riot police, many environmental and social protesters have implemented nonviolent actions, resistance and non-compliance to

defoliate mainstream authorities' reasons and ways of enforcing law and order. Nonviolent actions, such as sitting in trees threatened with felling in ecologically valuable areas, have various benefits. Such actions: enable protesters to express otherwise often relatively defensive positions in lively collective ways involving solidarity, commitment and courage; generally directly express the social and environmental ethics of the protesters; represent low-level causes for state powers of law and order to be enforced; and usually attract media, publicity and encourage debate on the issue, event or cause. For instance, nonviolence principles and tactics have been applied regularly during the last few decades in Australia's forests. To gain a sense of the diversity of people involved in such struggles and of the different (violent and nonviolent) strategies pursued in trying to conserve these ecologically rich landscapes, see *For the Forests: a History of the Tasmanian Forest Campaigns* (2001, The Wilderness Society, Hobart), a compilation of over a hundred interviews and hundreds of graphics (maps, cartoons and photographs) edited by Helen Gee (and other works in [References](#)).

The importance of nonviolence philosophies and activities includes: giving people experience of direct action over their lives and deepest concerns; empowering participants to act in a way that expresses that the personal is the political; developing people's skills and knowledge about ways to defend themselves and the environments that they deeply value in nonviolent ways. While state authorities responded to such well-meant activities with brute, legal and political force – fining, jailing, intimidating and injuring protesters – they also moved to restrict opportunities for people to protest, for instance, reducing public spaces and the regulation and definition of behaviours tolerated in public spaces.

Much of the apathy and demoralisation felt in contemporary society is associated with knowing that the naked and hidden powers of states the world over are all too ready to aggressively support capitalism, i.e. 'freedom' and 'democracy', even in relatively trivial grassroots situations. At the same time, all through the 20th century, civilians have been conscripted to fight even when it conflicted with their personal ethical and rational concerns in a range of wars associated with anti-communist ideology and the protection or access to critical resources, 'resource security'. In contrast many participants in nonviolent actions have developed positions and skills to assist 'power to the people'. Resistance to the development, establishment and use of nuclear power and policies to curb the use and storing of guns increases as people watch machinery and technologies amplifying the power of public authorities, who even privately contract out security activities and have always relied on companies producing military hardware, for use as an armour against their own people and peoples with inferior potential weaponry.

The ban against the August 2007 Camp for Climate Change held adjacent to Heathrow Airport, is an example of the role of the state in supporting business-as-usual by using anti-terrorism legislation against environmental protestors. Heathrow airport processes over 67.5 mn passengers on nearly 470,000 flights pa. The 2005 Serious Organised Crime Act amended the British 1997 Protection from Harassment Act 2005 so that it became an offence to persuade someone – by 'alarm' or 'distress', i.e. harassment – to either not do something that they were 'entitled or required to do' or to act in a way that they were 'not under any obligation to do'. Although the direct action against the proposed new runway for the newest terminal at Heathrow (still in construction at that time) was designed to raise awareness of the implications of global warning and went ahead anyway, BAA successfully sought

to ban it. As pointed out by George Monbiot in his commentary, 'Because it is illegal, the climate camp is now a protest for democracy' in *The Guardian* (7 August 2007), the 1997 act has been used continuously to prevent peaceful protests in Britain. (See too, BBC news coverage of the Camp for Climate Action – <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>).

The significance of this discussion of nonviolent assertion and defence for the main argument here – that social justice and environmental sustainability are impossible without dispensing with monetary relations of production and exchange – is that the last few decades have seen the expansion and intensification of a long tradition of grassroots nonviolent activities that provide experiential learning to inform the defence of communities establishing non-monetary ways of working, living, sustaining and expressing ourselves. As indicated in the introductory quote above, nonviolence is a philosophy, a political and economic way of life, as well as offering tactics and techniques for effectively dealing with force without resorting to violence. These principles and processes contribute model approaches and institutions for pursuing and defending the transition to a compact society.



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