

## Environmental Justice Working together for transformative change

Greg Macdougall  
LINCHPIN

When we talk about the moral and ethical implications of climate change it sounds like something that could put you to sleep. "Morals". "Ethics". A response might be, "stop lecturing me" or "don't you have anything more interesting to talk about?"

But what we're really saying is that the fight for "climate justice" is on the same level as efforts to end slavery, stop genocide, or win the right for women to vote. It's on the same scale, but perhaps even more profound than any of those. What we're saying is that climate justice isn't just a technical thing or an economic thing or a political thing. It's way bigger than any of that.

When we're talking about the potential extinction of 40-70 per cent of the species that live on this planet, and hundreds of millions of people dying prematurely because of climate change, and billions more suffering from those same changes, you might figure out that moral and ethical considerations are actually vitally important things to think about, to talk about and, most importantly, to act on.

You might realize how important it is to get people to have a 40-years-from-now vantage point, one that allows us to fully grasp the magnitude of what is potentially going to happen if we don't change course. If we truly let sink in what we're facing we realize how important it is to do our utmost, beyond any political, economic or technical limits.

One thing to recognize is that animals, who are potentially going to be extinct, are not the perpetrators of the damage to the environment. The hundreds of millions who will die prematurely

are not the ones causing most of the problem. The billions set to suffer won't be the ones most responsible for causing the problem. Instead, the ones with the biggest contributions to the problem are the ones who are most insulated from



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its effects. This is where the term "climate justice" comes in: justice for those who are going to suffer, or die, because of their relationship to a catastrophically changing climate.

Justice would mean that the people, the governments, the industries causing the problem would take responsibility for their actions and the consequences, and dramatically change

course to alter the outcomes for the better. It means those of us with the power to create change need to take responsibility.

Climate justice is related to the more general concept of environmental justice. Environmental justice is the right to a healthy natural environment, about justice for those affected by environmental destruction. It is about working with - not simply for - those most affected in the quest to bring about a positive outcome to the situation. It is about the disproportionate impact of environmental problems on certain groups of people, and also about recognizing that the best solution to the problem will come from impacted communities.

Environmental justice arises out of the intersection between - and inadequacies of - the traditional social justice and environmental movements, bringing together human rights with a respect for nature. An encompassing and defining document is the *17 Principles of Environmental Justice*, drafted and adopted at the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held in 1991 in Washington, D.C. ([www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html](http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html)).

Solidarity work in the context of environmental justice comes in the form of ally groups taking their resources

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### about us>>

Common Cause is an Ontario anarchist organization. We publish the Linchpin paper bimonthly, as well as additional content online. Branches are active in Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto, and there is interest elsewhere, including northern Ontario. We welcome new members and alliances with activist groups. Contact us at:

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- More online at [www.linchpin.ca](http://www.linchpin.ca)

## “Environmental Justice...” cont’d

and support and directing them to where the affected communities/groups would like them. It is also about allowing those communities – primarily women, people of colour and/or the economically disadvantaged – to speak for themselves on the issues that matter to them.

Environmental justice is relatively young in a Canadian context and is not often included in the way the traditional environmental movement operates. (There is actually a lot of resistance from these quarters to the concepts of environmental justice.) But there is a tremendous opportunity to bring in an analysis of the power dynamics involved in environmental organizing, to bring in the communities most directly affected, and to bring in accountability to those communities for what is done in their names.

There is both a need and opportunity for coalitions to come together to address many of the interrelated problems we face: those to do with the environment, poverty, racism, and colonialism. But in any situation where different groups join to work together, there is a responsibility to address the power dynamics that exist and that will otherwise unhinge and undermine

the potential of the coalition work to bring about transformative results.

Race, gender and class are three of the primary power dynamics that need to be addressed to successfully deal with the complex issues facing us. There is a need to change how we talk about these power dynamics, to recognize how they marginalize some to the benefit/privilege of others, and to deconstruct them so as to harness our true power to create change.

We need to change things and change them structurally, not just on a personal level. We are running up against the limits of our infinite growth model of economic and societal development. There is a burgeoning “decroissance” (degrowth) movement that is working on the transformation to a deindustrial society, working to completely change the way we look at society and at the world.

The earth has a limited carrying capacity, and we are in danger of surpassing that limit. We need to change course. This involves things like “steady state economics” and a new version of the 3 Rs: Renouncing the industrial model; Redesigning our societal and cultural paradigms; Rebuilding our society. One part of this “degrowth” is the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by some 90 per cent.

It will be a shift from fossil fuels to decentralized, renewable energy.

We have a choice about the type of world we want to live in, and “we” can refer to any or all of our world, our nation, our province, our city, our group, our neighbourhood. On all these levels, we will be choosing between transformative change or business as usual, with business as usual almost certainly leading to devastating effects.

We now stand at a point where the movements for climate justice, for environmental justice, need people to really get things going in the right direction, bringing all the key aspects together as we move forward. We can be those people. We need to be.

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*This article is a combination of the ideas on environmental justice presented by Anjali Helferty, Clayton Thomas-Muller, Graham Saul, Ben Powless, and Bob Thomson at the Organizing For Justice conference ([www.org4justice.wordpress.com](http://www.org4justice.wordpress.com)) held Nov 20-22, 2008 in Ottawa. For further reading see Andil Gosine and Cheryl Teelucksingh, Environmental Justice and Racism in Canada (Emond Montgomery Publications [www.emp.ca](http://www.emp.ca), 2008).*

# Anarchism 101: Social Ecology

Campbell Young  
LINCHPIN

These days, concern for the state of the planet is all the rage in the mainstream media. But an ecological perspective on things is nothing new in anarchism. In fact, one of the first serious “green” thinkers of modern times was also a social anarchist. Murray Bookchin (1921-2006), the American philosopher/activist who was an early pioneer in the ecology movement, also played a major role in getting anarchism back on the political landscape.

Through numerous books and articles, Bookchin developed a radical, coherent analysis of such diverse topics as cities, revolutions, technology, gender, and labour. As a whole, he called his praxis (praxis = thought + action) social ecology.

The basic idea of social ecology is that a given society’s view of nature re-

flects the social relations of that society. Early human communities (and many existing aboriginal communities) saw themselves as equal participants in nature because there was a high degree of equality in their societies. But as hierarchy – sexism, age-ism, racism, class, etc – developed through history, so too did a domineering attitude toward the natural world. For Bookchin, “the very idea of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human.” In other words, a society in which people see each other

as instruments of domination is bound to see nature as an object to be exploited.

This has reached a crisis point in the present age. Competition dictates that the state-capitalist system must “grow-or-die” to stay alive, swallowing up every one and every thing in the process. No matter how “environmentally friendly” some corporations claim to be, the capitalist system as a whole will eventually outgrow the biosphere in its quest to control labour, mar-

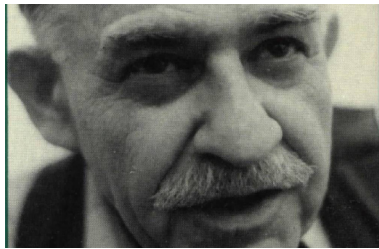
kets, and resources. To do so it must break down every vestige of community, creating new, often irrational, “needs” in people.

Unlike other radical eco-philosophies such as primitivism and deep ecology, social ecology does not take a negative and simplistic view toward technology, civilization, and human progress. While hierarchy has expanded through history, the potential for freedom has also taken on a wider scope with resistance, revolution, and utopian visions.

Thus, for social ecology, efforts to heal the planet are ultimately futile without revolutionary action to bring about a cooperative, libertarian-socialist society. Appropriate technologies are important, but they must find their place in decentralized, confederated, and directly democratic communities.

As Bookchin once wrote: “The notion that what exists must necessarily exist is the acid that corrodes all visionary thinking.”

*More info:*  
[www.social-ecology.org](http://www.social-ecology.org)  
[www.communalism.org](http://www.communalism.org)



Murray Bookchin

# Women organizing within

## An interview with the IWW Edmonton Women's Committee

Women often feel the need to organize as women within larger organizations – including the more radical and leftist ones – in order to fight against inequality between men and women, develop their own voice and feel empowered by it. A great example is the Women's Committee of the Edmonton, Alberta branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a union that believes in workers' power to organize ourselves and take the fight directly to the bosses without other people acting on our behalf. Karine Welm interviewed one member of the Women's Committee. We hope this interview will empower and encourage other women to organize within their own organizations.

**Linchpin:** Could you explain what the I.W.W. is in brief and tell us a little bit about the Edmonton branch?

**Women's Committee:** The I.W.W. is founded on the idea that the working class and the ruling class have nothing in common. Often, the employing class are the only ones who can afford the goods and services the working people provide. Instead of allowing the possibility for workers to be further exploited by giving power to union leaders, the I.W.W. strives to put power of production back into the hands of the workers. In this way, organizing as one class, one union, instead of industry by industry, an injury to one becomes an injury to all.

The Edmonton I.W.W. branch was founded in 1998 with 10 members. Since then, the branch has grown to have about 50-60 members, with 25-30 active members.

**Linchpin:** When and Why was a Women's Committee started within the I.W.W. Edmonton branch?

**Women's Committee:** Gender-related issues came to the forefront in April 2006, with two items on the agenda: women-cut union t-shirts and the formation of a sexual harassment policy. The Anti-Harassment committee was then started. In

October of 2006 we were looking into the possibility of starting a Women's Committee, and by December 2006 we elected our first chair and began operating formally.

**Linchpin:** Could you explain how the women's committee started and how it was perceived?



IWW Edmonton Marches on May Day, 2007. <http://edmonton.iww.ca/>

**Women's Committee:** With the branch rapidly growing in size, the anti-harassment policy was instated in order to have a structure in place to deal with potential issues that might arise. The Women's Committee was formed with the desire to continue bringing a feminist voice to the forefront of the worker's movement, to work with our allies, and other Wobblies, to address issues of sexism and gender discrimination that bosses use to divide the working class. In doing this, we may be truly united in the one big union. Initially, the group was sometimes reacted to with misunderstanding, but the dedication and thoroughness of committee members proved to impress all members of the branch. There's not a doubt in my mind we'll continue to do so.

**Linchpin:** Why do you think it's important to have this type of group within organizations such as the I.W.W.?

**Women's Committee:** The I.W.W. is a union for all workers, regardless of race, religion, nationality, sex, or sexual orientation. In my personal belief, here in the union and otherwise, committees like these are essential: while it is important to see ourselves as a specific group with a specific focus, that should not suggest we

ignore or downplay our rich differences as individuals. Our individuality makes us who we are as persons; our united visions make us who we are as a global community.

**Linchpin:** What activities are the Women's Committee currently doing or planning on doing in the near future?

**Women's Committee:** The Women's Committee is currently tackling smaller ideas until we're able to build stronger outreach with other like-minded groups. At present, we're ordering more women-related books for the Literature Committee, and are at work producing pamphlets. We wish to share our literature with other branches in the union, and do tabling at various local activities.

For International Women's Day and May Day, we're looking into two separate evenings of documentary screenings and discussion tables. So far, our focus is directed towards unionism of sex trade workers, and transgender workplace issues.

**Linchpin:** What would you say to other women that are trying to start this type of group within other organizations?

**Women's Committee:** Believe, inside and out, that what you're doing is important, relevant, and necessary. You can't fail.

## On the Web

More available at [www.linchpin.ca](http://www.linchpin.ca)

### Taiiake Alfred

- Mohawk Anarcha-Indigenist speaks at McMaster University

### Anarchism everywhere

- New *Sunrise Anarchist Collective* in Portland, Oregon
- *NEFAC* Quebec metamorphosizes into *Union Communiste Libertaire*

### Anarchism and the psychology of motivation

- Human needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy will make an anarchist society work

### Hamilton organizing against health care cuts

# Strike at York University

## On the frontlines against precarious work

By Petre Marin  
LINCHPIN

CUPE 3903 members at York University have been on strike since November 6, 2008. The 3,400 contract faculty, teaching assistants and graduate assistants decided to bear the bitter cold and head for the picket lines following management's refusal to consider their demands. Much is at stake in this strike, for CUPE 3903 members and beyond.

The workers' demands include wage increases of 11% over two years to keep up with the rise in the cost of living in one of Canada's most expensive cities. They are also demanding increased funding to benefits to reflect a 28% growth in membership. Another important demand is job security for contract faculty whose contracts typically last only one semester. These workers are required to re-apply for their job over and over every few months even as many of them have been teaching for years, sometimes decades.

Thus far the university has not offered anything that would increase job security for contract faculty. The university has offered a 9.25% wage "increase" over three years. However, by the union's calculations, when inflation and proposed reductions to other benefits are taken into account, the "increase" actually becomes a decrease of over 1% per year. Meanwhile, the salaries of top management officials have risen between 15-43% over the past three years. Similarly, the university's offer to increase child care funding (many members are parents) by \$1,500 is hard to take seriously. The current child care fund only provides benefits to 30 members out of a membership of 3,400, and the proposed increase amounts to just over \$2.25 per worker.

Already, a majority of CUPE 3903 members make wages below the poverty line. For example, teaching assistants,

who are the largest group within the union, make \$17,386 per year minus \$3,700 for tuition. They cannot legally work a second job as full-time students. For all members, anything less than victory in this round of bargaining would mean increased poverty, more student debt and continued insecurity.

But even more is at stake here. In 2001 CUPE 3903 members won significant roll backs in tuition for themselves and have since continued to be among the strongest forces against rising tuition costs. A setback for CUPE 3903 will mean a setback for the struggle for free education for all students. This is why the anti-strike opposition of some York undergraduate students is incredibly short-sighted.

As inadequate as it is, CUPE 3903 members have the best contract in the province – a reflection of the incredibly low wages and dire working conditions across the sector. For example, teaching assistants at McMaster University in Hamilton earn a little over half of what York TAs earn and do not receive a tuition rebate. Wages and working conditions are even lower at most other Ontario universities.

Thus CUPE 3903's contracts are the standard in the sector. Whether this standard is lowered or raised will have a significant impact on all part-time education workers in the university sector. For this reason other part-time education workers' unions, such as CUPE 3906 at McMaster University, are supporting the strike.

The struggle of CUPE 3903 members is also significant for all precarious workers. The past decades of neoliberal restructuring led by governments of all stripes have produced an explosion of low-wage work with non-existent job security or benefits. More and more of us are working part-time and/or temporary jobs that come without pensions, health benefits, child care and other basic needs. A victory by CUPE 3903 will thus be an example of hope for all

precarious workers that through common struggle we can improve our lives and the lives of those around us.

This strike has the potential to be a long fight. The university's actions raise doubts about whether they are bargaining in good faith or simply hoping that the union will give in under pressure from angry students and economic hardship. Whatever the university's intentions, CUPE 3903 members have a proud history of solidarity and holding out until victory. As anyone who has been to the picket lines recently can see, the workers are well-organized and most importantly they have a high morale. Other unions, student groups and other organizations have also thrown their support behind the strike. Given all that is at stake, it is encouraging to see that CUPE 3903 members will not be alone in fighting this battle.



3903 rallies support from undergrads and other unions

## Events

### Hamilton

Anarchist Discussion Group: The Role of the Anarchist Organization  
Monday December 15, 7 pm  
Sky Dragon Centre - ground floor  
27 King William Street

### Ottawa

Anarchafeminism Discussion  
January 2009  
Details, location TBA  
Contact: a\_ottawa@mutualaid.org

## Linchpin Locations

Where you can find a copy of the Linchpin:

### Hamilton

The Skydragon Centre, 27 King William Street

### London

Empowerment Infoshop, 636 Queen Street

### Ottawa

Exile Infoshop, 256 Bank Street

### Toronto

Toronto Women's Bookstore, 73 Harbord Street

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