

Debating Population

**Articles & Arguments on
Population, Immigration &
Climate Change**

**Ian Angus, Simon Butler
& Ben Courtice**

Contents

Should Climate Activists Support Limits on Immigration? by Ian Angus & Simon Butler	3
'I=PAT' Means Nothing, Proves Nothing by Ben Courtice	26
Do Individual Consumers Cause Climate Change? by Ian Angus	32

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Should Climate Activists Support Limits on Immigration?

By Ian Angus & Simon Butler

Immigrants to the developed world have frequently been blamed for unemployment, crime and other social ills. Attempts to reduce or block immigration have been justified as necessary measures to protect “our way of life” from alien influences.

Today, some environmentalists go farther, arguing that sharp cuts in immigration are needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow climate change. However sincere and well-meaning such activists may be, their arguments are wrong and dangerous, and should be rejected by the climate emergency movement.

Lifeboat ethics & anti-immigrant bigots

“Environmental” arguments for reducing immigration aren’t new. In a 1974 article, “Lifeboat Ethics: the Case Against Helping the Poor”, US biologist Garrett Hardin argued that “a nation’s land has a limited capacity to support a population and as the current energy crisis has shown us, in some ways we have already exceeded the carrying capacity of our land”. Immigration, he said, was “speeding up the destruction of the environment of the rich countries”. Elsewhere he wrote: “Overpopulation can be avoided only if borders are secure; otherwise poor and overpopulated nations will export their excess to richer and less populated nations.”

Hardin’s ideas have been very influential in the development of the right-wing, anti-immigration movement in the US and elsewhere. In 1979, he helped to found the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), an anti-immigrant lobbying

Ian Angus is the editor of the Canada-based online journal *Climate and Capitalism*. **Simon Butler** is a member of the Socialist Alliance in Australia and is co-editor of *Green Left Weekly*. Angus and Butler are the authors of *Too Many People: Population, Immigration and the Environmental Crisis* (Haymarket Books: Chicago, 2011).

group that has been named a “hate organisation” by the Southern Poverty Law Center. In addition to the usual array of anti-immigrant arguments FAIR has made a particular point of linking concerns about the environment with opposition to immigration.

Virginia Abernethy, a Hardin collaborator who calls herself an “ethnic separatist”, argues that the ability to migrate to rich countries gives people in poor countries an incentive to have bigger families. “The US would help, not harm, by encouraging an appreciation of limits sooner rather than later. A relatively closed US border would create most vividly an image of limits and be an incentive to restrict family size.”

Shifting gears

In the past, the “environmental” anti-immigration argument was: *immigrants should be kept out because their way of life is a threat to our environment*. That argument is still made by anti-immigrant groups and some conservationists. Recently, as concern about greenhouse gas emissions and global warming increased, the anti-immigrant argument has taken on a new form. Now the argument is: *immigrants should be kept out because our way of life is a threat to the world’s environment*.

That’s the argument made in a recent briefing from the US Centre for Immigration Studies, a “think tank” founded by FAIR: it says that immigration worsens CO₂ emissions “because it transfers population from lower-polluting parts of the world to the United States, which is a higher polluting country”. CIS calculated that the “average immigrant” to the US contributed four times more CO₂ than in their country of origin.

Otis Graham, a founder of FAIR, made the same argument in his 2004 book *Unguarded Gates*:

Most immigrants ... move from poor societies to richer ones, intending to do what they almost always succeed in doing, take on a higher standard of living that carries a larger ecological footprint. This being the case, the logic of the relationship is straightforward. Population growth in both poor and wealthy societies, but especially in the latter, intensifies environmental problems. Where immigration shifts population numbers to wealthier societies, it does not leave global environmental damage the same, but intensifies global as well as local environmental degradation.

A recent FAIR report claims that increased population is the primary cause of the huge increase in US greenhouse gas emissions between 1973 and 2007 — and that the population increase was caused by immigration. “The United States will not be able to achieve any meaningful reductions in CO₂ emissions without serious economic and social consequences for American citizens unless immigration is sharply curtailed.”

The racist British National Party, which likes to call itself the “true green party” because it opposes immigration, also uses this argument. BNP leader Nick Griffin

recently told the European parliament that climate change isn't real — but that hasn't stopped him saying immigrants will make it worse. He told author Steven Faris that by accepting immigrants from the Third World, "We're massively increasing their impact of carbon release into the world's atmosphere. There's no doubt about it, the Western way of life is not sustainable. So what on Earth is the point of turning more people into Westerners?" (It is significant that none of these supposed defenders of the environment take their argument to its logical conclusion: if immigration to the North is bad for the climate then emigration to poor countries with low emissions must be good and should be encouraged.)

Greens versus immigration

For anti-immigration bigots, concern for the environment is just a ploy — they'll say anything to justify keeping immigrants out. It's an example of what author and feminist activist Betsy Hartmann has called "the greening of hate — blaming environmental degradation on poor populations of colour." But it is particularly disturbing to witness the promotion of similar arguments in the mainstream media, and by environmental activists whose political views are otherwise hostile to those of FAIR and the BNP.

For example, Ross Gittins, economics editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, said in 2008 that cutting Australia's immigration was "one of the quickest and easiest ways to reduce the growth in our emissions" because "it's a safe bet they'd be emitting more in prosperous Australia than they were before". Australian renewable energy expert Mark Diesendorf has urged the Australian Greens to call for immigration restrictions because Australia is such a big polluter. "Australia is world's biggest per capita emitter of greenhouse gases. So every additional Australian has a bigger impact than anywhere else."

Even the highly respected US environmentalist Bill McKibben has written that "the immigration-limiters ... have a reasonable point", because "If you're worried about shredding the global environment, the prospect of twice as many world-champion super-consumer Americans has got to worry you."

Noted environmentalist and journalist Tim Flannery made a similar argument during a debate on immigration policy broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in September 2009:

Growing Australia's population has a much greater impact than growing the population of a poor country. We are the heaviest carbon users in the world, about 23 tonnes per capita, so people that come to this country from anywhere on the planet will result almost certainly in an increase carbon emissions ...

As these examples show, "green" arguments against immigration are no longer the

exclusive property of anti-immigrant bigots. They are increasingly heard within the climate movement, and so require strong answers from climate activists.

Wrong diagnosis, wrong cure

The view that stopping immigration to wealthy countries is a good way to fight global warming rests on the simplistic idea that because immigrants come from countries with low per capita emissions to countries with high per capita emissions they supposedly increase total emissions simply by moving. This argument is false on its face.

To calculate “per capita emissions”, we simply divide a country’s total greenhouse gas emissions by its total population. This provides a useful baseline for comparing countries of different sizes — but it tells us nothing at all about the emissions that can actually be attributed to individuals.

In fact, most emissions are caused by industrial and other processes over which individuals have no control.

In Canada, for example, no change in the number of immigrants will have any effect on the oil extraction industry at the Alberta Tar Sands, described by George Monbiot as “the world’s biggest single industrial source of carbonemissions”.

Reducing immigration to the United States will have no effect whatsoever on the massive military spending — up 50% in the past decade — which ensures that the Pentagon is the world’s biggest consumer of oil. To put that in context: a study published in March 2008 found that the CO₂ emissions caused directly by the Iraq war until then were equivalent to putting 25 million more cars on the road in the US.

Closing Australia’s borders would have had no effect on the climate denial policies of the previous Liberal Party government, or on the current Labor government’s determination to continue Australia’s role as “the world’s largest ‘coal mule’”.

As US immigrant rights campaigner Patricia Huang has pointed out, “the relationship between population growth and environmental destruction is shaped by how we use our resources, not by the number of people who use them”.

Labeling migrants as a climate change problem is not only unjust, but it obscures the real challenges the climate movement faces. The decisive question we must address is who makes decisions about resource use in society. In capitalist society, the big financial institutions, multinational corporations and fossil fuel companies wield this power with devastating results for the planet’s ecosystems — and governments do their bidding.

Focusing on immigration diverts attention from the real social and economic causes of global warming, and makes it more difficult to solve them. This approach

mistakenly links the trends of population and ecological harm, and so misdiagnoses the root causes of the current environmental crisis. It leaves social change out of the equation or consigns it to the far future. It downplays or ignores the fact that immigration would have a very different impact in the zero-emissions economy we need to fight for.

As we've seen, the argument that reducing immigration will protect the environment

Myth of overpopulation

The myth of overpopulation is one of the most pervasive myths in Western society, so deeply ingrained in the culture that it profoundly shapes the culture's world view. The myth is compelling because of its simplicity. More people equal fewer resources, and more hunger, poverty, environmental degradation, and political instability. This equation helps explain away the troubling human suffering in that "other" world beyond the neat borders of affluence. By procreating, the poor create their own poverty. We are absolved of responsibility and freed from complexity.

The population issue is complex. To put it into proper perspective requires exploring many realms of human experience and addressing difficult philosophical and ethical questions. It entails making connections between fields of thought that have become disconnected as the result of narrow academic specialization. It demands the sharpening of critical faculties and clearing the mind of received orthodoxies. And above all, it involves transcending the alienation embodied in the very terms "population bomb" and "population explosion". Such metaphors suggest destructive technological processes outside human control. But the population issue is about living people, not abstract statistics.

The myth of overpopulation is destructive because it prevents constructive thinking and action on reproductive issues. Instead of clarifying our understanding of these issues, it obfuscates our vision and limits our ability to see the real problems and find workable solutions. Worst of all, it breeds racism and turns women's bodies into a political battlefield. It is a philosophy based on fear, not understanding.

— Betsy Hartmann, *Reproductive Rights & Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control*

originated with right-wing, anti-immigrant bigots. Our major concern, however, is that virtually identical arguments have been adopted by progressive activists and writers who are sincerely concerned about global warming.

Despite their sincerity, their arguments betray regrettable pessimism about our common ability to build a climate emergency movement that is powerful enough to win the anti-emissions fight. As Larry Lohmann of Cornerhouse writes, the anti-immigration argument “relies on the premise that changing Northern lifestyles is a lower priority, or less achievable, than preventing others from sharing them”.

Sadly, some groups that favor immigration control seem oblivious to the danger of lending credibility to bigots and racists who view immigrants as a threat to “our” way of life.

For example, last year the Australian Conservation Foundation praised Labor MP Kelvin Thompson, and Sustainable Population Australia named him to its “Population Role of Honour” when he called for immigration cuts to deal with climate change. Both ignored the fact that just 10 days earlier Thomson had revealed his real motives by calling for immigration cuts “to minimise the risk that people who do not respect Australia’s laws and legal system will enter this country”.

The anti-immigration response to climate change raises a huge wall between the climate movement and the most oppressed working people in the imperialist countries. How can we possibly win migrants and refugees to the climate movement while simultaneously accusing them of responsibility for rising emissions and asking the government to bar them and their families from entering the country?

What’s more, it undermines efforts to work with the growing and important climate justice movement in the Third World, where global warming is now producing its first and most devastating effects. How can we expect to be taken seriously as allies, if we tell those movements that migrants are not welcome in our countries?

The Climate Justice and Migration Working Group, an international coalition of human rights and immigrant rights groups, estimates that between 25 and 50 million people have already been displaced by environmental change, and that could rise to 150 million by 2050. It calls for recognition of the right of human mobility across borders as an essential response to the climate change threat.

The climate justice movement in the rich countries has a particular responsibility to support this demand — but blaming immigrants in general for global warming will make it more difficult to win public support for climate refugees.

Despite the good intentions of its green advocates, support for immigration controls strengthens the most regressive forces in our societies and weakens our ability to stop climate change.

It gives conservative governments and reactionary politicians an easy out, allowing them to pose as friends of the environment by restricting immigration, while doing nothing to reduce real emissions.

It hands a weapon to climate change deniers, allowing them to portray the climate movement as hostile to the legitimate aspirations of the poorest and most oppressed people in the world.

People are not pollution. Inserting immigration into the climate change debate divides the environmental movement along race, class and gender lines, at a time when the broadest possible unity is essential. It is a dangerous diversion from the real issues, one the movement cannot afford and should not support. ■

Responses to ‘Should Climate Activists Support Limits on Immigration?’

IBS: Thanks for posting this. It’s funny how so many ideas for “saving the planet” really come down to ideas for saving the privileged lifestyles of the wealthy. I’m reminded of this project for people in rich nations to encourage birth control in poor countries as a way of combating climate change. I wonder how the math works: how many less Africans for an LCD television?

DAVE GARDNER: I have to take exception to this. It is telling that 50% of this piece is spent passing on the author’s assumptions about the motivations and attitudes of various groups and individuals who have advocated in some way for limited immigration. No facts, just assumptions, which have little to do with the wisdom of limiting immigration. And the assumptions are, in many cases, just wrong. But it is a waste of time to argue about the motivations, when we should be examining the merits of public policies that either encourage mass immigration or discourage mass immigration into the UK, Australia, the US and Canada — the big overconsumers.

When the authors do finally move beyond allegations of bigotry, they still get it wrong. They assume (yes, more assumptions) that a nation’s industrial production is in no way related to the number of consumers or the number of cheap workers available in that nation. There is a relationship.

They also fail to address the pressure these overconsuming nations, hooked on growth, feel to keep feeding the beast. They import consumers/workers and now they have to provide social services and infrastructure. They believe added tax revenue is the answer to that, so they try to grow their economy and their population even more, in order to increase tax revenue. Even the military operations expand, as there are

more mouths to feed and gas tanks to fill. And the cycle plays on.

How do we stop this cycle? Yes, we absolutely must address the overconsumption, both in gross terms and on a per capita basis. But we also must get these systems unhooked from perpetual expansion. Whether your focus is on importing cheap labor, more consumers, or more taxpayers, your nation, state or city's prosperity strategy is unsustainable.

And like it or not, a nation's footprint is the product of per capita resource intensity x population.

While compassion may tempt one to promote open borders, there are many big-picture public policy reasons to reconsider:

1. We cannot continue to abdicate sustainable population policy to future generations or unknown political subdivisions. Every city, state and nation needs to get unhooked from growth and discontinue economic growth policies that encourage and depend on population growth.

2. Importing the most ambitious workers from poorer nations is exploitative. It separates them from their families and their homes, crowds them into substandard living conditions, and pays them unfairly low wages so the wealthy can get things on the cheap. It may appear humane on the surface, but over the long haul it is the least humane choice. It dooms the donor nations to develop much more slowly, because the ambitious just leave rather than improving conditions at home.

3. It does turn them into superconsumers much more quickly. I can guarantee you they are shopping at Wal-Mart within weeks of their arrival. Instead of exploiting them to drive Wal-Mart profits and provide the labor for continued unsustainable expansion and sprawl, we should focus all our energy on helping them improve their own nations and develop in a way that does not follow our pattern.

Yes, our pattern is wrong. Yes, we have no right to plunder the planet and prevent others from following in our footsteps. But their survival and quality of life, as much as ours, depends on everybody shifting to a new system as quickly as possible. There is a blank slate in the donor nations, and an ambitious workforce available, if we in the richer nations can get over our desire to have cheap construction, landscaping and housekeeping while calling it humanitarian.

PHIL CAFARO: Should climate activists support limits on immigration? Absolutely, if their main concern is limiting greenhouse gas emissions and the threat of catastrophic global climate change.

According to the US Department of Energy, between 1990 and 2003 US per capita CO₂ emissions increased 3.2%, while total US CO₂ emissions increased 20.2%. Why

the discrepancy?

During that same period, America's population increased 16.1%. More people drove more cars, built more houses, etc. Population growth greatly increased total emissions, and it is total emissions, not per capita emissions, that quantify the full US contribution to global warming.

There are pros and cons to increasing or decreasing immigration into the US. Policy discussions of the issue would be strengthened by more attention to the numbers, and less ad hominem attacks on people whose views one disagrees with.

Those looking for the best up-to-date analysis of the impact of US immigration on worldwide greenhouse gas emissions should read the study by Kolankiewicz and Camarota.

MARY: Unexamined assumptions do seem to be a problem with the authors. But with “helping them [people from poor countries] improve their own nations” and “develop in a way that does not follow our pattern”, Dave Gardner seems to display a few himself. Surely how “they” develop their own nations and regions is up to them? Otherwise we seem to be back in the days of the “white man’s burden”.

Furthermore, Dave seems to assume that “we in the richer nations” are all well-off, something belied by the ongoing economic crisis. For example, basic infrastructure in the USA needs massive regeneration.

DAVE GARDNER: Mary, the developing nations ask for our support. And the humanitarian thing to do is to give it. I'm suggesting it be in the form of developing clean technologies, education, etc. Not in the form of exporting our dirty industries to their shores.

And I'm suggesting, if they want our help, that we encourage them *not* to make the same mistakes we've made — which have landed us in the predicament we today find ourselves in. And even though we have gone down a dead-end road, we are *materially* richer than those nations — significantly, even with our current economic crisis. So I think my points stand. The critical thing for all of us is that we end the era of unbridled economic growth, consumption and plunder and move the entire world in a sustainable direction as soon as possible.

GLEN COLTON: It was not “right-wing, anti-immigrant bigots” that first supported reducing immigration to help the environment. It was actually all mainstream environmental organisations that supported US population stabilisation in the late 1960s and into the '70s. Back then it was generally agreed that the US had enough

people (at 170 million) and our population should be stabilised to help save the environment.

If we are to address climate change as an issue, we must address both consumption levels and population. Working on one to the exclusion of the other is shortsighted and will not result in a meaningful reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

I would also ask the authors to consider how hypocritical it appears to mainstream America, and how harmful it is to efforts to convince Americans of the urgency of global climate change, to ignore the population/immigration side of the problem. In effect, climate change reduction advocates are asking, in fact demanding, that all Americans significantly change their lifestyles, quit driving cars, pay more for energy, and otherwise make what many consider, inordinate sacrifices to reduce their individual “climate footprint”. Then, when it is suggested that we don’t add more people through mass immigration to the highest consumption countries in the world, people like the authors call people names like “right-wing, xenophobic, bigots”. Well, in my book, that doesn’t go over very well with the majority of the people that we are trying to convince that global climate change is a dire threat to the world. And we wonder why there is such a backlash to proposals like climate change legislation.

So, if we, as environmentalists really want to make progress on climate change we must address the reality of both individual consumption and population in the wealthiest of countries. And this means reducing immigration to these countries and helping people in their own countries. To not address both, will result in a failure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a meaningful way.

It is time for people like the authors to quit throwing stones at immigration reductionists and work towards real solutions to global warming.

TAYA: Immigration is a very odd concept. Insiders and Outsiders. Hmmmm. I suppose we should have had much stronger immigration laws regarding migrant workers/traders 500+ years ago. So strange ... capitalism and nationalism really IS oxymoronic. Hey, I thought everyone was all free and equal ...

DAVE GARDNER: Well, Taya, *who* do you propose take some responsibility for stabilising and eventually reducing population?

MARY: Fair point, Dave ... if our clean technologies prove to be as attractive and useful — I guess that is partly a technical problem. I wonder how far ingenuity can get around the ecological burden imposed by production (production which is in some sense justified by other than profit, though in what sense and by whom is another

issue).

DAVE GARDNER: I don't believe there is any reason to believe technology can prevent us from destroying our home and resources if we ignore the perils of economic growth and population growth. Today's solutions usually end up being tomorrow's problems.

TAYA: No one is illegal. How will a discussion even begin to include ecosystems as living "citizen" when "we" are still attempting to exclude some people as deserving "citizens" or not?

It is definitely the "we" that has posed problems historically. As for myself, I can't imagine having the power or temerity ... to decide borders ... to decide who is illegal ... who is legal.

Indeed, I find it incredibly ironic that the very beneficiaries of colonial genocidal practices (the old settlers) are at the forefront of limiting new settlers. How sad and truly has little to do with climate justice.

GLEN COLTON: Tanya, Trite sayings like "no one is illegal" are not going to save the planet from global warming.

It just shows that your concept of "climate justice" is more important to you than taking real action to reduce climate change in the very countries that have the highest rates of consumption. Open borders will not solve climate change, but could certainly make it worse.

JEFF WHITE: Barring the door to immigration does nothing to reduce the wasteful and environmentally destructive nature of the capitalist system that rules in the "advanced" countries of the world. This is a system that is by definition unsustainable and wasteful, regardless of how low you drive the population down.

Barring immigration is the state-level analogue of the "gated community" mentality — we'll put up walls to keep out the world's riff-raff so they won't be able to move into our cities, eat our food, and pollute our air and water. We want to keep that exclusive right all for ourselves.

Of course, if those who seek to immigrate also come from countries where the per capita ecological footprint is high, then there's no reason to exclude them, because it's a zero sum. So it's only the Asians, Latinos, and Africans (the ones with the small ecological footprints) who have to be excluded —for the good of the human race, don'tcha know?

How stupid do you have to be not to recognise the rampant xenophobia behind this?

Why stop at barring immigrants? If the theory is that things will be better if we forcibly keep immigrants out, why not start forcibly exiling North Americans to the global south? That would simply follow the “logic” of not letting any more people in. Think of it as “undoing” the immigration policy errors of the past! And how about forcibly sterilising the people who are already here? That would work, too.

GLEN COLTON: Jeff, The most rabid capitalists encourage immigration to the most consumptive countries like the US and Europe because it feeds their capitalist machine. So, when you argue for more immigration you are actually supporting the capitalist machine you so despise. And, I don't support mass immigration to the US from any country, whether a poor, Third World country, or a developed country for economic and environmental reasons.

The more people we add to the US and the more we grow our population/economy, the more pressure there is for our government and corporations to take the resources from other poorer countries. I don't think that is fair to those other countries, do you?

JEFF WHITE: Glen, in case you haven't noticed, the “most rabid capitalists” don't need to bring people to the USA in order to exploit their labour and get them to consume commodities. Capitalism is happy to go to the far corners of the world, if need be, to recruit cheap labour for their offshore operations and to peddle to the global south their Coca Cola and their Big Macs. Anyone who imagines that curbing immigration will somehow starve the capitalists of labour and markets doesn't understand the international nature of capitalism.

And to suggest that US imperialist exploitation of “developing” countries is somehow driven by “pressure” from domestic US population growth is to display an even more profound ignorance of how capitalism operates. Was the pressure of population growth in Belgium in the 1880s responsible for the rapacious plunder and genocide against the Congo? Were the activities of the East India Company in the 17th century driven by population pressures in England? Of course not. Capitalism needs no excuses or external pressure to look for new markets and new resources to exploit; its drive to do so is built right into its DNA.

So don't pretend to be fighting capitalism or helping “poor” countries by turning your back on the vast majority of humanity at whose terrible cost the wealth of your society has been built.

GLEN COLTON: Well, I guess we just need to let everyone move here and that will take care of climate change.

TIM: Well said Jeff. The climate crisis is an international systemic crisis and the resistance to that system must also be internationalist. The only thing that can wrest concessions from and ultimately destroy capitalism in the interest of human wellbeing and ecological restoration is an international mass democratic movement from below of workers and the oppressed. This is a great example of why green politics must also be red politics.

Right-wing and liberal green politics are both dead ends. They lead to ineffective and elitist top-down proposals and economic nationalism in which either the needs of the many are ignored or the ecological sustainability intended is a mirage. This is largely due to a lack of understanding about how capitalism operates and a blindness to the problem of class.

But socialists and/or green activists who recognise that capitalism has to be challenged should really know better than to fall for this disgusting anti-immigrant claptrap. We all know how terrible the old “socialism in one country” idea was. Now try “ecosocialism in one country”!

DAVE GARDNER: Here’s the deal:

1. If you really want what is best over the long haul for the people in the poorest nations, is stealing their most ambitious workers to grow the US economy really the answer?

2. If you believe the capitalist system is unsustainable, do you have a better chance of spreading ecosocialism by first importing and indoctrinating people into the capitalist system? Or might it be wise to encourage the people in other nations who want a better life to leapfrog over our capitalist experiment and build a more sustainable system in their nation, where they are working with a clean slate?

3. Unfortunately we need borders in order to have accountability. Seven billion people on the planet makes it very easy to abdicate or diffuse responsibility — whether it’s responsibility for sustainable economies or sustainable population levels. We absolutely have to get smaller groups of people to start taking responsibility for these things. Otherwise, we’re always waiting for the other guy to take responsible action first.

Does your town or city believe it has to grow to have a “healthy” economy? Probably. Does your nation? Most likely. Some are quite open about that, others have a prosperity policy based on growth that is more covert. Whether they admit it or not,

they link population growth with population growth. How do you propose we have a sustainable world as long as it's subdivisions have unsustainable goals?

So importing people (workers, consumers, taxpayers) feeds their growth addiction. They are assisted in this exploitative, unsustainable Ponzi scheme by well-intentioned progressives (including, apparently, ecosocialists) who want to be compassionate today to an immigrant trying to improve his or her life. But today's compassion perpetuates the greater evil of seeking perpetual economic growth. And it retards real progress worldwide in improving the lives of billions of would-be but cannot-be migrants and delays real progress in killing the destructive, overconsuming, growth-obsessed capitalist beast. I thought I was an ecosocialist. But if membership in this club requires having a closed mind to the big picture of how to most quickly (and actually more humanely) achieve global sustainability, then I must be out.

JEFF WHITE: Dave Gardner's words appear in italics below:

1. *If you really want what is best over the long haul for the people in the poorest nations, is stealing their most ambitious workers to grow the US economy really the answer?*

Your bizarre suggestion that allowing immigration is tantamount to "stealing" ambitious workers has no support at all from other countries. Where are the "poor nations" who are begging the USA to slam the door shut on immigration? Please name some.

If you really want the rest of the world not to hate the United States so much that they are willing to fly airplanes into your buildings, do you really want to tell them that they can't live in your country, and pretend that keeping them out is for their own good? Especially after your country has done more than any other to make their lives miserable and turn many of them into climate refugees?

2. *If you believe the capitalist system is unsustainable, do you have a better chance of spreading ecosocialism by first importing and indoctrinating people into the capitalist system? Or might it be wise to encourage the people in other nations who want a better life to leap-frog over our capitalist experiment and build a more sustainable system in their nation, where they are working with a clean slate?*

Translation: "Now that our system of neoliberal monopoly capitalism has succeeded in plundering much of the wealth of your country and destroying your environment, we intend to hold onto that wealth and leave you to fend for yourselves, in the hope that you will find a way to fix the colossal mess we have made of the world. Go away and come back when you've figured out how to do that. After all, we wouldn't want to corrupt you with our ways." And "clean slate"? What does that mean? Can you

name a single country that can be said to have a “clean slate”? Haiti perhaps? Nigeria? Honduras? Indonesia? France?

3. *Unfortunately we need borders in order to have accountability. Capitalism doesn't respect borders — it's become a worldwide system of “free trade” agreements where money, commodities, raw materials, and military forces move freely around the globe, to wherever there is a profit to be made, a natural resource to exploit and despoil, or a rebellious population to control.*

Accountability must be demanded first and foremost from the capitalist system. This has nothing to do with borders. So importing people (workers, consumers, taxpayers) feeds their growth addiction. They are assisted in this exploitative, unsustainable Ponzi scheme by well-intentioned progressives (including, apparently, ecosocialists) who want to be compassionate today to an immigrant trying to improve his or her life. But today's compassion perpetuates the greater evil of seeking perpetual economic growth.

If you read my previous comment directed to Glen Colton, you will see in the first paragraph how I explained that stopping immigration is not going to prevent the continuing growth and expansion of capitalism, which cares nothing for the international borders you are so eager to defend. It's unfortunate that someone who purports to be producing a documentary on growth understands it so poorly.

4. *I thought I was an ecosocialist. But if membership in this club requires having a closed mind to the big picture of how to most quickly (and actually more humanely) achieve global sustainability, then I must be out.*

Trust me, you're no ecosocialist. Ecosocialists would never adopt such acallous and brutal attitude to the majority of humanity. We want to make it possible for all the people of the world to share in the enormous wealth that has been taken from them by the international capitalist system. We do not regard them as the enemy, but as our allies in the struggle for a better world.

GLEN COLTON: Jeff, I'm not exactly sure what an “ecosocialist” is, but based on your comments, I don't think you care about the environment or ecology at all. I guess that just makes you a good old socialist.

By the way, I'm against so-called “free trade” and CAFTA/NAFTA, and also don't see how allowing the free movement of people helps save the environment or reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It's been good having this conversation with you. I learn more all the time ...

DAVE GARDNER: Wow, Jeff. You appear to believe there are endless resources. It is

not fair that some of us got to plunder the planet, and some cannot. But the Earth cannot support billions of automobiles driving the freeways or billions of families sitting in 4000 square-foot houses watching big-screen TVs with the air-conditioning on high. It just can't.

Now, we need to change our ways in the richest nations. We need to make major changes and make them quickly. It is hard enough today to do that. We don't need to convert more of the world's population to superconsumers first, and *then* try to correct course. Are you familiar with the work of the Global Footprint Network? Do you know how many people the Earth can sustainably support at various levels of affluence? We need to be shrinking the footprint of the superconsumers, not expanding it.

While it's tempting to answer you point by point, I think it's pretty clear you are not interested in thinking this through. You have your mind made up. Mine is, too, but I spent six years of research to make up my mind. I have no idea what research, logic or emotional path brought you here. But I admit it's hard for me to imagine that facts got you here.

You are quick to attach derogatory labels to the commenters in this thread. Quick to make assumptions about their motives. I don't believe I've disparaged you in my comments, nor have others who've tried to make similar points. I think that's an embarrassment to the cause you claim to represent. But maybe that's just me.

I'd love to see your plan for achieving social justice, ending poverty, *and* achieving a sustainable equilibrium on the planet that doesn't liquidate the resources future generations will need.

TIM: David says: "I'd love to see your plan for achieving social justice, ending poverty, *and* achieving a sustainable equilibrium on the planet that doesn't liquidate the resources future generations will need." Well David I'm glad that you admit that you don't believe social justice or ending poverty are possible. And Jeff is correct. With your economic nationalism and reactionary anti-immigrant views, you are most definitely *not* a socialist of any kind. Maybe an eco-Stalinist. But not an ecosocialist.

DAVE GARDNER: Well I do refuse to engage in name-calling, so I guess I don't belong in the Tim and Jeff club. I'm going to keep looking at ecosocialism, however, as I suspect Tim and Jeff may not best represent the movement.

TIM: Dave, I have seen no name calling. I'm just trying to classify what your politics are because anyone who would advocate such reactionary positions on the issue of

immigration is definitely not any kind of socialist. It's just not negotiable.

And here in the US we have nothing even close to open borders. We have a militarised, repressive, and murderous border regime. (See <http://socialistworker.org/2010/01/14/acts-of-cruelty-to-immigrants>.) The ruling class wants to be able to control the border like a faucet, letting cheap rights-less migrants in when it desires them and shutting down the flow when it doesn't. But most importantly, it wants immigrants to be without rights and virtually helpless. And pitting native born workers against immigrants is to their benefit as well.

Socialists know who their allies and enemies are. Their allies are workers and the oppressed all over the world, not national capitalist states and the local bourgeoisie. We understand that we're ultimately divided by and should organise as an international class. That's why the old socialist slogan is "workers of the world unite" and not "nationalists of the world divide". Racism and nationalism are not solutions. They're two of the biggest barriers to the kind of world ecosocialists want to build.

IAN ANGUS: I don't know if Dave Gardner is still reading these comments. I hope so, because I want to say that I don't think he is racist, elitist or reactionary. I suspect that his views on most subjects are somewhat to the left side of the American political spectrum. I agree with much of what he has written about the devastating effects of so-called growth on the environment, and I know that he agrees with at least some of what I've said on the subject, because he once asked for a clip of me speaking, for inclusion in his film. Simon Butler and I wrote the article that triggered this discussion not as a critique of the right-wing anti-immigrant movement, but in response to a disturbing trend we've noticed in the environmental movement in several wealthy countries. We wrote:

For anti-immigration bigots, concern for the environment is just a ploy — they'll say anything to justify keeping immigrants out ... But it is particularly disturbing to witness the promotion of similar arguments in the mainstream media, and by environmental activists whose political views are otherwise hostile to those of FAIR and the BNP.

To illustrate our concern, we quoted Mark Diesendorf, Bill McKibben, and Tim Flannery. None of them could be described as bigots, but a wrong explanation of the environmental crisis has led them to political conclusions that contradict their otherwise progressive views.

Uncontrolled growth is the inevitable result of an economic system that cannot function without generating constantly increasing short-term profits— even at the cost of making the world uninhabitable.

Diesendorf, McKibben, and Flannery (and Dave Gardner) are harshly critical of unrestricted growth, but they stop there: they don't examine its social and economic roots. That leaves them with explanations based on biology (too many people) and psychology (greedy human nature) — in short, with the view that people are the problem.

Unlike most populationists, Dave has focused his attacks on hypergrowth in the richest countries, not on the birthrates of the poorest. That's to his credit. But because he believes the economy is driven by people as consumers, rather than by an irrational system of production, his ultimate solution is to reduce the number of consumers. Wrong diagnosis, wrong cure. In the course of this discussion, Glen Colton objected that "your concept of 'climate justice' is more important to you than taking real action to reduce climate change".

"More important?" No — inseparable. Ecosocialists support every practical measure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But we are convinced that that environmental restoration and social justice are inextricably linked. In the long run, the only way to save the earth is to replace the existing social and economic order with one that is committed to justice for all. All of our actions today must be guided by that goal — and that excludes building fence sto keep out this system's victims.

GLEN COLTON: Ian, I appreciate your thoughts. There has been a tendency by some to label and viciously attack anyone who is for immigration reduction as (take your pick) xenophobic, hate-filled, right-wing, extremist, bigoted, racist, yada, yada.

But as you just noted, many progressives (including myself) including McKibben, Diesendorf, Gardner, Flannery, Dick Lamm, believe that mass immigration hurts the environment and really doesn't help the billions ofpoor in the world.

We do agree on many things including the need to reduce consumption, readdress free trade (CAFTA/NAFTA, etc), stopping US imperialism, using less resources, protecting the environment, etc..

I would suggest that these ad hominem attacks on progressive immigration reductionists are very counterproductive to efforts to address any of these issues. It quickly puts up barriers between people who might disagree on immigration but might agree and work together on other issues.

In addition, the terms racist, bigot, xenophobe, etc. have lost meaning because so many people who obviously aren't racists are labeled that way along with others who really are.

So, if "ecosocialists" want to enlist any help in reducing the powers of corporations, readdressing the negative aspects of capitalism and free trade, reducing greenhouse

gas emissions, etc. or attaining other goals, it would be wise to work with other progressives, instead of attacking and labeling them.

TIM: Glen, like Ian, I respect your and Dave's work and desire to call attention to eco-crises and the role of rampant growth. But I profoundly disagree with some aspects of your approach and your playing the victim here isn't very convincing. Go re-read what I (and Jeff White for that matter) actually posted. A few of my main points re-capped:

1. Liberal (i.e. "progressive") and right-wing green politics are deadends because they are blind to the reality of class and they fail to acknowledge the roots of ecological degradation in the workings of the capitalism system. They lead to reformism and top-down "solutions" that will either be not truly ecologically sustainable, not in the interest of the vast majority of people, or most likely both.

2. The only way to wrest meaningful and desirable reforms (ones that are both ecologically sustainable *and* in the interest of all human beings) and ultimately do away with the capitalist system is for an international movement of workers and the oppressed to gain power. This requires solidarity across borders and opposition to using state power or any other means to exclude our brothers and sisters.

3. No matter how "progressive" one may be on other questions, a call for restrictions to immigration (which inevitably would have to involve criminalisation of the most vulnerable, state roundups of so-called "illegals", militarisation of the border, etc.) is reactionary. Like racism, sexism, and homophobia, nativism and nationalism divide the working class, whose unity is necessary for the kind of international movement that is required to challenge the eco-destructive prerogatives of capital in a humane, sustainable, and democratic way. Eco-socialists cannot be too uncompromising in their opposition to anti-immigrant politics and calls to restrict the movement of working-class people across borders. And neither can they be too harsh in their denunciations of them.

Currently, ecological degradation, waste, *and* social injustice (such as hunger and imperial war, f.e.) are caused by a system which is based around production for profit and separation of the vast majority of people from control of the means of production and subsistence. They are not due to there being too many people. That's why I'm an *ecosocialist* not a "progressive" or a liberal. That's why green politics must be red and red politics must be green. That's why ecological struggles and struggles for workers and immigrants rights are ultimately one.

GLEN COLTON: Tim and others, you have motivated me to take the time to google ecosocialism and read Wikipedia and information on the Ecosocialism International

Network Link that was posted on this website.

I think that a few of you have tried to hijack the ecosocialism concept for your own open borders agenda, which is inconsistent with the ecosocialism platform. Below is information from the Belem Ecosocialist Declaration. Nowhere does it talk about the open borders, pro-immigration nonsense that you have espoused during this discussion. In addition, the position that you have espoused is so much more extreme than the Belem declaration that you are marginalised in the discussion of climate change and immigration. (See <http://www.ecosocialistnetwork.org/Docs/Mfst02/BelemDeclaration.htm>.) Ecosocialism proposes radical transformations in:

1. The energy system, by replacing carbon-based fuels and biofuels with clean sources of power under community control: wind, geothermal, wave, and above all, solar power.

2. The transportation system, by drastically reducing the use of private trucks and cars, replacing them with free and efficient public transportation;

3. Present patterns of production, consumption, and building, which are based on waste, inbuilt obsolescence, competition and pollution, by producing only sustainable and recyclable goods and developing green architecture;

4. Food production and distribution, by defending local food sovereignty as far as this is possible, eliminating polluting industrial agribusinesses, creating sustainable agro-ecosystems and working actively to renew soil fertility.

To theorise and to work toward realising the goal of green socialism does not mean that we should not also fight for concrete and urgent reforms right now. Without any illusions about “clean capitalism,” we must work to impose on the powers that be — governments, corporations, international institutions — some elementary but essential immediate changes:

- Drastic and enforceable reduction in the emission of greenhouse gases.
- Development of clean energy sources.
- Provision of an extensive free public transportation system,.
- Progressive replacement of trucks by trains.
- Creation of pollution clean-up programs.
- Elimination of nuclear energy, and war spending.

TIM: Glen, Ian Angus, who wrote the original article that prompted this long comment exchange was arguing against placing restrictions on immigration and is one of the authors of the Belem Declaration. Angus is one of the leading voices calling championing the cause of ecosocialism. In the article, Angus writes:

People are not pollution. Inserting immigration into the climate change debate divides

the environmental movement along race, class and gender lines, at a time when the broadest possible unity is essential. It is a dangerous diversion from the real issues, one the movement cannot afford and should not support.

In fact, if one is any kind of revolutionary socialist, eco or otherwise, one stands in solidarity with their immigrant brothers and sisters and against the reactionary calls to criminalise or restrict them in any way. One also stands for full equality with them and for the immediate granting of their full rights, including rights to organise unions, go where they must to find work, and a living wage.

One doesn't do so, as Dave accuses, out of some kind of "humanitarian" impulse or a kind of "charity", but in solidarity. This is at the core of socialist practice. Sorry you aren't familiar with the philosophy and history of socialism. So if *you* wanted to use the socialism, you would be the one "hijacking it" and distorting it with your anti-immigrant "nonsense". Again, to see an example of what a socialist stance on immigration looks like, I refer you to a 1910 letter Eugene Debs criticising right-wing anti-immigrant policies of some activists of his day. Debs writes:

Upon this vital proposition I would take my stand against the world and no specious argument of subtle and sophistical defenders of the civic federation unionism, who do not hesitate to sacrifice principle for numbers and jeopardise ultimate success for immediate gain, could move me to turn my back upon the oppressed, brutalised and despairing victims of the old world, who are lured to these shores by some faint glimmer of hope that here their crushing burdens may be lightened, and some star of promise rise in their darkened skies.

The alleged advantages that would come to the socialist movement because of such heartless exclusion would all be swept away a thousand times by the sacrifice of a cardinal principle of the international socialist movement, for well might the good faith of such a movement be questioned by intelligent workers if it placed itself upon record as barring its doors against the very races most in need of relief, and extinguishing their hope, and leaving them in dark despair at the very time their ears were first attuned to the international call and their hearts were beginning to throb responsive to the solidarity of the oppressed of all lands and all climes beneath the skies.

In this attitude there is nothing of maudlin sentimentality, but simply a rigid adherence to the fundamental principles of the International proletarian movement. If socialism, international, revolutionary socialism, does not stand staunchly, unflinchingly, and uncompromisingly for the working class and for the exploited and oppressed masses of all lands, then it stands for none and its claim is a false pretense and its profession a delusion and a snare.

Let those desert us who will because we refuse to shut the international door in the

faces of their own brethren; we will be none the weaker but all the stronger for their going, for they evidently have no clear conception of the international solidarity, are wholly lacking in the revolutionary spirit, and have no proper place in the socialist movement while they entertain such aristocratic notions of their own assumed superiority. Let us stand squarely on our revolutionary, working-class principles and make our fight openly and uncompromisingly against all our enemies, adopting no cowardly tactics and holding out no false hopes, and our movement will then inspire the faith, arouse the spirit, and develop the fibre that will prevail against the world.

Yours without compromise,

Eugene V. Debs

The whole letter is here: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1910/immigration.htm>.

IAN ANGUS: Glen, I'm glad that you are researching ecosocialism. I hope you'll do more. As Tim's response shows, there is much more to the subject than a Wikipedia article and a leaflet that we wrote for distribution at last year's World Social Forum.

On the *Climate and Capitalism* site, you could click on "Articles by topic" and scroll down to "Reviews" to get some suggestions for books. Or you could scroll to "Population" for other articles on topics related to the one we are discussing here. There are also links, in the right-hand column, to many other ecosocialist sites.

You'll find a lot to read, and you'll find that ecosocialism is not a monolithic movement — we publicly disagree with each other on many issues. But I am willing to bet that you will not find any ecosocialists, no matter what their views on other subjects, who think that restricting immigration is an acceptable response to climate change. As a previous commenter said, that's not negotiable.

I look forward to marching with you on campaigns we both support. But when it comes to immigration and population, you are marching in the wrong direction, and I hope you'll turn around.

GLEN COLTON: Hi folks. You can say all you want about not dealing with immigration and population. But your position will help ensure that greenhouse gas emissions will continue to grow.

As I had predicted a few weeks ago with some friends, President Obama is now all for more nuclear plants, offshore oil drilling, and "clean coal". As I've been telling people, meeting the needs of an ever increasing population will mean that the environment will be sacrificed for more energy, more dams to provide water, more drilling, more sprawl, more roads, destruction of agricultural lands, etc. Let me know

how your plan works out.

TIM: Hi Glen. Let us know how your support for repression by the capitalist state against the poorest and most oppressed peoples turns out. Maybe in your “lifeboat” you can console yourself that it is the “ethical” thing to do. It should be noted that, while you are using Obama’s recent very un-green actions to support your reactionary anti-immigrant stance, his actions have nothing to do with immigrants or a crisis of there being too many people. They are the result of him representing and bending to the will of the influence and sway of capitalist industry. He could have announced that he was going to implement a plan to switch to solar, wind, and other renewable energy resources. But he didn’t. The system did not permit him to. The *process* and *system* of capital is to blame. Not immigrants and the poor. ■

'I=PAT' Means Nothing, Proves Nothing

by Ben Courtice

$I=P \times A \times T$ (commonly pronounced “eye-pat”) is a formula, often cited, describing the factors that cause environmental degradation.

In this formula, I stands for impact, P stands for population, A stands for affluence (or amount consumed), T stands for technology.

The population, multiplied by the “affluence” (or amount of stuff consumed), multiplied by the technology used to produce the stuff that is consumed, gives the impact of humans.

At first glance this is an indisputable description of the overall impact of humanity taken as a whole. It's use lies in this division of impact into different factors: having done so, we can consider how each separate factor works in our further inquiry.

But by itself, eye-pat is really not a useful description of the problem. It is almost mathematically meaningless, because A and T simply describe averages, per capita. Taken together, they add up to the average ecological footprint of each unit of population (each person, that is). So the total impact equals the average impact multiplied by the number of people.

The mathematics of this is as profound as saying that a number equals half of itself multiplied by two.

The formula is also based on, and biased toward a population focus. It divides impact by person, not by income bracket, nation, bio-region, or any of the other possible ways of dividing up society's overall impact. This predisposes the formula to an individualist and consumerist approach to solving environmental impact and it predisposes the formula to suggesting population control measures. Yet population is

Ben Courtice is an activist in the Climate Emergency Network. He writes for *Green Left Weekly* and blogs at *Blind Carbon Copy*.

just one arbitrary factor among many that could have been chosen, and our impact as individuals is only caused by our interactions with others, through work as much as through consumption.

To take apart the formula some more, it is commonly (and fairly) criticised that “affluence” takes no account of the vast differences between rich and poor, or the consumption and technology in which we have no direct say — like the resources used to maintain the world’s war machinery and armies for example.

To really examine how an increase in the amount of consumption (or what is consumed) can impact, you have to look at who is doing the consuming and why — not a statistical average of the whole world or whole nation. Population, equally, has to be analysed as an independent factor with its own dynamic of change driven by social and environmental factors to gain any real insight.

But more profoundly, the formula says nothing about how pollution/impact grows in relation to the three factors: each is given an equal weight, independent of the way they interact with each other, which is only measured in the end figure of “I”.

Population grows incrementally, generation after generation, at various rates around the world. In Australia, it is only growing due to immigration, as the birth rate is currently below the rate of replacement. Growth due to immigration is not growth in population overall, because population is a global phenomenon. The whole world’s population is projected to peak this century, and its rate of growth has already begun to slow.

Changes in technology and consumption, however, can leap in rapid bounds. Any changes in consumer items or production practices are multiplied through the social mechanism of the market economy.

Imagine a newly released consumer item is put on the market and rapidly taken up by consumers. This addition of one technologically produced consumer item results in an impact that is rapidly multiplied by that part of the population that buys it.

Markets tend to expand because capitalism is a system that requires economic growth to survive, so if an item is successful in a part of the market it is sold fairly quickly to the whole population, or large parts of the population. This applies to SUVs or McMansions as much as iPods or fresh produce imported by fast refrigerated air freight.

So an increase in technology is rapidly multiplied by the whole population. Yet an increase in population does not multiply by the whole ecological footprint of everyone else added up: it only multiplies by the average of their footprints. (Here I am taking ecological footprint as equivalent to $A \times T$). So population growth only adds incrementally to overall impact, whereas changes in technology and production for

the market multiply the impact. Taken on a regional or national level, many factors are quite unrelated to population. Coal for export will continue to be mined and shipped, whether Australia's population doubles or halves, unless political measures entirely independent of the individualist $I=P \times A \times T$ paradigm are taken.

A simplistic reliance on eye-pat to "prove" the importance of population controls for environmental protection is very wrong. Population cannot be reduced to one of only three factors that determine ecological impact. Quoting a mathematical formula might look smart, but algebra is only meaningful when it is given a meaningful content. $I=PAT$ does not impart much meaning. ■

Responses to 'I=PAT Means Nothing, Proves Nothing'

BILL BURGESS: Most ecological footprint calculations make the eyepat error, but the study below is a step in the right direction.

It still only addresses personal consumption, but it breaks that down by income decile, showing that "the richest 10% of Canadian households create an ecological footprint of 12.4 hectares per capita — nearly two-and-a-half times that of the poorest 10%." The biggest reason is ... transportation. (Size Matters: Canada's Ecological Footprint by Income from <http://www.policyalternatives.ca>.)

JOHN TONS: The critical point made is that "But by itself, eye-pat is really not a useful description of the problem."

But it is an important starting point.

For example the paragraph dealing with Australia makes the assumption that because migration is merely a shifting of a population from one part of the planet to another is an indication that the formula has neither been properly understood nor used as a starting point.

If one looks at the table in Lincoln's *Challenged Earth* (about p. 74 from memory) one can see that Australia's per capita ecological footprint is among the highest in the world therefore to increase our population will in more cases than not bring in people from an area of low consumption to join us in our obscene feeding frenzy.

However, that said, the point remains that just to rely on the eye pat formula does not get us very far.

Part of the problem lies with using averages. David Schweickart is a mathematician who exposes that myth in his book *After Capitalism* (a more detailed account is given in *Beyond Capitalism*). Societies where the average is not greatly different from the mean will be more egalitarian, similarly consumption levels will be roughly the same

across the society.

In an another forum I was asked why population looms so large in my concerns regarding climate change.

If one is going to develop an ecosocialist perspective then I would suggest that population has to play a big role in one's considerations.

Part of the problem in this debate seems to be the propensity to look at population in isolation of a range of factors that contribute to human alienation as described in Marx's pre-1848 writings.

With regard to population there are a number of propositions that need to be taken on board:

1. The larger the population the larger the labour force; in a capitalist system that erodes workers' ability to bargain for fair wages. (Especially when they are not united as is the present case.)

2. The larger the population the greater the demand on finite resources — technological innovations can forestall the day of reckoning but it will come. (I agree with those who argue that we simply do not know what the earth's carrying capacity is; but that does not imply that we should promote policies of population growth.)

3. All living organisms are in competition with one another either directly or indirectly — population growth in one organism comes at the expense of an other. Lovelock illustrates this in his example of Daisy world — human population growth implies a reduction in biodiversity. Again part of this is natural — to mourn the extinction of species is railing against the natural order, to object to the avoidable extinction of species demonstrates an awareness of our obligation to consider the impact our actions will have on future generations.

4. Climate change is a product of the activity of human kind. Given that we need to bring our emissions back to somewhere close to zero population growth makes that task even more difficult. (Although population growth in the developed world is sitting close to zero the drive in Australia and some other developed countries to increase our population means that we have to make even deeper cuts in emissions just to meet the absurdly inadequate targets we have already set.)

5. There is a link between poverty and population growth — our focus needs to be to reduce poverty which will in turn, over time, reduce population in the under developed world.

However, I need to reiterate that I do not see population growth as the number one enemy. I see it as yet another manifestation of a social order that is ultimately self-defeating.

PHIL WARD: I agree that the I=PAT formula is problematic. I'll take the definition from Paul Ehrlich, who invented the concept: "The relationship is summarised in the classic I=PAT identity: Impact is equal to Population size, multiplied by per capita consumption (Affluence), in turn multiplied by a measure of the damage done by the Technologies chosen to supply each unit of consumption." (From an address to the 1994 Cairo Conference, interestingly entitled "Too many rich people".)

Let's consider the measure of damage done to be CO₂ emissions. Over a whole population group, the unit of consumption is GDP. This means: Impact=(population X (GDP/population) X (CO₂ emissions/GDP)

Numerically, the total impact is just the CO₂ emissions of the population group as the population and GDP terms cancel out. I think what Ehrlich is trying to say is that you could reduce the impact (CO₂ emissions) by either reducing population or GDP per head, or the carbon intensity of production, or a by combination of the three. (To digress: Hawken, Lovins and Lovins in their book *Natural Capitalism* argue that technology can reduce the latter term by a factor of 100, which begs the question of why one of them is on the board of the Carrying Capacity Network, which attacks immigration into the USA on climate change grounds.)

Ehrlich does apply I=PAT to specific groups of people, hence the title of his Cairo talk, and it could be applied to individuals as well. In addition to the problem of the formula generally being used over whole populations, irrespective of the impacts of different classes, it has two other problems:

1. The working class and oppressed do not control the economy, so they have no control as a class over their impacts, i.e. over the carbon intensity of production. In order to do that, they would need to control production.

2. GDP is a very blunt measure. It has meaning in the context of I=PAT. However, under capitalism GDP is used as a measure of "our" living standards, or well-being, when in fact it includes massive waste, planned obsolescence, production of car rather than other transport means, building of offices for corporate executives, accountants and lawyers, military expenditure, the costs of crime (more prisons = higher GDP), ill-health etc. So as well as controlling production, there is a need to control what is produced.

RALPH BENNETT: Ben, you are a unwitting stooge of big business and globalisation which loves people like you doing the heavy lifting for them ... all in the name of naive political correctness.

Why do you think big business wants massive population growth?

1. To sell more things (read more greenhouse).

2. To keep wages low for higher profits (read exploitation of workers — the less scarce labour is, the less it's worth, like any other commodity).

3. To lend on housing with massive mortgages (read mortgage/rent slaves). Housing cost inflation and speculation is caused by increase in demand through population growth.

Finally, you are a speciesist. That is you don't care about the destruction of all the other species we share the planet with, by having the forests and water habitats wrecked, by the needs of more of our species.

Come out of your seedy manipulation and promote having around two children at 30 years of age and replacement immigration (i.e. 80,000 leave bring in 80,000) and the planet will breath a sigh of relief. ■

Do Individual Consumers Cause Climate Change?

by Ian Angus

One of the most contentious debates among green activists concerns the responsibility of individual consumers for promoting greenhouse gas emissions and thus climate change.

In addition to the obvious question of whether changing individual behavior is an effective way to fight climate change, this issue is also a key factor in the debate on the relationship between climate change and population growth.

The claim that consumer behaviour causes emissions growth is frequently made by advocates of population restriction: in essence, they argue that more people cause more emissions, so reducing the population will reduce emissions. A very similar argument is used to argue for limiting immigration to rich countries: immigrants, it is said, will adopt high-emission lifestyles, and so accelerate global warming.

Most ecosocialists would reply that individual consumers have very little control over greenhouse gas emissions, that consumption patterns are driven by an irrational system of production, not vice versa.

These issues have been discussed in several recent Climate and Capitalism articles. While the quality of individual contributions varies, the discussion as a whole provides valuable insight into the thinking on both sides of the “individual consumer responsibility” debate.

I found the following exchange particularly interesting, so I’m reproducing excerpts here, to make it easier to find and follow. The comments appear in full after “Women’s Rights, Population and Climate Change”, in which Betsy Hartmann and Laurie Mazur debated the population issue (<http://climateandcapitalism.com/?p=1544>).

JEFF WHITE: Very revealing is Mazur’s observation that it would be “easier to provide a good life — at less environmental cost — for 8 billion rather than 11 billion people”.

Implicit in this is a faulty assumption that poverty and environmental degradation are a function of population levels. Back in 1975, when world population was only 4 billion people, was it “easier” to provide a good life, at less environmental cost, to the majority of the world’s people than it is today, when we have nearly 7 billion? Obviously not.

The reason is that poverty and climate change are socio-political, not biological problems. Under a system of globalised capitalism, it doesn’t matter how many people there are on the planet; reduce the world to a billion inhabitants and there would still be unsustainable ecological destruction and enormous economic, racial, and gender inequality.

LAURIE MAZUR: I do argue that that it would be “easier to provide a good life — at less environmental cost — for 8 billion rather than 11 billion people”. But don’t get me wrong, I don’t think any of this is easy. Nor do I assume that that poverty and environmental degradation are a function of population levels. See, for example, my recent blog on Haiti: <http://www.rhrealitycheck.org/blog/2010/01/20/is-haiti-overpopulated>.

I certainly do not believe that a smaller world population is a panacea; it would not by itself usher in a new era of sustainability and equity. Nor am I naive enough to believe that slowing population growth is ALL we must do. Challenging the petro-military-corporate-industrial complex is the first order of business if we hope to survive as a species. This challenge is every bit as daunting as it was in 1975, the year Jeff White references.

But other things have changed since 1975. The atmosphere is now full. We have surpassed the atmospheric concentration of CO₂ that would preserve a habitable planet for current and future generations.

Against that backdrop, consider the challenge of raising the standard of living of the half of humanity that now lives on less than \$2 a day. We can hope that developing countries will steer a different course than the one we’ve followed, and “leapfrog” over the most environmentally destructive technologies. But almost any scenario that accounts for economic growth in the developing countries means a vast increase in carbon emissions. China, for example, has per capita emissions that are much lower than those of the US or UK, but it has a lot more capitas. That’s one reason why China has recently overtaken the US as the world’s largest emitter of CO₂. Indeed, the only scenario in which population size doesn’t matter for CO₂ emissions is one in which the current inequitable divide between rich and poor countries remains fixed for all time. At best, that scenario is unrealistic. At worst, it is cruel beyond imagining.

JEFF WHITE: Laurie Mazur commits the fallacy, common among the population fetishists, of presenting per capita emissions statistics as the primary driver of climate change. She says: “China, for example, has per capita emissions that are much lower than those of the US or UK, but it has a lot more capitas. That’s one reason why China has recently overtaken the US as the world’s largest emitter of CO₂.”

It starts with mathematical sleight-of-hand. Representing a country’s total emissions as simply the sum of all the per capita emissions helps to create the false impression that total emissions are a direct function of population. The fallacy lies in the fact that the total emissions must be known before you can calculate the per capita emissions. First you take the total emissions and divide by total population to get a per capita figure; to then multiply that figure by the total population is merely to reverse the calculation back to the original number you started with — total national emissions! It’s these total emissions that are the primary data; per capita figures are derived from the total, not the other way around.

Per capita figures are statistical artifacts that tell us the ratio of a country’s total emissions to its population. But they don’t tell us about individual contributions to the country’s total emissions. For example, if I tell you that Canada’s annual per capita emissions are 23 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent, it doesn’t tell you how much of that 23 tonnes I, as an average Canadian, am personally responsible for. It includes, for example, “my” per capita shares of the emissions caused by the mining of the tar sands in Alberta, the manufacture of cement in Quebec, and the industrialised livestock production in Ontario — none of which I have any personal control over.

If half the population of Canada suddenly disappeared, my per capita share of emissions, and that of every other remaining Canadian, would increase dramatically overnight, without any change being made in my — or anyone else’s — personal levels of carbon consumption. The population fetishists would realise their fondest wish (a dramatic reduction in population levels) while per capita emission levels would soar! What could demonstrate more clearly that per capita statistics tell us nothing about “overpopulation”? Canada’s per capita emissions are among the worst in the world. Does that mean Canada is suffering from overpopulation? On the contrary; Canada is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world, with about 3.3 people per square kilometer. Moreover, the current fertility rate of 1.66 babies per woman is far below the replacement rate of 2.1. Without immigration our population would decline. When it comes to carbon emissions and overconsumption, Canada’s problem is capitalism, not too many people.

Mazur also makes the error of assuming that raising the standard of living of the half of humanity that now lives on less than \$2 a day necessarily involves unsustainable

forms of economic activity and growth. It doesn't, unless you also assume that there is no alternative to profit-driven, capitalist modes of production.

In fact, the whole population control movement is predicated on an inability to imagine a sustainable alternative to capitalist waste, greed, and exploitation. It seeks to find biological solutions to economic and political problems.

ALEX HAUGHEY: It is true that per capita carbon emissions of each country are not a measure of personal responsibility for climate change. A measure that does attempt to represent that is a carbon "footprint". A person's carbon footprint is the total carbon emissions caused by all of the goods and services they consume. Under this measure responsibility for Canada's cement industry would not be heaped onto Jeff's total, but rather the totals of the ultimate customers of that industry.

The problem with this measure for Jeff's repost to Laurie, is that while Canadians lose personal responsibility for their cement industry, they gain personal responsibility for the carbon footprint of all the plastic tat that they buy that has been manufactured for them and shipped to them from overseas. If Canadian habits are anything like British ones (I am from the UK), then that is a hefty responsibility indeed.

If half the population of Canada disappeared, then a lot less plastic tat would be made, and Canada's carbon footprint would be dramatically reduced (not by half, to be sure, but a significant reduction nonetheless).

My personal view is that we need to take responsibility for the consequences of our own actions. Carbon footprints help show us the environmental consequences of buying goods and services. They could also show us the environmental consequences of starting a family. Clearly there are many other extremely important things to consider, but they can be part of the decision. What is wrong with that?

JEFF WHITE: Alex, it's wrong to focus on the consumption rather than the production of goods. If I buy things made out of plastic or packaged in plastic, and consume those goods, my consumption does not create greenhouse gas emissions. Rather, the emissions associated with the goods have already been created by the manufacturer, before I ever get my hands on the product. They properly belong to the manufacturer's carbon footprint, not mine.

I do not personally have any control or influence over the manufacturing process or the packaging of goods. If manufacturers are profligate with fossil fuels and use carbon-intensive production methods, then the responsibility lies with them, not me.

This is what the population-control "leftists" fail to understand. By making environmental issues all about consumption rather than production, they simplistically

jump to the conclusion that the environment can be saved by having fewer people around to consume manufactured goods. In other words, they completely let the manufacturers off the hook.

They also swallow the fallacy of “consumer democracy” — the idea that we as consumers can “vote with our wallets” to force manufacturers into ecologically sustainable modes of production. It’s a fallacy born of a quasi-religious belief in the power of the marketplace to solve all problems, thereby avoiding the messy necessity to actually take political action to bring about the systemic, revolutionary social and economic change that will be required to allow humanity to live in harmony with nature.

SIMON BUTLER: Alex wrote: “My personal view is that we need to take responsibility for the consequences of our own actions. Carbon footprints help show us the environmental consequences of buying goods and services.” There is nothing wrong per se with people choosing to be less wasteful. The big problem is how changing individual consumption patterns is all too often presented as some kind of strategy to solve ecological problems. When people raise the consumption argument with me, my normal reply is something like: “But you can’t shut down a coal-fired power station, build a public transport system or buy a solar thermal plant on the supermarket shelf. We need political action to win these things.”

In Australia, the approach is typified by the World Wildlife Fund’s annual Earth Hour advertising blitz, which urges climate conscious citizens to turn off your light bulbs for an hour. It has a bad ideological impact — it reinforces the illusion that individual consumption choices can play a major role in winning a safe climate.

Individual consumption theories fall down for another practical reason — household energy consumption accounts for about 12% of the total in Australia. For water consumption, the figure is slightly lower.

Populationist responses to climate change (or any other social problem) are also a kind of “consumption-side environmentalist”. As Jeff pointed out, they generally leave changing polluting capitalist production in the too-hard-to-solve basket, even though it’s the only way to deal with the climate emergency. It makes for another dangerous diversion when the science shows we are running out of time.

PAUL YORK: To imply that it is either consumption or production — that one is not a driver for the other — seem strange to me. They contribute to each other. If consumers choose not to buy Hummers or fly or eat meat, the markets for those products will decrease, with positive environmental consequences. In feminist thought there is much

criticism of earlier “radical feminism” for stripping women of “agency” — personal choice in their decision-making. In the same way, sometimes socialist thought focuses too much on the system and not the choices of the people in it, as though they have no agency. I think both the system and the free will of people in it are determinants. The system we have now — capitalism and industrial technology — very often manipulates or forces people or persuades them to act in accordance with the paradigm of unlimited economic growth — at the expense of human rights, animal rights, and the rights of nature. So systemic change is needed. At the same time, people absolutely do choose to be bigger consumers and to consume the wrong things — sometimes knowingly — as in the case of cigarettes. There is an argument to be made that there is addiction and that capitalists are to blame — certainly the fossil fuel industry has manipulated the marketplace and the media — but at a certain point ordinary people must also be held accountable for the decisions they make.

The fact is that the comforts of the consumer life are alluring and hard to resist. That is why much of the developing world wants an affluent North American style life. As we know it is impossible for everyone on the planet to live this way without courting ecological disaster; that is why limiting our consumption — all of us — is necessary.

Dismantling the system as it is now is necessary, and so is the personal choice on the part of conscientious people to not buy into that system. Of course the rub is that even if a lot of people opt out, the rest won't and the system fails anyway. So both personal and systemic change are needed, concurrently.

JEFF WHITE: Paul York wrote: “The system we have now — capitalism and industrial technology — very often manipulates or forces people or persuades them to act in accordance with the paradigm of unlimited economic growth — at the expense of human rights, animal rights, and the rights of nature. So systemic change is needed.”

Quite correct. So which is more effective:

- a. Changing the system to one that doesn't manipulate, force, or persuade people to conform to a nature-destroying paradigm, or
- b. Convincing 6 billion people not to be manipulated, forced, or persuaded to conform to a nature-destroying paradigm?

Do we spend our energies organising consumer boycotts and encouraging people to buy capitalism's “green” products, or do we use our energies to fight for social change?

Ecosocialism or barbarism — there is no third way.

CIARAN MUNDY: I think Jeff White makes his point very well on population not

being “the issue”, but it’s not correct to frame the fossil fuel era as a purely socio-political phenomenon. It is more than coincidence that human populations exploded around the same time we started mining for energy, rather than depending on the flow of energy in natural systems.

More fossil fuels allowed industrialisation of agriculture.

Any species finding a rich exploitable resource of energy/food would likely go through a population explosion as a result and then crash if that resource declined or created too much toxic waste (peak oil and climate change). It’s a serious predicament irrespective of the socio-political system within which such a problem occurs.

The point remains as to what kind of system is best suited to handling this predicament in the most humane way? This is the political question to my mind. I agree that change driven by consumer responsibility is fatally flawed. In the consumer capitalist paradigm, agency is seen to reside in our individual ability to shop our way to sustainability. This is clearly not the case.

Even if sustainable substitute products were generally available, it’s impossible to be informed enough in the face of endlessly shifting branding, where most of the information acted upon is that delivered through advertising (commercial world will always have greater resources than “campaigns” to message relentlessly). The idea that most people could sift through advertising information to find all relevant details to make informed choices is ridiculous. We must recognise this if we are not to waste precious time and energy.

However, that does not mean that trying when and where possible to make signal changes in our own behaviour is not meaningful. If I want to persuade others to join me in changing the system causing so much damage, I think being willing to take responsibility for ones own behaviour is necessary, whilst recognising that we are part of the system we want to change.

For example I have reduced massively my dependence on meat and dairy, I cycle and use public transport and never fly. I campaign in my neighbourhood, city and country to change the system. The transition movement I have found a powerful tool for getting many people together from across social and political boundaries. It is shifting the centre of gravity right here and now.

My gripe is with the system, not with people who depend on it. BUT it’s much easier to stay motivated and persuade others about changing the system when I choose to avoid supporting it where I can.

TIM: Jeff White said: “They also swallow the fallacy of ‘consumer democracy’ — the idea that we as consumers can ‘vote with our wallets’ to forcemanufacturers into

ecologically sustainable modes of production.”

He’s absolutely right. The insulting nature and absurdity of notions like “consumer democracy”, “voting with our wallets” or maybe the worst “one dollar, one vote” should be obvious to all. If a dollar is a vote, Bill Gates and Dick Cheney have so many more “votes” than you or I that trying to pretend that something like democracy is taking place in the capitalist market is nothing more than a sick joke.

The fact is that production is ultimately controlled by a tiny elite who are forced by the competitive dynamics of the capitalist system in which they operate to constantly seek profit. This reality is what’s behind ecological crises. It is what blinds elite economic planners to ecological consequences, both qualitative and quantitative.

And in the end, even this elite itself isn’t truly in control. The imperative for profit controls them. If an elite won’t act to maximise profit, he/she will be replaced by an elite who will. It’s capitalist discipline. If profit increase stalls and growth slows, a crisis occurs that sends the global system into shambles.

Look at our current predicament. What ultimately needs to be happen is for the vast majority to take our economic and productive lives into our own hands so we can collectively and democratically plan and control things with our own needs and ecological sustainability in mind. That means doing away with the capitalist system and its ruling class who themselves are bound by the dictatorship of profit. Shopping “activism” is a dead end.

JEFF WHITE: I agree mostly with Ciaran Mundy’s post above. It’s undeniable that the discovery of an abundance of cheap fossil energy available for the taking (and appropriating into private hands) made possible an unprecedented period of rapid economic growth and concentration of wealth for the capitalist system. It’s even possible to imagine that, were it not for the fortuitous circumstance of this planet’s having stored vast quantities of solar energy in the form of coal, oil, and gas in its crust, capitalism would not have become such a powerful, entrenched, flexible, adaptable, and long-lived economic system as it has been.

And of course, unlimited long-term economic growth (despite short-term recessions and depressions) has given rise to continuous population growth — although, as I have often noted, the rate of the latter has always been outstripped by the rate of the former throughout the history of capitalism. Because of the nature of capitalism, however, with its disregard for both the environment and the needs of greater humanity, its readiness to appropriate the natural wealth of the planet for private profit, its need to feed the machines of war, and its built-in imperative for growth, I would argue that a socio-economic system based on different principles would have

reacted differently to the discovery of fossil fuels.

For example, a democratic system based on the recognition of the importance of preserving the biosphere against destruction, the need to live in balance with the earth's natural ecosystems and to minimise waste, and the obligation to share the fruits of nature and of human labour for the benefit of all, would have used fossil fuels in entirely different ways. In that sense, I don't agree that the "sociopolitical system" is irrelevant to the way in which a natural resource is used.

I don't think that runaway climate change was inevitable once humans struck oil; but it's idle to speculate on what might have happened but never did. What's important is to try to figure out how a future ecosocialist society, inheriting both the mess and the bounty left by capitalism, would actually give us a chance to treat this planet and its inhabitants with the respect they deserve.

JOE BISH: A curious divide between what "ought to be" and what "is". It seems that everyone seriously engaging in this discussion believes the planetary situation is not ecologically sustainable; that is certainly my position as well.

In a nutshell, the ecosocialists talk about changing the system of production, while for some as yet unclear reason dogmatically oppose the effect of what can happen by providing women and families around the world reproductive free choice and comprehensive family planning tools. That effect being the further reduction in global fertility rate, slower population growth and sooner population stabilisation.

Interestingly, most do not oppose the provision of choice and family planning tools per se they merely oppose the idea that one can retain a moralistic integrity by supporting those provisions out of concern for the ecological welfare of the planet.

They view this as profoundly misguided, having identified the capitalistic system of production as essentially the one and only ecological problem facing the human community. They view conscious attention towards lowering planetary fertility as something naively elitist, in most cases misanthropic, and ultimately a red-herring so long as the system of capitalist production remains dominant.

In other words, you can support women's liberation and family planning programs only in so far as you do not in any way, shape or form link that support to your concern about the current and future wellbeing of the biosphere (human and non-human).

All your concern in that regard is best, and to retain any legitimacy *must be*, channeled through devotion to seeing an era of ecosocialism reign on a planetary scale. Because if this scenario is achieved ecological stewardship will be, first and foremost, the focus of human productive efforts and malignant relations with our planet will be minimised almost as to not exist.

I agree that there is tremendous value in this intellectual vision of what “ought to be”. It is an unusual, relatively speaking, critique of the situation and could serve so many a much needed pill of cognitive dissonance. However, what the situation “is” — from any honest assessment — suggests the main benefit of this eco-social vision is in its polar opposition to reigning ideology and popular notions of normalcy. Further, what “is” occurring is that 9000+ more people are being added onto our planet each hour, many unwanted and unplanned, but all who will need to utilise our already tragically burdened planet, whether in subservience to capitalist production or the fact that they would like to eat sometime this week.

Trying to tell me, or anyone, that they are mistaken in calling attention to this unsustainable tragedy and simultaneously offering human rights enhancing remedies that are uncontested as good things in themselves (family planning, reproductive health) can only be a symptom of unrelenting devotion to a higher priority — in this case, ecosocialism.

I do not think ecosocialists necessarily have their priorities wrong, but I am certain they are fools in trying to run concerned environmentalists through their sieve of ideological purity when it comes to the issue of the absurd rate of population growth of homo sapiens. Every time eco-socialists bring forth the argument that population is not intermingled within the ecological sustainability issue they validate their own worldviews of what “ought to be”, but do nothing to help the planet as it “is”.

They may be doing yeoman’s work in their other articulations, but on this issue, in my opinion, they fail.

TIM: Joe Bish writes: “The eco-socialists talk about changing the system of production, while for some as yet unclear reason dogmatically oppose the effect of what can happen by providing women and families around the world reproductive free choice and comprehensive family planning tools ... Interestingly, most do not oppose the provision of choice and family planning tools per se”

That’s such a crock. Socialists, eco- and otherwise, are the staunchest and most consistent advocates of women’s reproductive rights and women’s liberation you can find anywhere. In fact, only by ending the class system where women’s oppression is rooted can true liberation occur. Bourgeois feminism that accepts the limits of the capitalist system has been beneficial to a small number of ruling-class women, but for the majority of women, it has proven itself to be a dead end. What Engels wrote of working class women in his *Origin of the Family* ... is relevant today:

When she fulfils her duty in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and cannot earn anything; and when she wishes to take part in

public industry and earn her living independently, she is not in a position to fulfill her duties.

We ecosocialists are not for women's liberation because of neo-Malthusian fear mongering and population hysteria. We support it because we are committed to human emancipation. We do, however, oppose forced sterilisation and population control programs implemented by the ruling class, which you actually denied the existence of in a previous discussion. You said: "It is disingenuous to claim that the rich are trying to coerce the poor nations on population issues."

But make no mistake, it is very real. See: <http://dissidentvoice.org/2008/05/1975/> and <http://links.org.au/node/1361>.

To say that eco-socialists aren't in favor of real immediate actions and reforms in the here-and-now because we only see the revolution as a worthy goal and that we are concerned with ideological purity, and this explains our opposition to neo-Malthusianism and population hysteria, is another total crock.

Ecosocialists are also the most consistent proponents of here-and-now pragmatic eco-reforms that will actually work and move us in the right direction (transitioning to solar and wind, more urban gardens, strict enforceable emissions limits, end to Canada's tar sands, free clean public transport, sustainable agriculture) and opponents of schemes and reforms that won't (clean coal, nuclear, cap-and-trade, the Copenhagen agreement, factory farming, neoliberal farming and trade, and neo-Malthusian hysteria).

The rate of population growth actually peaked several decades ago and has been declining ever since. In fact, studies show that it's likely that population will slowly grow for only a bit longer and then level off. Actually addressing the poverty and the neoliberal domination in the places where population is currently growing the most would likely reduce that growth. But that's not the point because the fact is, population is not the reason for global hunger or ecological degradation right now, nor will it be at the level it is expected to level off at.

JOE BISH: Tim, I did not deny the existence of atrocities in the name of misguided "population control", they are a clear landmark in history. I did provide evidence that trying to frame the population discussion as a north vs. south fight is disingenuous, as there are many people from all around the world, including southern countries who are concerned with the ecological ramifications of rapid population growth ... and they are not all capitalist elites or lemming-like stooges of the capitalist system.

One thing I will tell you for certain is that I don't go around accusing you or Ian of the historical atrocities committed in the name of socialism — so I would appreciate it if you stopped with the slander. There is nothing hysterical about concern for people

and planet. I feel safe in assuming you don't intend to see the ecosocialist vision you have come via the iron fist ... maybe I am wrong.

The much-heralded stabilisation of population at mid-century is dependent upon as yet unrealised investments in family planning and reproductive health care: <http://gpso.wordpress.com/2010/01/13/unfounded-faith-assuming-population-stabilization-by-2050/>.

Ironic thing is that as long as we don't mention our motivations for the hope, I feel safe in assuming we would both hope these investments are made. "We support it because we are committed to human emancipation." I support "it" for that too, along with the fact it will help slow population growth.

TIM: I have no need to repeat myself. But just to clarify a few things:

1. I have nothing kind to say about the state capitalist regimes of Stalinist Russia and Mao's China, etc. Those tyrannical regimes were not socialist. Socialism means to me what it meant to Marx: self-emancipation of the working class and the oppressed from below.

2. The fact is that population growth peaked decades ago and has been on the decline ever since.

3. As the sociologist John Bellamy Foster pointed out in an article on Malthus a decade ago: "Where threats to the integrity of the biosphere as we know it are concerned, it is well to remember that it is not the areas of the world that have the highest rate of population growth but the areas of the world that have the highest accumulation of capital, and where economic and ecological waste has become a way of life, that constitute the greatest danger."

4. Population is not the reason for ecological degradation or world hunger, nor will it be in the foreseeable future. The global capitalist system is. Focusing on population is incorrect, confusing, and plays into the hands of the ruling class. As Ian continually reminds us, we need an anti-capitalist movement, not an anti-people movement.

JOE BISH: Tim, that's all so wonderful, but you keep insinuating that I am representing an anti-people movement; that's profoundly dishonest. Secondly, you seem to expect me to allow you to disavow the historical excrement of socialism without a blink; meanwhile, if I say "progressive population stabilisation efforts mean to me what they mean to Laurie Mazur: the empowerment and emancipation of people, especially women" you keep invoking the specter of Malthus or forced sterilisations. Why do you do that? The rate of population growth has peaked, but absolute nominal population growth is still absurdly high at 2.4 people per second. Like it or not,

“stabilisation at mid-century” is about as likely to occur as eco-socialism is — unless serious efforts to are made to provide reproductive health and family planning services to those who want them.

Population stabilisation is part of any legitimate sustainable living scenario we hope to achieve with the planet, be eco-socialist or otherwise. Focusing on population in exclusion of inequity, militarism and the worst deprivations of capitalism is wrong; ignoring it is worse.

JEFF WHITE: Joe Bish wrote: “Population stabilisation is part of any legitimate sustainable living scenario we hope to achieve with the planet, be [it] ecosocialist or otherwise. Focusing on population in exclusion of inequity, militarism and the worst deprivations of capitalism is wrong; ignoring it is worse.”

Single-payer public health care is also part of any legitimate sustainable living scenario we hope to achieve with the planet. So are old-age pensions, mass transit, and a free public education system. But we don’t see too many advocates for those issues coming around to scold ecosocialists for “ignoring” them and demanding that we give them priority over the need to replace the capitalist system. Only the population fetishists seem to do that. Is it any wonder our reaction is to call them anti-people?

Equating population control with emancipation and empowerment of women is nothing but a rhetorical device designed to stifle any criticism of seeing “overpopulation” as the root cause of all humanity’s problems. In actuality, the main aim of the “too many people” lobby is not the liberation of women, but merely the reduction of their fertility rate.

Who’s to say that fully emancipated and empowered women in some future society would not want to have children — even more children? Isn’t it conceivable (pardon the pun) that many women in today’s society feel constrained from having (more) children because of the need to keep working, the lack of affordable child-care, the cost of child-rearing, and the years of unpaid hard work involved?

Ecosocialists understand that the empowerment and emancipation of women is about far more than handing out family planning information and contraceptive devices, useful though those activities are. So long as capitalism persists women will never be fully emancipated and empowered; the essential precondition for the full liberation of women is socialism. Campaigning to reduce fertility rates doesn’t even begin to come close.

JOE BISH: Jeff, I am not asking eco-socialists to give priority to population issues, writ large.

However, when you go out of your way to attack someone like Laurie Mazur and insist on using stale old stereotypes to throw mud at people trying to do good work, and put words in our mouths that we've nothing to do with, I will confront you and argue you down from now until the cows come home.

Now, let me also say that I am glad people like you, Ian and Betsy Hartman exist. You are like cruel old watchdogs acting on behalf of the progressive population stabilisation movement; we don't even have to pay you. There are far too many (even one would be too many) people for whom your critiques are chillingly accurate. Your criticisms force a clearer understanding of self-identity for those to whom they do not apply. Additionally, one of your core messages — re: the ecological deprivations of capital — is one that sorely needs to be heard and considered in the western psyche. I can't ask you to change your mind or your convictions.

IAN ANGUS: Joe, one positive result of this discussion has been that the tone has become more respectful on both sides, that both sides have at least tried to discuss issues. I thank you for your contribution to that process. Although we don't agree, I hope we better understand each other's views.

I want to comment briefly on the issue of coercion.

You have repeatedly said that you, like Laurie Mazur, oppose coercive measures to reduce population, that you believe that just making birth control generally available will achieve that goal. You object to being bracketed with those who favor compulsory birth limitation.

As I said in the article that touched off this debate, I do not doubt Mazur's sincerity. Nor do I doubt yours.

Unfortunately, sincerity isn't enough. Sincere people have unwittingly caused a lot of damage in this world.

As I also pointed out in that article, study after study of family planning programs in Third World countries — including a study reported in Mazur's own book — shows that programs motivated and funded by a desire to cut population have consistently used coercive measures, regardless of the desires of their supporters. In my opinion, that's a direct result of viewing people as the abstraction "population", rather than as actual human beings who live and work in a host of different social, economic, political, geographic, institutional and ecological contexts.

Dr. Lourdes Arizpe, a founding member of the Mexican Academy of Human Rights and former Assistant Director General of UNESCO, put the problem very clearly in a book she co-edited, *Population and the Environment*: "The concept of population as numbers of human bodies is of very limited use in understanding the

future of societies in a global context. It is what these bodies do, what they extract and give back to the environment, what use they make of land, trees, and water, and what impact their commerce and industry have on their social and ecological systems that are crucial.” (p. 18)

She’s saying that to change the world, we need to understand how it really works, in detail. Global statistics and broad generalisations about population are rarely helpful: in fact they are often barriers to understanding and to effective action.

As an ecosocialist, I am an unbending defender of human rights, including women’s right to safe and effective birth control. I am equally unbending in my determination to expose and deal with the real causes of ecological destruction. For both reasons, I am resolutely opposed to blaming the world’s problems on “too many people”.

I will be writing more articles on various aspects of populationism in coming months. I hope you read them, and I will continue to welcome your comments. ■

One of the most controversial debates in the modern environment movement has been about whether human population size is a big factor in environmental destruction. Here, three ecosocialists challenge the mainstream view. They say pollution begins not in the family bedroom but in the corporate boardroom. They say calls for immigration cuts or population control dangerously weaken movements for real solutions. When these articles were first published they generated robust debate. A selection of the responses — critical and positive — follows each article.

Resistance books