

# CREATING AN ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY

*Toward a Revolutionary Transformation*

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## Preface

*I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown  
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things;  
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed  
And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains: round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare.  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

—PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, “OZYMANDIAS”

**A**T SOME TIME IN THE FUTURE archaeologists may look at the rubble of a large twenty-first century city or other physical remnants of today's world and wonder, as Shelley's traveler surely would, what cataclysm struck that civilization. What caused such utter destruction, as occurred in the land of the “king of kings”? Without sweeping, systemic changes, the ominous trends in the world—ecologically the most momentous being global climate change, but additionally pollution of the seas, fresh water, soils, air, and people; soil erosion; biodiversity loss; use of renewable resources occurring faster than replenishment; and the depletion of nonrenewable resources—are unstoppable. The “business as usual” approach takes us on a clear pathway to planetary destruction.

A few years ago, Fred was speaking to a professor of environmental studies at a liberal arts college in the midwestern United States. The professor agreed with Fred's contention that a whole new system, having new ways of relating to one another and the environment, was needed. But the environmental studies professor went on to explain that he did not talk to his students about it because any such change was so far off that he felt it was more important to talk about what might be done within the system in the near future to make things better. Finding out that systemic change was necessary, his students might become discouraged and immobilized by the enormity and long-term nature of the project. Fred's response was that if we don't begin thinking about what a new society might look like, how it might be organized, how it might work, and how it might be brought into existence—and start talking it over with others, especially young people—it will put the project off to the indefinite future. Any other response is counterproductive: it guarantees delaying precisely the kind of change the professor agreed was vital. If young people don't fully comprehend the depth of the crisis, its systemic nature, and the magnitude of the required changes, they will not be in the struggle as a lifelong commitment. Knowing the extent of change required can help avoid demoralization or getting sucked back into the realities of simply trying to survive in an unjust and unhealthy system.

This is the crux of the issue: *if we can't even imagine a different way of interacting with one another, the economy, and the resources we use and depend upon, then the struggle for a just and ecologically sound world recedes into the realm of utopian fantasy.* And without a vision for a plausible, genuine alternative, people understandably set their sights on reforms that will never add up to the immense changes that are needed.

But what could replace our current system? What might a truly ecologically sound and socially just society look like? Is such a thing even possible? If so, what would the basic organizational, economic, and ethical principles underlying such a society consist of? What are the forms of resistance, practices, and approaches needed to replace capitalism and start anew?

In attempting to answer these questions, we have divided *Creating an Ecological Society* into four parts:

**Part One: Why an Alternative Is Essential** (chapters 1–4) outlines where we are today, the severe social and ecological problems facing humanity, the systemic cause of the crises, and the ecological and social consequences. We examine capitalism’s role in creating and exacerbating these crises and their effects.

**Part Two: Is an Ecological Society Possible?** (chapters 5–7) surveys and evaluates supposed obstacles that are commonly said to prevent changing our economic system to an entirely new one—that our relationship to nature has to be one of domination, our inherent human nature prohibits transformation to a different socioeconomic system, and that the supposedly innate differences among groups of people of different ethnicities, races, classes, nationalities, or genders make an equitable society impossible.

**Part Three: Learning from Nature** (chapters 8–10) discusses basic ecological concepts, the characteristics of relatively stable and resilient ecosystems and how some aspects of these might apply to human society, and proposes a selection of ecologically sound technical practices for provisioning human needs.

**Part Four: Toward a New Society** (chapters 11–12) delves into how an ecological society could be organized, how it might operate, and how we might bring such a society into existence. An argument is made for a cohesive alternative system to replace capitalism. One that is democratic and equitable, organized and carried out to fulfill human needs in ways that regenerate and maintain a healthy biosphere. Even though much of our focus is on the country in which we live, what we have written is not meant to apply to a particular country or even region; such a system needs to extend across the globe.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the result of a true partnership in which each author learned from the other. During the writing process we grappled with differing ideas and approaches, leading us to new ways of thinking about the complex issues we discuss. Chris would like to thank Fred

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