Just Sustainabilities

Development in an Unequal World

Edited by

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2003

EARTHSCAN

Earthscan Publications Ltd
London

Chapter 2

Neo-liberalism, Globalization and the Struggle for Ecological Democracy: Linking Sustainability and Environmental Justice

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Introduction: Linking Sustainability and Environmental Justice

To sustain economic growth and higher profits in the new global economy, American companies are increasingly adopting ecologically unsustainable systems of production. Motivated by the growing costs of doing business and threat of increased international competition in the era of globalization, corporate America initiated a political movement beginning in the early 1980s for 'regulatory reform', ie the rollback of environmental laws, worker health and safety, consumer protection, and other state regulatory protections seen as impinging upon the 'free' market and the profits of capital. Termed 'neo-liberalism', the recent effect has been a general increase in the rate of exploitation of both working people (human nature) and the environment (mother nature), as witnessed by the assaults upon labour, the ecology movement and the welfare state. Coupled with increased trade advantages brought about by corporate-led globalization and significant innovations in high technology and service related industries in the 'new economy', the US experienced a record-breaking economic boom under the Clinton administration during the 1990s. However, this economic 'prosperity' was to a large degree predicated upon the increased *privatized-maximization* of profits via the increased *socialized-minimization* of the costs of production, ie the increased displacement of potential business expenses onto the American public in the form of pollution, intensified natural resource exploitation and other environmental problems. Though progress was made on a number of critical issues, the ecological crisis continued to deepen during the 1990s.

Since the 2000 election of George W Bush to the presidency and the slowdown in the US economy, the war against the environment has greatly intensified. Heavily supported by the most polluting sectors of American business – including campaign contributions of more than US$1.86 million from the oil and gas industry and US$1.25 million from the automotive industry (contender Al Gore received only US$131,764 and US$115,790 respectively) – the Bush administration is implementing sweeping measures aimed at delaying and/or dismantling programmes and policies designed to protect public health and the environment. President Bush has already backed down on a promise to curb US emissions of greenhouse gases, blocked efforts to protect a third of national forests from roads and logging, rescinded a key ergonomics workplace safety rule that was years in the making, and repealed tough scientific-based standards for removing poisonous arsenic in drinking water, among other assaults on environmental protection. Furthermore, following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on New York and Washington, the administration has also led reinvigorated attempts to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to energy development by invoking the cause of 'national security'.

Not all citizens, however, equally bear the 'externalized' social and ecological costs of these assaults by American business. In order to bolster profits and competitiveness, companies typically adopt strategies for the exploitation of nature that are not only economically 'efficient' but politically 'expedient' (that offer the path of least social resistance). The less political power a community of people commands, the fewer resources a community possesses to defend itself; the lower the level of community awareness and mobilization against potential ecological threats, the more likely they are to experience arduous environmental and human health problems at the hands of capital and the state. In the US (as elsewhere in the world), it is the most politically oppressed segments of the population, or the *subaltern* – dispossessed peoples of colour, industrial labourers, the underemployed and the working poor (especially women), rural farmers and farm workers, and undocumented immigrants – whom are being *selectively victimized* to the greatest extent by corporate practices (Johnston, 1994, p11; see also Agbola and Alabi, Chapter 13). The disenfranchized of America are serving as the dumping ground for American business, a fact that is often blatantly advertised. A 1984 report by Cerrell Associates for the California Waste Management Board, for instance, openly recommended that polluting industries and the state locate hazardous waste facilities in 'lower socio-economic neighbourhoods' because those communities had a much lower likelihood of offering political opposition (Roque, 1993, p25–28). In this respect, the prosperity of the American business community is predicated on specific forms of unsustainable production that *disproportionately impact oppressed peoples of colour and the working poor.*

It is now clear that the economic crisis tendencies of the 1970s–1980s have become increasingly displaced to the realm of nature in the 1990s–2000s, assuming the form of ecological crisis tendencies; while the short term economic health of the salariat and corporate owners is being increasingly secured through the long term sacrifice of the environmental health of the

subaltern – peoples of colour and the poor (including developing world peoples). In this respect, the process of global economic restructuring, which neo-liberalism has helped facilitate, is thus responsible for the deterioration in ecological and working/living conditions of the poor and people of colour. The increased hardships of both the subaltern and their environment are thus two sides of the same political-economic coin and are now so dialectically related (if not essential) to each other as to become part of the same historical process. As a result, the issues of sustainable development and social/environmental justice have surfaced together as in no other period in world history. This chapter will explore the challenges confronting the environmental justice movement as it tries to forge a truly participatory ecological democracy capable of building a more just and sustainable society.

Neo-Liberalism, Globalization and the Restructuring of American Capitalism

The new millennium has witnessed the triumph of a distinctly hard-nosed brand of American capitalism in the world economy. Spurred by a booming stock market, low interest rates (some 30 to 50 per cent lower than during the 1980s), 30-year lows in inflation and unemployment, record governmental budget surpluses, higher corporate earnings relative to Japan and Western Europe and other apparent signs of financial health, the US economy soared during the 1990s. The country's decade-long economic expansion became the longest in the nation's history. In the three-year period 1997–1999, economic growth averaged over 4 per cent, well above the 2.6 per cent growth rate experienced in the first half of the decade. Aggravated by the growing costs of energy, declining consumer confidence and spending, falling profits and corporate earnings and wild fluctuations and devaluations in the stock market, only recently has the US economy demonstrated significant drops in the rate of growth, falling into a recession immediately following the events of 11 September 2001.

Perhaps the most significant forces transforming the nature of American capitalism reside in the profound changes taking place in the global economy. Fuelled by innovations in communications, transportation and production technologies, huge investments in infrastructure, as well as major improvements in the educational, skill and productivity levels of labour power, multinational corporations and domestic industries located in the newly industrializing countries (NICs) have rapidly expanded in recent years to capture a growing share of the world market. This process of globalization, which is being facilitated in great part by a host of 'free-trade' agreements brokered by the Clinton and both Bush administrations, spurred many sectors of the US economy, particularly industries exporting high-tech and other capital goods and services of all kinds to both developed and newly industrializing countries overseas. As a result, semi- and highly skilled workers associated with these industries in the 'new economy' have witnessed a tremendous growth in demand for their services, with substantially higher salaries, lucrative stock options and rich opportunities for advancement.

On the other hand, industries that have traditionally served as the backbone of the US economy, as well as the trade union movement, have seen their competitive position for mass-produced consumer goods and processed raw materials (such as steel) steadily eroded by overseas producers (Ross and Trachte, 1990, Dicken, 1992). With an increased ability to relocate to low-wage havens and utilize 'job blackmail' strategies against unskilled or semi-skilled blue/pink-collar workers, the labour movement has been significantly weakened. Where union membership once comprised 36 per cent of all private-sector employees in 1953, today the figure has plunged to just above 9 per cent. As a result, union and non-union workers alike are under increased pressure to accept reduced wages, benefits and other programmes. Fearing that increased costs to business will undermine its ability to compete in the world market, US capital has become unwilling to abide by the traditional accords brokered by the liberal wing of the Democratic Party on its behalf with the labour, civil rights, women's and other progressive social movements.

Instead, the rise of neo-liberals committed to less governmental control of industry, as embodied in the Democratic Leadership Council (Clinton, Gore, and Lieberman all served in key DLC leadership positions), as well as the Republican Party and George W Bush, have become hegemonic. As a result, the defining characteristics of liberal capitalism that have traditionally enlisted the mass loyalty of working people with high wages, good benefits, job security and advancement, affirmative action, universal entitlements, civil rights and liberties and welfare protections are being eroded – a process further accelerating under the new bi-partisan consensus to increase resources for national security as part of America's War against Terrorism. For not only has the triumph of the 'Third Way' neo-liberalism model of globalization undermined traditional 'New Deal' liberalism and welfare state capitalism in North America, but it also dealt a death blow to bureaucratic state socialism in the East, nationalist-based models of dependent development in the South and severely weakened Keynesian social democratic regimes in the West (seen especially in the rise of Tony Blair's New Labour Party in the UK).

Without an adequate rate of profit in the global marketplace, and hence rate of capital accumulation, corporate America would lapse into economic stagnation. With the globalization of capital and the increased competition brought about by the adoption of Export-oriented Industrialization (EOI) economic policies in almost every corner of the planet, transnational corporations are less able to boost profits by passing along their increased costs to consumers in the form of higher prices that, along with a restrictive monetary policy implemented by the Federal Reserve at the behest of Wall Street, has maintained relatively low inflation rates in the 1990s–2000s. American consumers have kept the world market afloat and facilitated globalization by serving as the supermarket for European, Japanese and much of Latin American and Asian businesses. In the 1990s, cheap and easy credit allowed working Americans to spend far more than they earned and eventually run up unparalleled personal debts. This was clearly economically unsustainable and would require a more systemic solution than offered by the Bush administration 2000–2001 tax cut (most of the big savings have gone to the rich, while the

relatively small tax rebates were utilized by working families to pay down their debts). Since the 11 September attacks, the bubble has burst, and domestic consumer spending has contracted by more than US$300 million annually. As a result, the world economy is now sinking, as businesses throughout the world are struggling to survive in a contracting market. As a result, the first imperative of capital in the new global economy is not to increase prices or even production but rather to lower production costs. Because domestic and world export markets are becoming more cut-throat, *cost minimization* strategies now lie at the heart of business strategies for *profit maximization* for all nations. Greater efficiency (greater output per unit of input) becomes more important precisely because it leads to more profits. Increases in sales matched by increases in cost of production are no longer viable for global capital given the gross contraction of consumer spending since the terrorist attacks.

Greater cost containment by American capital is thus being achieved through a process of capital restructuring. The aim of this restructuring is to re-establish the necessary economic, social, political and cultural conditions for renewed profitability, including new institutional arrangements congruent with the development of new technologies, production processes, work relations and changing patterns of commodity demand. So, for example, by closing higher-cost facilities and moving to lower-cost production facilities offshore more rapidly than competing nations, particularly West German and Japanese market-share maximizers (who were left with so few profits in the 1990s that they found it difficult to finance expansions even when more profitable opportunities presented themselves), American business has been able to recapture some of the markets in the 1990s and 2000s they had lost in the 1970s–1980s.

The most important goal of capital restructuring for American business in the current period is to re-establish corporate 'discipline' over trade unions and other social movements that are cutting into profits. Along with labour costs (which include health insurance and other benefits), environmental protection measures are considered by many industries to be some of the most expensive and burdensome. Companies are therefore seeking to protect profits not only by 'downsizing' the labour force but also by cutting investments in pollution control, environmental conservation, and worker health and safety. Simply put, the key to cost containment lies in processes of capital restructuring that have enabled American businesses to *extract more value from labour power and nature in less time and at less cost.* And in the 1990s–2000s, capital restructuring and deep cuts in labour and environmentally related costs are *boosting the earnings of American business at a much faster rate than revenue growth or increased sales.*

Thus, the primary force behind the profitability of American corporations has been the increased economic exploitation of working people (labour power) and nature. Generally speaking, increased rates of labour exploitation are being achieved by extracting more work (surplus-value) out of the American working class in shorter periods of time and at less cost. American business is achieving this result through a general assault on the past gains of the labour movement and other social justice movements, which is taking numerous forms: the business offensive against unions; increased layoffs of permanent workers and the increased use of temporary or contingent workers at less pay; greater job

insecurity, stagnant or falling wages, benefits, and living standards for broad sectors of the workforce; longer hours, mandatory overtime, and a speedup of the production process; attacks on the minimal protections offered by the welfare state; deteriorating worker health and safety conditions; and a general assault on those private and public programmes and policies that serve the interest of lower and middle income working families (Gordon, 1996). The success of these assaults can be seen in the year 2000 labour productivity levels, which surged ahead at over 5 per cent – the fastest pace in 17 years. At the same time, labour costs declined for the first time since 1984. In fact, after more than two decades of lacklustre gains in productivity from 1973 to 1995, which averaged only 1.4 per cent a year, increases since 1996 have been over double that rate.

On the other hand, increased rates of environmental exploitation are being achieved by such measures as: extracting greater quantities of natural resources of greater quality more quickly and at less cost; cutting production costs by spending less on pollution prevention and control, as well as environmental restoration; adopting new production processes (such as biotechnology in agriculture) that increase productivity but are also more polluting or destructive of the environment; and so forth. American business is producing these results through a general assault on the past gains of the ecology movement and a general offensive upon the policies and programmes that make up the environmental protection state. The result is increased dumping of ever more toxic pollution into the environment, particularly in poor working-class neighbourhoods and communities of colour; more destructive extraction of raw materials from this country's most unique and treasured landscapes, especially Native lands and natural resources belonging to other subaltern groups; a deterioration in consumer product safety (and attempts to limit corporate liability for defective or damaging products); the disappearance of ever more natural species and habitats; suburban sprawl; and a general assault on those programmes and policies designed to protect the environment. In short, to sustain the process of capital accumulation and higher profits in the new global economy, American capital is increasingly relying on ecologically unsustainable forms of production which disproportionately impact communities of colour and lower income members of the working class – sectors, which are underrepresented in the traditional environmental movement.

For instance, under the devolution policies of 'new federalism' and the rhetoric of 'states-rights', governmental responsibilities are being shifted from the federal government to the states. The neo-liberal hope is that many states will neglect their responsibilities to engage in bidding wars with other states to attract capital to their home regions by offering more favourable investment conditions, including less worker and environmental regulation and enforcement (ie to aid in efforts at cost minimization). One reason that economic problems in the northern 'rust-belt' are deeper than in most of the rest of the country has been the disproportionate relocation of capital to the 'sun-belt' in search of cheaper labour, lower taxes and real estate costs and less stringent environmental regulations. Increased capital mobility is thus a primary mechanism by which

American business is restructuring itself to minimize costs. Hence, the political-economic power base since the 1980s has shifted to the south (through such figures as Carter, Perot, Bush, Clinton and Gore) and west (Reagan, Cheney and McCain).

Lax enforcement of environmental and worker health and safety laws, along with cheaper, non-union labour statutes, are key factors in the rise of cowboy capitalism in the sun belt. Fifteen southern states alone account for 33 of the 50 most polluting plant sites in the nation. Under the tutelage of former Governor George W Bush, the state of Texas possesses five of the ten most polluted zip code areas in the country and leads the nation in total air, water and land releases of carcinogenic pollution. A 1995 report by the Environmental Defense Fund showed that refineries in Texas, Mississippi, West Virginia and Kansas are the nation's most environmentally inefficient (in terms of pollution releases and waste produced per barrel of oil refined per day). Refineries in northern states such as New Jersey, which have some of the country's toughest pollution laws, are among the best. Furthermore, an emissions-to-jobs ratio report by environmental science professor Paul Templet of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge showed that Louisiana's chemical plants, especially those located in poor African-American parishes in the corridor between New Orleans and Baton Rouge known as 'Cancer Alley', released nearly ten times as much pollution per worker as such plants in New Jersey and California, where law enforcement and industry spending for pollution control and abatement are greater (Selcraig, 1997, p38–43). 'Dumping in Dixie' is therefore part of a general pattern in which toxic waste dumps, polluting industries, incinerators and other ecologically hazardous facilities are becoming increasingly concentrated in communities of colour in the sun-belt (Bullard, 1990).

The Clean Air Act of 1990 is another such example. Supported by the Tennessee Senator Albert Gore, a key aspect of that legislation involves the commodification of pollution (which can be bought and sold on the stock market), which has allowed enterprises such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to buy millions of dollars in 'pollution credits' from Wisconsin Power and Light. These pollution credits allow the TVA to exceed federal limitation on sulphur dioxide and other toxic emissions in older facilities which would otherwise be costly to upgrade, and are located mostly in poor working-class communities of colour in the south and west. The Act is therefore a powerful reminder of the manner in which neo-liberal, free-market environmentalism is exacerbating, rather than resolving, the profound social and environmental injustices fostered by traditional regulatory approaches over the past 30 years (Tokar, 1996, p24–29). These discrepancies are now beginning to be addressed through EPA's Office of Environmental Justice and the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC).

So, if increased profits are the economic engine pulling the train of American business in the world economy across what former President Bill Clinton termed 'the bridge to the 21st century', then unsustainable increases in the rate at which nature (both human and non-human) is being exploited is providing the energy powering the locomotive. Neo-liberal politicians stand at the controls, having engineered a loss of political power by the more progressive

sectors of organized labour, environmentalists, and other social movements. The process of capital restructuring, which neo-liberalism has helped facilitate, is thus responsible for the deterioration in ecological and working/living conditions. The hardships of both the American working class, oppressed peoples of colour and their environments are thus different sides of the same political-economic coin and are now so dialectically related (if not essential) to each other as to become part of the same historical process of the restructuring and globalization of American capitalism. As a result, the issues of sustainable development and environmental justice have surfaced together as in no other period in American history.

The Evolution of the Environmental Justice Movement

In reaction to the growing economic and ecological disparities accentuated by the rise of neo-liberalism and corporate-led globalization, as well as the neglect of the mainstream environmental movement, a new wave of grassroots environmentalism has been building in the US. In Latino and Asian-Pacific neighbourhoods in the inner cities, small African-American townships, depressed Native American reservations, Chicano farming communities and white working-class districts all across the country, peoples traditionally relegated to the periphery of the ecology movement are now challenging the wholesale depredation of their land, water, air and community health by corporate polluters and indifferent governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations. At the forefront of this new wave of grass-roots activism are hundreds of community-based environmental justice organizations working to reverse the ecological and economic burdens borne by people of colour and poor working-class families (Schwab, 1994). Since the 1991 First National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit, the single most important event in the movement's history, these local and sometimes isolated community-based groups have become increasingly integrated into a number of strategic, regionally based networks, as well as national constituency-based and issue-based networks for environmental justice.

The diversity of people participating in these local and regional movements is matched by the diversity of political paths and approaches taken to achieving environmental justice. For the most part, environmental justice activists have primarily emerged out of six other popularly based political movements to embrace the mantra of environmental protection and sustainability. These independent movements have been present for decades, and are:

1. the civil rights movement as led by African-Americans and other disenfranchized people of colour;
2. the occupational health and safety movement, particularly that wing devoted to protecting non-union immigrants and undocumented workers;
3. the indigenous land rights movement, particularly that wing devoted to the cultural survival and sovereignty of Native peoples;

4 the public health and safety movement, particularly that wing devoted to tackling issues of lead poisoning and toxics;
5 the solidarity movement for promoting human rights and the self-determination of developing world peoples; and
6 the social/economic justice movement involved in multi-issue grass-roots organizing in oppressed communities of colour and poor working-class neighbourhoods all across the country.

The community-based organizations and regional/national networks for environmental justice established by these activists often bear the distinctive political imprints of the original movements from which they emerged, so it may appear to the casual observer that there is no united national movement at all. Although most organizations or *movements* for environmental justice are distinct from one another in a number of rather profound ways (the constituency served, unique cultural legacy and experiences of activists, core issues of emphasis, political strategies, set of challenges, etc), it should be emphasized that *all are united in the larger struggle for ecological democracy* (Faber, 1998). For the organizations within these various wings all share a passion for linking grass-roots activism and participatory democracy to problem-solving the issues of environmental abuse, unsustainable economic development, racial oppression, social inequality and community disempowerment (Bastian and Alston, 1993, p1–4). In this respect, there is occurring a steady and undeniable sublation of these various political heritages into a larger environmental justice body politic, whereby these differing elements are achieving a deeper appreciation and understanding of the other wings and merging it with their own political consciousness and movement-building strategies.

As witnessed by the creation of a number of new organizational entities, including: the Environmental Justice Fund; regionally based environmental justice networks such as the Southern Organizing Committee (SOC), the Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (SNEEJ), and the Northeast Environmental Justice Network (NEJN); national constituency-based networks such as the Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN), the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN), and the Farmworker Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (FWNEEJ); the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC); the National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summits in 1991 and 2002; and so forth; there is thus emerging a national, multi-racial environmental justice movement which is greater than the sum of its parts (Lee, 1992, Alston, 1992, pp30–31). The Fund and strategic networks are particularly important in serving to create a new infrastructure for building inter-group collaboration and coordinated programmatic initiatives that are taking the movement beyond the local level to have a broader policy impact. The people of colour-led environmental justice movement might have only been borne with the local Warren County, North Carolina fight in 1982, but it is beginning to come of age in the new millennium.

Environmental Racism and Unequal Protection: The Civil Rights Movement and Environmental Justice

The legacy of the civil rights movement is one of the most important foundations on which the modern environmental justice movement is predicated. While the quality of life for all US citizens is compromised by a number of environmental and human health problems, not all segments of the citizenry are impacted equally. In contrast to high-income salaried and professional workers, who can often buy themselves access to ecological amenities and a cleaner environment in non-industrial urban, suburban and rural areas, people of colour face a much greater exposure rate to toxic pollution and other environmental hazards. For communities of colour, this takes the form of exposure to: (1) greater concentrations of polluting industrial facilities and power plants; (2) greater concentrations of hazardous waste sites and disposal/treatment facilities, including landfills, incinerators and trash transfer stations; and (3) lower rates of environmental enforcement and clean-up (Faber and Krieg, 2001). Thus, unequal exposure to environmental hazards are experienced by people of colour in terms of where they 'work, live and play' (Alston, 1991).

Hazardous waste sites nationwide are among the more concentrated environmental hazards confronting communities of colour. According to a 1987 report by the United Church of Christ's Commission on Racial Justice, three out of five African-Americans and Latinos nationwide live in communities that have illegal or abandoned toxic dumps. Communities with one hazardous waste facility have twice the percentage of people of colour as those with none, while the percentage triples in communities with two or more waste sites (Chavis and Lee, 1987). A subsequent follow-up study conducted in 1994 has now found the risks for people of colour to be even greater than in 1980, as they are 47 per cent more likely than whites to live near these potentially health-threatening facilities (Goldman and Fitton, 1994). Federal governmental enforcement actions also appear to be uneven with regard to the class and racial composition of the impacted community. According to a 1992 nationwide study in the *National Law Journal*, Superfund toxic waste sites in communities of colour are likely to be cleaned 12 to 42 per cent *later* than sites in white communities. Communities of colour also witness government penalties for violations of hazardous waste laws that are on average only one-sixth (US$55,318) of the average penalty in predominantly white communities (US$335,566). The study also concluded that it takes an average of 20 per cent longer for the government to place toxic waste dumps in minority communities on the National Priorities List (NPL), or Superfund list, for clean-up than sites in white areas (Lavelle and Coyle, 1992, p2–12).

Represented by regional networks such as the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice (SOC) and local and/or state organizations such as People Organized in Defense of Earth and Her Resources (PODER) in East Austin, Texas, this component of the environmental justice

movement is committed to battling the disproportionate impacts of pollution in communities of colour, the racial biases in government regulatory practices, the glaring absence of affirmative action and sensitivity to racial issues in the established environmental advocacy organizations and other forms of environmental racism (Bullard, 1994, Bryant and Mohai, 1992). The issue of environmental racism has helped to link issues of civil rights, social justice and environmental protection. It has also inspired investigations into the class, gender and ethnic dimensions of exposure to environmental hazards.

West Harlem Environmental Action (WEACT) was created in 1988, for instance, to educate and organize the predominantly African-American and Latino communities of northern Manhattan in New York City on a broad range of environmental justice issues. These include the use of East, West and Central Harlem and Washington Heights as a dumping ground for noxious facilities and unwanted land uses, including two sewage treatment facilities, six of Manhattan's eight diesel bus depots and a marine garbage collection transfer station. Coupled with the air pollution supplied by three major highways, an Amtrak rail line, the NY/NJ Port Authority and several major diesel truck routes, these facilities gave northern Manhattan an asthma mortality and morbidity rate that is up to five times greater than citywide averages. Through 'The Clean Fuel – Clean Air – Good Health' campaign and other initiatives, these issues are now being addressed. For instance, in December of 1993, efforts to correct problems at the North River Sewage Treatment Plant resulted in settlement with the city for a US$1.1 million community environmental benefits fund and designation of WEACT as a monitor of the city's US$55 million consent agreement to fix the plant.

Dying for a Living: Occupational Health Struggles and Environmental Justice

Another wing of the environmental justice movement is developing out of the struggle for labour rights and better occupational health and safety conditions for vulnerable workers. Spurred by governmental de-regulation and lack of enforcement, neo-liberalism is not only allowing capital to spend less on the prevention of environmental and community health problems outside of the factory, but also to spend less on the prevention of health and safety problems that impact the working class inside the factory. In order to increase the rate of exploitation of labour, business is now reducing and eliminating safety equipment and procedures that lower labour productivity and cut into profits. There are now only 800 inspectors nationwide to cover the 110 million workers in 6.5 million workplaces. As a result, American workers are being exposed to greater hazards at the point of production. Some 16,000 workers are injured on the job *every day*, of which about 17 will die. Another 135 workers die *every day* from diseases caused by exposure to toxins in the workplace (Levenstein and Wooding, 1998). These types of occupational hazards are even more profound for workers lacking the minimal protections afforded by unions or formal rights of citizenship. Over 313,000 of the 2 million farmworkers in the US – of whom

90 per cent are people of colour and undocumented immigrants – suffer from pesticide poisoning each year. Of these victims, between 800 and 1000 die (Perfecto, 1992).

The plight of such vulnerable workers is spurring new coalitions between farm-worker associations such as the United Farm Workers (UFW), immigrant rights groups, consumer and environmental organizations, labour and the environmental justice movement. Recent examples include legislative right-to-know campaigns, farmworkers' struggles against pesticide abuses impacting workers in the field and nearby communities, and campaigns against the reproductive dangers of high-tech industry. At the national level, the constituency-based Farmworker Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (FWNEEJ) has taken the lead in linking labour rights issues with workplace and community hazards. Formed in 1993, the FWNEEJ has six affiliated organizations working on pesticide abuses, EPA Worker Protection Standards and immigrant rights. In addition, two smaller, more regionally based farmworker collaborations around pesticide abuse and advocacy have developed environmental justice training programmes. They are CAMPO (Campesinos a la Mesa Politica/Farmworkers to the Policy Table), linking groups from the Midwest, Texas and the Caribbean, and the Farmworker Training Institute, developed by groups from the East Coast and the Caribbean.

Protecting Cultural and Biological Diversity: Native Land Struggles and Environmental Justice

The environmental justice movement also emerges out of struggles by Native Americans, Chicanos, African-Americans and other marginalized indigenous communities to retain and protect their traditional lands (see Peña, Chapter 7). A key component of the neo-liberal offensive in the 1990s–2000s against environmentalism involves efforts to contain and roll back policies establishing national parks, as well as protections for wilderness, forests, wild rivers, wetlands and endangered species. The reason is that capital restructuring is facilitating a much more aggressive and destructive scramble by American business for cheaper sources of renewable and non-renewable natural resources. These include efforts to exploit the majestic old-growth forests in Alaska's Tongass National Forest and ancient redwoods in the Pacific Northwest habitat of the endangered spotted owl; the rich deposits of low-sulphur coal that lie underneath the Black Mesa homelands of the Hopi and Navajo Indians in the Four Corners region of the American Southwest; the vast oil and natural gas reserves that lie in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska; and to open up more wetlands and fragile ecosystems to agricultural, commercial, and residential developers. Much of the land richest in natural resource wealth targeted for acquisition by business interests is home to indigenous communities established long ago by Spanish and Mexican land grants in the 18th–19th centuries, or during Reconstruction following the Civil War, or by treaty with the US government. The Native American land base alone amounts to 100 million acres, and is equivalent in size to all 'wilderness lands' in the National

Wilderness Preservation System. In fact, Native lands in the lower 48 states are larger than all of New England. The Navajo Reservation alone is five times the size of Connecticut, and twice the size of Maryland. In an attempt to gain control over and exploit the low-cost resources on these lands, a nationwide corporate attack on Native Americans has been initiated, including calls for the termination of treaty rights (LaDuke, 1999, Weaver and Means, 1996, Grinde et al, 1998).

New resource wars against indigenous communities are consequently intensifying in every corner of the country. Such schemes to exploit new resource reserves are motivated by landed capital's desire to bring in lower cost (and therefore more profitable) sources of oil, coal, timber and other fuels and raw materials to more effectively compete in the world market, as well as to lower the cost of inputs utilized by American capital as a whole in the production process. The result has been the growth in offshore drilling, strip-mining and destructive timber harvests with all attendant adverse social and environmental consequences, including the contamination of indigenous communities and their environment with toxic chemicals and radioactive waste produced by mining and industrial operations. Native lands, and the tribes which depend upon these lands for survival, have already suffered decades of abuse at the hands of indifferent government agencies and rapacious corporations, resulting in problems of severe poverty and ecological degradation. According to the First Nations Development Institute, about 126 species of plants and animals are listed as threatened or endangered on Indian lands (tribal lands include 49 per cent of all threatened or endangered fish, 26 per cent of birds, and 22 per cent of mammal species).

To tackle the social and ecological crises confronting indigenous communities, the environmental justice movement is linking concerns for natural resource protection and sustainability with issues of land and sovereignty rights, cultural survival, racial and social justice, alternative economic development and religious freedom (see Rixecker and Tipene-Matua, Chapter 12, for examples from the Maori in Aotearoa New Zealand). At the forefront of these struggles is the national constituency-based Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN). Formed in 1992, IEN is a resource network committed to building mutual support strategies by providing technical and organizational assistance to over 600 Native American organizations and activists across North America. Working primarily on reservation-based environmental issues, which include forestry, nuclear weapons and waste, mining, toxic dumping, water quality and water rights, IEN is now moving to create regional inter-tribal networks that build the capacity of local organizations as well as the national structure. Its National Council and annual conference are in themselves important centres for collaboration, advocacy and consensus-building among activists representing indigenous peoples from all over the world.

Fighting for People Over Poisonous Profits: The Public Health Movement and Environmental Justice

The environmental justice movement has also developed out of the community/public health and safety movement in general and the anti-toxics movement in particular. In thousands of communities across the US, billions of gallons of highly toxic chemicals including mercury, dioxin, PCBs, arsenic, lead and heavy metals such as chromium have been dumped in the midst of unsuspecting neighbourhoods. These sites poison the land, contaminate drinking water and potentially cause cancer, birth defects, nerve and liver damage and other health effects. The worst of these are called National Priority List (NPL) or Superfund sites, named after the 1980 law to clean up the nation's most dangerous toxic dumps. In a 1991 study, the National Research Council found that there were over 41 million people who lived within four miles of at least one of the nation's over 1500 dangerous Superfund waste sites (National Research Council, 1991). It is estimated that groundwater contamination is a problem at over 85 per cent of the nation's Superfund sites – a particularly alarming statistic when we realize that over 50 per cent of the American people rely upon groundwater sources for drinking. Although these dumps are the worst of the worst, it has been estimated that there are as many as 439,000 other illegal hazardous waste sites in the country (Environmental Research Foundation, 1993). Public health problems related to lead poisoning, pesticide abuse, dioxin and mercury contamination of the environment by municipal incinerators, power plants and a host of other sources, are also critical.

Coupled with the neo-liberal assault on the regulatory capacities of the state, American business is now externalizing more costs and spending less on prevention of health and safety problems inside and outside the factory, as well as on reducing pollution and the depletion of natural resources. According to EPA's Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) for 1998, some 23,000 industrial facilities reported releasing a total of 7.3 billion pounds of chemical pollutants into the nation's air, water, land and underground. The vast majority of these pollutants – some 93.9 per cent (or 6.9 billion pounds) – were released directly on-site, posing greater risks for nearby communities. As is evident from the growing toxic waste problems, pollution and other social/environmental costs of capitalist production, many neo-liberal policy initiatives directed at these current crises are actually intensifying problems they were designed to cure. Most environmental laws require capital to *contain* pollution sources for proper treatment and disposal (in contrast to the previous practice of dumping on-site or into nearby commons). Once the pollution is 'trapped', the manufacturing industry pays the state or a chemical waste management company for its treatment and disposal. The waste, now commodified, becomes mobile, crossing local, state and even national borders in search of 'efficient' (ie low-cost and politically feasible) areas for treatment, incineration and/or disposal (Field, 1998). Because these communities have less political power to defend themselves, possess lower property values and are more hungry for jobs and

tax-generating businesses, more often that not, the waste sites and facilities are themselves hazardous and located in poor working-class neighbourhoods and communities of colour. As stated by one government report, billions of dollars are spent to remove pollutants from the air and water only to dispose of such pollutants on the land, and in an environmentally unsound manner (Regenstein, 1986, p160).

The growth in neo-liberal environmental policy initiatives is fuelling the rapid expansion of the waste circuit of capital (in both legal and illegal forms) that, perhaps more than any other phenomenon, has magnified problems of ecological racism and class-based inequities related to toxic pollution that the environmental justice movement is now challenging. Over the last two decades, thousands of local citizen organizations have been created to fight for the clean-up of toxic waste dumps, the regulation of pollutants from industrial facilities, the enforcement and improvement of federal and state environmental standards and many other issues. Emerging from a diverse array of settings, including poor working class communities, with notably high numbers of women in key activist and leadership positions, these local organizations are increasingly making the links between issues of corporate power, governmental neglect and citizen disenfranchisement. As a result, many of these organizations are working in close collaboration with (or evolving into) environmental justice organizations. At the national level, organizations such as the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ) headed by Lois Gibbs (formerly the Citizen's Clearinghouse on Hazardous Waste) have taken a lead role in galvanizing the anti-toxics movement to address issue of political-economic power, although most of their efforts were concentrated on white working- and middle-class communities. However, there were a number of activists of colour who emerged from the white-led anti-toxics and environmental health movements (such as the now-defunct National Toxics Campaign) to take up leadership roles in the environmental justice community.

Today, there are a great variety of community-based and regional networks that are organizing communities of colour to protect the health and environment. For instance, the Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) was founded in 1980 and is a community-based organization in San Diego which combines grass-roots organizing, advocacy, technical assistance, research, education and policy development in its work, helping community members develop solutions to environmental health problems. This approach not only brings about institutional change, it also empowers individuals and communities to demand better working and living conditions. Working primarily with people of colour in the San Diego area and Tijuana, Mexico, EHC's programmes concentrate on problems of toxic contamination of local neighbourhoods, the workplace, San Diego Bay and the border region. EHC won a five-year battle with the San Diego Port District in July of 1997, ending the use of the toxic pesticide methyl bromide. A toxic pesticide, which causes birth defects and other health problems, and is an ozone destroyer, methyl bromide had been used to fumigate imported produce unloaded at the port. The practice posed significant health risks to nearby communities, including Barrio Logan, one of San Diego's poorest neighbourhoods. Surrounded by more than 100 toxic

polluting facilities, residents in Barrio Logan had experienced high rates of asthma, headaches, sore throats, rashes, damaged vision and other health problems. This unprecedented local victory resulted in the first policy in the world to prohibit the common practice of using methyl bromide as a port fumigant. In fact, EHC was the only local environmental group to participate with national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 1997 during discussions on the Montreal Protocol, an international treaty regarding the phasing out of ozone-depleting chemicals. The EHC campaign has become a model, which many other environmental health organizations are now using to pressure ports to reduce the use of dangerous pesticides. Since the victory, the Port District has committed US$20 million for the creation of an important wildlife refuge in the economically depressed South Bay, adopted a plan to reduce pesticide use at all of their facilities and agreed to provide funding for comprehensive community planning and expansion of the redevelopment area in Barrio Logan. Because of EHC's efforts, Barrio Logan was recently chosen by a Federal-State Interagency Committee (which included EPA) as one of 15 national environmental justice pilot projects to address air pollution problems. EHC's Border Environmental Justice Campaign also works with groups on the US–Mexican border.

The Export of Ecological Hazards to The New Global Dumping Ground: The Solidarity Movement And Environmental Justice in the Developing World

The environmental justice movement is also predicated on the human rights and anti-imperialism campaigns led by the US solidarity movement, including the South African anti-apartheid and anti-US intervention in Central America struggles in the 1980s. Solidarity movements in support of popular-based environmental movement in the developing world are assuming an ever greater importance in the era of corporate-led globalization. The growing ability of multinational corporations and transnational financial institutions to dismantle unions, evade environmental safeguards and weaken worker/community health and safety regulations in the US is being achieved by crossing national boundaries into politically repressive and economically oppressive countries, such as in Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Central America generally (Faber, 1993). As a result, various nationalities and governments are increasingly pitted against one another in a bid to attract capital investment, leading to one successful assault after another on labour and environmental regulations seen as damaging to profits. Aided by recent 'free trade' initiatives such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and enforced by bodies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), these processes of ecological imperialism include the export of more profitable yet more dangerous production processes and consumer goods, as well as waste disposal methods, to developing countries

where environmental standards are lax, unions are weak and worker health and safety issues ignored (Karliner, 1997, Castleman and Navarro, 1987).

Along the US–Mexico border there are more than 2000 factories or *maquiladoras*, many of them relocated US-based multinational corporations. One study of the border town of Mexicali indicated that stiff environmental regulations in the US and weaker ones in Mexico were either the main factor or a factor of importance in their decision to leave the US (Sanchez, 1990, p163–170). In fact, Lawrence Summers, current President of Harvard University and former Undersecretary of the Treasury of International Affairs and key economic policy-maker under the Clinton administration, is infamous for writing a 12 December 1991 memo as a chief economist at the World Bank that argued that 'the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable', and that the Bank should be 'encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [less developed countries]'. Forging links with developing world popular movements combating such abuses is yet another profound challenge confronting the US environmental justice movement.

Initially led by organizations such as the Environmental Project On Central America (EPOCA) and Third World Network in the 1980s, a host of environmental justice organizations in the US are now focusing on the interconnections between corporate-led globalization and growing problems of poverty, human rights violations, environmental degradation and the lack of democracy for poor developing world peoples. For instance, affiliates with the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ) – a regional, bi-national network founded in 1990 by representatives of 80 grass-roots organizations based throughout the US South-west, California and Northern Mexico – worked on the EPA Accountability Campaign in 1994 to force the EPA to subpoena the records of over 95 US corporations operating in Mexico for their contamination of the New River. This was the first enforcement action that used NAFTA environmental 'side bars' and the Executive Order on Environmental Justice, and became one of the largest single enforcement actions ever taken by EPA. Likewise, EarthRights International (ERI) is launching a promising new 'International Right to Know' campaign, which would extend the existing reporting requirements of domestic environmental, occupational health and safety and labour rights legislation to US corporate activities in other countries. The campaign is being built in coalition with the AFL-CIO, Sierra Club, Center for International Environmental Law, Friends of the Earth, Amnesty International and other organizations

Community Organizing for Social Change and Economic Reform: The Empowerment of Oppressed Peoples and Environmental Justice

Finally, a significant element of environmental justice activism has evolved out of community-based movements for social and economic justice, particularly in communities of colour. Emphasizing issues of affordable and safe housing,

crime and police conduct (including racial profiling and police brutality), un/under-employment and a living wage, accessible public transportation, city services, redlining and discriminatory lending practices by banks, affordable daycare, deteriorating schools and inferior educational systems, job training and welfare reform, and a host of other issues, many of these organizations have expanded their political horizons to incorporate issues such as lead poisoning, abandoned toxic waste dumps, the lack of parks and green spaces, poor air quality and other issues of environmental justice into their agenda for community empowerment. Although many organizations are not strictly self-defined as 'environmental' per se, they may devote considerable attention to environmental issues in their own communities. In fact, in recent years some of the most impressive environmental victories at the local level have been achieved by multi-issue-oriented economic justice organizations.

Direct Action For Rights and Equality (DARE), for instance, was established in 1986 to bring together low-income families in communities of colour within Rhode Island to work for social, economic and environmental justice. In this multi-issue, multi-racial dues-paying membership-based organization made up of 900 low-income families, members are organized into block clubs (similar to chapters), identify issues of common concern at regular organizational meetings and develop a strategy to address the problem. Since its establishment, DARE has successfully campaigned for the clean-up of over 100 polluted vacant lots and improved neighbourhood playgrounds and parks throughout Providence. One of DARE's most significant victories was recently achieved when Rhode Island became the first state in the nation to guarantee health care coverage for day care providers. Through this agreement with DARE, Rhode Island has set a new standard for other states to follow and implement. DARE is beginning work on campaigns to win jobs and career training from local companies for young people and is implementing further strategies to reduce pollution in low-income neighbourhoods.

Also included in this corner of environmental justice activism are the contributions of social justice-oriented religious groups and alliances, particularly those located in disenfranchised communities of colour. For instance, the St Paul Ecumenical Alliance of Congregations (SPEAC) began faith-based organizing in 1990 through a wide variety of civic and religious-based institutions within St Paul, Minnesota's lowest-income census tracts. Today, SPEAC's 19 low-income congregations and congregations of colour have strategically expanded their alliances at the neighbourhood, metropolitan and regional levels to impact St Paul's core city issues of reclaiming metro-polluted land for living wage job creation, as well as related issues of regional tax base sharing and reinvestment, public finance reform, affordable home ownership and fair welfare reform. Working in close collaboration with ageing inner ring suburban municipalities, SPEAC and the Interfaith Action (IA) of Minneapolis recently won a total of US$68 million in state funds which is being utilized to turn polluted dirt into pay dirt, by redirecting funds from outer ring suburban development on agricultural land (green fields) into the reclamation of abandoned, polluted industrial land in the inner cities (brown fields). This funding, when fully spent and matched by private investment over the next six

years, will yield about 2000 permanent, good wage industrial jobs which will be easily accessible to people who need them most, rather than promoting urban sprawl. This campaign has become a model for metropolitan stability throughout the country.

The Struggle for Ecological Democracy: Linking Sustainability and Environmental Justice

As we move further into the new millennium, the mainstream US ecology movement is confronting an immense paradox. On the one hand, over the last three decades environmentalists have built one of the more broadly based and politically powerful new social movements in this country's history. As a result, US governmental policies for protecting the environment and human health are among the most stringent in the world. On the other hand, despite having won many important battles, it is becoming increasing apparent that the traditional environmental movement is losing the war for a healthy planet. With the ascendancy of neo-liberalism, globalization and the growing concentration of corporate power over all spheres of life, the ability of the movement to solve the ecological crisis is undermined. While there is no doubt that ecological problems would be much worse without the mainstream environmental movement and current system of regulation, it is also clear that the traditional strategies and policy solutions being employed are proving to be increasingly impaired. Most existing environmental laws are poorly enforced and overly limited in prescription, emphasizing, for instance, ineffectual *pollution control* measures which aim to limit public exposure to 'tolerable levels' of industrial toxins rather than promoting *pollution prevention* measures which prohibit whole families of dangerous pollutants from being produced in the first place. In addition, other problems such as the acceleration of sprawl and the growth in US emissions of greenhouse gases continue to worsen. The US system of environmental regulation may be among the best in the world, but it is grossly inadequate for safeguarding human health and the integrity of nature.

Perhaps the most critical factor for explaining the hegemony of neo-liberalism and the growing incapacity of the state to adequately address the ecological crisis is what Robert Putnam has termed the decline in *social capital* – those social networks and assets that facilitate the education, coordination and cooperation of citizens for mutual benefit (Putnam, 2000). Over the past generation, the social networks that integrate citizens into environmental organizations and other civic institutions have seriously deteriorated in communities across the country. The resulting decline in social capital inhibits genuine citizen participation in the affairs of civil society and engagement in the realm of politics, including the ability to tackle environmental problems in an equitable and effective fashion (Borgos and Douglas, 1996). With interactions that build mutual trust eroded, greater sectors of the populace become increasingly cynical of their ability to collectively effect meaningful ecological and social changes. Instead, a growing number of people retreat into what Jurgen Habermas (1975) terms *civil privatism*, with an emphasis on personal lifestyle issues

such as career advancement, social mobility and conspicuous consumption. When social and environmental problems are confronted, increasingly individualized or 'privatized' solutions become the favoured response. As a result, the various racial, ethnic, class and religious divides in American society become accentuated, as the 'haves' increasingly disregard the needs of the 'have nots': witness the attack on affirmative action, the social safety net, labour rights and ecological protection in favour of reduced taxes, fiscal conservatism and increasingly harsh punishments for criminal misconduct.

Unfortunately, too many mainstream environmental organizations adapt corporate-like organizational models that further inhibit broad-based citizen involvement in environmental problem-solving. For these groups, citizen engagement means simply sending in membership dues, signing a petition and writing the occasional letter to a government official. As stated by William Shutkin (2000, pp1–20), there is a 'tendency for many non-profit environmental organizations to treat members as clients and consumers of services, or volunteers who help the needy, rather than as participants in the evolution of ideas and projects that forge our common life'. In the effort to conduct studies, draft legislation and organize constituencies to support passage of environment-friendly initiatives, the mainstream movement has gravitated toward a greater reliance on law and science conducted by professional experts. The aim of this move towards increased professionalization is to regain legitimacy and expert status in increasingly hostile neo-liberal policy circles. The effect, however, is to reduce internal democratic practices within some environmental organizations and state regulatory agencies. The focus on technical-rational questions, solutions and compromises, rather than issues of political power and democratic decision-making, is causing a decline in public interest and participation in national environmental politics (Faber and O'Connor, 1993).

To overcome this crisis of democracy and the corporate assault upon nature requires the reinvigoration of an *active environmental citizenship* committed to the principles of *ecological democracy*. These principles include a commitment to: (1) grass-roots democracy and inclusiveness – the vigorous participation of people from all walks of life in the decision-making processes of capital, the state and social institutions that regulate their lives, as well as civic organizations and social movements which represent their interests; (2) social and economic justice – meeting all basic human needs and ensuring fundamental human rights for all members of society; and (3) sustainability and environmental protection – ensuring that the integrity of nature is preserved for both present and future generations. These three pillars on which the concept of ecological democracy rests provide a meaningful vision for building a more just and ecologically sound American society.

Fortunately, there are signs that a powerfully new active environmental citizenship committed to the principles of ecological democracy is beginning to emerge in America and throughout the world. The revitalization of grass-roots environmental organizations committed to genuine base-building and political-economic reform is a reaction to the new challenges posed by neo-liberalism and globalization, and includes the use of direct action against timber companies, polluters, the World Trade Organization (as seen in the 'Battle in

Seattle'), the World Bank and others (as well as criticism toward the 'corporatist' and exclusionary approaches of mainstream environmental organizations). Pressing for greater economic equality, greater corporate and government accountability (such as the 'right to know' about hazards facing the community) and more comprehensive approaches to environmental problem-solving (such as adoption of the precautionary principle over risk-assessment, source reduction and pollution *prevention* over pollution *control* strategies, 'Just Transition' for workers out of polluting industries over job blackmail, etc), the struggle for ecological democracy represents the birth of a *transformative* environmental politics (Faber and O'Connor, 1993, Dowie, 1995).

At the forefront of the struggle for ecological democracy and a new active environmental citizenship is the environmental justice movement. No other force within the broader context of grass-roots environmentalism offers the same potential as the environmental justice movement for: (1) bringing new constituencies into environmental activism, particularly in terms of oppressed peoples of colour, the working poor and other populations who bear the greatest ecological burden; (2) broadening and deepening our understanding of ecological impacts, particularly in terms of linking issues to larger structures of corporate power; (3) constructing and implementing new grass-roots organizing and base-building strategies over traditional forms of advocacy, as well as developing new organizational models which rebuild social capital and maximize democratic participation by community residents in decision-making processes; (4) connecting grass-roots and national layers of environmental activism; (5) creating new pressure points for policy change; (6) building coalitions and coordinated strategies with other progressive social movements, including the labour movement and (7) bringing more innovative and comprehensive approaches to environmental problem-solving, particularly in terms of linking sustainability with issues of social justice.

Environmental justice activists clearly recognize the importance of community building, promoting active forms of citizen participation in decision-making processes and forging stronger partnerships with other community organizations in order to build a more vibrant and democratic civil society. As stated by Mark Gerzon (1995, pp188–95), '... strengthening the capacity of communities for self-governance – that is, making the crucial choices and decisions that affect their lives', is the most critical task confronting the environmental movement in rebuilding social capital and a vibrant ecological democracy. Because the environmental justice activists emphasize base-building strategies that take a multi-issue approach, they function as *community capacity builders* to organize campaigns that address the common links between various social and environmental problems (in contrast to isolated single-issue-oriented groups, which treat problems as distinct). In this respect, the movement has done an outstanding job of *enlarging the constituency* of the environmental movement as a whole by incorporating poorer communities and oppressed peoples of colour into strong, independent organizational structures insulated from colonization and co-optation by white-led, mainstream environmental organizations and government bodies. Although an identity-based politics focused on environmental racism poses some limitations to coalition building

with white working- and middle-class families, the movement has done important work in helping to *span community boundaries* by crossing difficult racial, class, gender-based and ideological divides which weaken and fragment communities (Mathews, 1997, pp275–280).

Finally, the movement is facilitating *community empowerment* by emphasizing *grass-roots organizing and base-building* over traditional forms of environmental advocacy. Under the traditional advocacy model, professional activists create organizations that speak and act on behalf of a community. In contrast, the grass-roots organizing approach by the environmental justice movement emphasizes the mobilization of community residents to push through the systemic barriers that bar citizens from directly participating in the identification of problems and solutions so that they may *speak and act for themselves* (Alston, 1990). Base-building implies creating accountable, democratic organizational structures and institutional procedures which facilitate inclusion by ordinary citizens, and especially dispossessed people of colour and low-income families, in the public and private decision-making practices affecting their communities.

If the environmental justice movement continues to build upon the already impressive successes it has established in these areas, and find ways to collaborate with the broad array of grass-roots citizens groups representative of the white middle class, we may finally witness the creation of a truly broad-based ecology movement, inclusive of all races, the working poor and women, that is finally capable of implementing a national and international strategy to end the abuses of nature wrought by corporate America. In short, the environmental justice movement is critical to the larger effort to build a more inclusive, democratic and effective ecology movement in the US – one which can challenge and transform structures of power and profit which lie at the root of the ecological crisis.

Conclusion

It is now clear that the traditional environmental movement has become so fragmented, parochial and dominated by single-issue approaches that its capacity to champion fundamental social and institutional changes needed to address America's ecological crisis is greatly diminished. As stated by Pablo Eisenberg (1997, pp331–341), 'although we know that our socio-economic, ecological and political problems are interrelated, a growing portion of our nonprofit world nevertheless continues to operate in a way that fails to reflect this complexity and connectedness'. In this respect, if the traditional environmental movement continues to conceive of the ecological crisis as a collection of unrelated problems, and if the reigning paradigms are defined in the neo-liberalist terms of a minimally regulated capitalist economy, then it is possible that some combination of regulations, incentives and technical innovations can keep pollution at tolerable levels for many people of higher socio-economic status. Poorer working-class communities and people of colour who lack the political-economic resources to defend themselves will continue to suffer the worst abuses. If, however, the interdependency of issues is emphasized, so that

environmental devastation, ecological racism, poverty, crime and social despair are all seen as aspects of a multi-dimensional web of a larger structure crisis, then a transformative ecology movement can begin to be invented (Rodman, 1980).

It is precisely this single-issue orientation that the environmental justice movement is coming to challenge by developing broad-based coalitions that are pushing for comprehensive approaches to community, national and global problems. The struggle for environmental justice is not just about distributing environmental risks equally (ie distributive environmental justice) but about preventing them from being produced in the first place so that no one is harmed at all (ie productive environmental justice). The struggle for environmental justice must be about the politics of corporate power and capitalist production per se and the elimination of the ecological threat, not just the 'fair' distribution of ecological hazards via better government regulation of inequities in the marketplace. And while increased participatory democracy by popular forces in governmental decision-making and community planning is desirable (if not essential), and should be supported, it is, in and of itself, insufficient for achieving true sustainability and environmental justice. What is needed is a richer conception of ecological democracy.

From this perspective, organizing efforts against procedures that result in an unequal distribution of environmental problems (distribution inequity) cannot ultimately succeed unless environmental justice activists continue to address the procedures by which the environmental problems are *produced* in the first place (procedural inequity) (Lake, 1996, p169). Any effort to rectify distributional inequities without attacking the fundamental processes that produced the problems in the first place focuses on symptoms rather than causes and is therefore only a partial, temporary, and necessarily incomplete and insufficient solution. What is needed is an environmental justice politics for procedural equity that emphasizes democratic participation in the capital investment decisions through which environmental burdens are *produced* then distributed. As Michael Heiman (1996, p120) has observed, 'If we settle for liberal procedural and distributional equity, relying upon negotiation, mitigation and fair-share allocation to address some sort of disproportional impact, we merely perpetuate the current production system that by its very structure is discriminatory and non-sustainable'. Productive environmental justice can only be achieved in a sustainable economic system – a post-capitalist society in which material production and distribution is democratically planned and equitably administered according to the needs of both present and future members of society.

Rather than existing as a collection of isolated organizations fighting defensive 'not-in-my-backyard' battles (as important as they may be), the environmental justice movement must continue to evolve into a political force capable of challenging the systemic causes of social and ecological injustices as they exist 'in everyone's backyard'. It is precisely this distinction between *distributional environmental justice* versus *productive environmental justice* that many in the movement are now beginning to address in a more systematic fashion. Only by bringing about what Barry Commoner (1990) calls 'the social governance of the means of production' – a radical democratization of all major political,

social and economic institutions – can humanity begin to gain control over the course of its relationship with nature. Such a programme for social governance would require that the institutions of workplace and local direct democracy, liberal democratic procedures and constitutional guarantees, state planning and the initiatives of popular-based social and environmental movements be sublated into a genuine ecological democracy (O'Connor, 1992, p1–5).

The challenge confronting the environmental justice movement is to help forge a truly broad-based political movement for ecological democracy. While the traditional environmental movement has played a critical and progressive role in stemming many of the worst threats posed to the health of the planet and its inhabitants, the movement is now proving increasingly unable to institute more sustainable and socially just models of development in the face of neo-liberalism, globalization and the economic restructuring of US and international capitalism. And as unsustainable practices and environmental injustices intensify across the globe, the need for a mass-based international movement committed to the principles of ecological democracy will become more pressing. Just as in the 1930s, when the labour movement was forced to change from craft to industrial unionism, so today does it appear to many that labour needs to transform itself from industrial unionism into an international conglomerate union, inclusive of women and all racial/ethnic peoples, just to keep pace with the restructuring of international capital. And just as in the 1960s, when the environmental movement changed from a narrowly based conservation/preservation movement to include the middle class (and some sectors of the white working class), so today does it seem to many that it needs to change from single-issue local and national struggles to a broad-based multi-racial international environmental justice movement. We must work in solidarity to promote strong unions, environmental justice movements and worker health and safety standards throughout the rest of the world in order to protect local initiatives and gains. This historic task now confronts the environmental justice movement.

Acknowledgements

Funding for this research paper was provided by the Nonprofit Sector Research Fund of the Aspen Institute, Washington, DC; the Marion and Jasper Whiting Foundation; as well as the Research, Scholarship and Development Fund (RSDF) of the Provost Office at Northeastern University.

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