Workers' Solidarity Federation
The Environment

Retrieved on January 1, 2005 from www.cat.org.au

Workers' Solidarity Federation

The Environment

To Sum Up

1. The Earth is facing a serious environmental crisis with potentially catastrophic results.
2. The environmental crisis has been created by capitalism and the State.
3. The working class has a direct interest in fighting to halt the environmental crisis as it the main victim of this crisis. By contrast the ruling class profits from the crisis.
4. Mass action against the capitalists and the State is the only effective way to fight the environmental crisis in the short-term.
5. The only effective long-term solution to the crisis is the replacement of capitalism and the State by Anarchism or stateless socialism.
6. There will continue to be economic growth and industry in the Anarchist society, but this will take place only on an environmentally-sustainable basis.
7. Workplace organization will play a central role in fighting and winning the battle to end the environmental crisis, and its causes.

27. Support wilderness preservation in the form of nature reserves, but, recognizing that such reserves have often been set up at the expense of local communities, and the resentment this creates, call for these communities to retain access to some grazing, dry wood, and other resources. Demand that local communities receive cut from gate takings. Unionize workers at these facilities.

28. Oppose all testing of atomic, biological and chemical weapons in all circumstances and support blacking of goods and services as well as other direct action to halt these tests.

29. Oppose the practice of vivisection not just for its cruelty but for its scientific flaws. Link this issue to the struggle for health and safety by pointing out how bogus "scientific" testing on animals results in the exposure of the working class to unsafe medicines.

30. Call for strike action against companies strip mining forests to force them to reforest and manage extraction. Support unionization of workers in these industries and their revolutionary education.

31. Call on unions to fund their own environmental monitoring section answerable to the workers and community affected. Call on unions to publicize and organize action against industries that expose workers and the community at large to toxic substances, pollution etc.

32. Within unions also demand industry use recycled products where possible and find alternatives for products or by-products that harm the environment. This should be backed by industrial action.

Contents

7. Workers Solidarity Federation Activity on the Environment

General perspectives

21. The role of Workers Solidarity Federation is first and foremost to spread the ideas of Anarchism as far and far as possible. We are also in favor of helping the working class organize itself and increase its confidence in its own decision-making capacity.

22. A crucial part of our work is to link a criticism of the present society with a vision of how society could be organized to benefit the masses. We support all progressive struggles, for their aims, for the confidence that campaigning gives people, and because it is in struggle that ideas are spread.

23. We always try to relate our ideas to the day to day needs and struggles of the working class. We are opposed to an abstract form of environmentalism that does not link itself to the class struggle.

Guidelines for day-to-day activities

24. Call for workers in polluting factories to enforce safety rules and monitor pollution. Support actions by workers and the local community to stop/ reduce pollution. Where factories cannot be made safe we can demand that they be closed but that their workers get employed at the same pay levels and skill in the local area.

25. Call for the shutting down of all nuclear power stations under capitalism because the placing of profits before human needs means that these facilities will never be safe.

26. Link the fight for land redistribution to the issue of how the homelands system has generated severe environmental problems. Argue that the redistributed land should be farmed by means of sustainable agricultural practices.

Anarchism . . . has always fostered an intense interest in the proper ecological management of the Earth, and its history, theory and practice contains valuble clues and suggestions as to how we might overcome the ecological crisis that presently confronts the human species.

Graham Purchase, *Anarchism and Ecology: the Historical Relationship of Anarchism to Ecological Thought*, Black Swan, 1992.

6. What Will a Future Anarchist Society Look Like, and How Does this Relate to the Environment?

20. The two fundamental structures of the Anarchist society will be the Syndicate (democratic workplace associations) and the Free City-Commune (the self-managed city or village, made up of syndicates and community committees in a given area)[1].

20.1. Communes will be federated into regions and nations; they will also be linked by federations of Syndicates that provide services impossible to organize purely at the level of the individual Commune (eg. transcontinental railways, post).

20.2. Each Commune must be located in a particular ecological region (Bio-region) and must learn to preserve, enhance and integrate itself into that region's natural dynamics.

20.3. The trade unions and civic associations provide the nucleus of the future syndicates and communes.

[1] on the theory of the Communes and the Syndicates as developed by classical Anarchism, see Guerin, Daniel, (1970), *Anarchism: From Theory To Practice.* Monthly Review Press. New York and London. Chapter 2, esp. pp56-60. The addition of the Bio-regional dimension is found in Purchase (1993), Purchase (1991) and Purchase, Graham, (1990), *Anarchist Society and its Practical Realization.* San Francisco. See Sharp Press.

1. General Introduction

1. The Earth is facing an environmental crisis on a scale unprecedented in human history. This environmental crisis is already responsible for high levels of human suffering. If the crisis continues to develop at its current rate, the ultimate result wil be the extinction of human life on the planet.

2. We call for action to end the environmental crisis because of the threat it poses to humankind, and because we recognize that nature and the environment have value in their own terms. Although we hold human life above all other life on the planet, we do not think that humans have the right destroy animals, plants and eco-systems that do not threaten its survival.

3. The main environmental problems include:

3.1. Air pollution: destroys the ozone layer that filters out dangerous rays from the sun; creates a general increase in planetary temperatures (the greenhouse effect) that will severely disrupt weather patterns; turns rain water into acid that destroys plant and animal life; causes respiratory and other diseases amongst humans.

3.2. Solid waste: the sea and the land environments are poisoned by the dumping of dangerous industrial wastes (such as mercury and nuclear waste); the use of materials that nature cannot break down in packaging and in other products, particularly disposable products, have turned many parts of the world into large rubbish dumps as well as wasting resources; poisons and injures people.

3.3. Soil erosion: this takes place in both the First and the Third World, and is the result of factors such the (mis-)use of chemical fertilizers, dangerous pesticides etc, as well as inappropriate land use, land overuse, and the felling of trees. For these reasons, soil is eroded at a rate faster than that at which it is being produced; contributes to rural poverty[1].

[1] Cooper, Dave, (1991) "From Soil Erosion to Sustainability: land use in South Africa," in Cock, Jacklyn and Eddie Koch (editors), (1991), *Going Green: People, Politics And The Environment In South Africa.* Cape Town. Oxford University Press. p177.

3.4. Extinction: plants and animals are being made extinct at a faster rate than any time since the dinosaurs died out, 60 million years ago; results in the loss of many species, and undermines the ecosphere on which all life depends.

4. All of these environmental problems exist on a serious scale in South Africa[2].

4.1. For example, in 1990 coal burning power stations and factories in the Eastern Transvaal and Vaal Triangle pumped acid rain-producing chemicals into the atmosphere at levels twice those of (ex-)East Germany, which is the country with the world's most serious acid rain problem[3].The area affected includes half of South Africa's agricultural land and forest resources, whilst the rivers that drain out of it provide a quarter of the country's surface water.

4.2. As for soil erosion, this takes place in South Africa at a very high rate: on average, at least 20 tons of topsoil are lost for every ton of grain produced. Rates are higher in many areas.

5. The environmental crisis has contributed strongly to the emergence of a large world-wide environmental movement. This movement first emerged in the nineteenth-century but has become especially prominent since the 1960s.

[2] Three books that provide a good overview of environmental issues in South Africa are Cock, Jacklyn and Eddie Koch (editors), (1991), *Going Green.* Cape Town. Oxford University Press; Koch, Eddie, Cooper Dave and Henk Coetzee, (1990), *Waste, Water And Wildlife: The Politics Of Ecology In South Africa.* Penguin Forum Series; Ramphele, Mamphela (editor), (1991), *Restoring The Land: Environment And Change In Post-Apartheid South Africa.* London. Panos Institute.

[3] This figure and the next one come from Koch, Cooper and Coetzee, (1990), p5. and Cooper (1991), p177, respectively.

will the idea that happiness can only be gained by buying more and more useless commodities[3]. Thirdly, the introduction of social and economic equality will end the environmental degradation forced on the poor by means such as land shortages and the homelands system. And finally, the workers will be able to install (and further develop) the ecologically sustainable technologies that the bosses suppress[4].

[3] see Bill Meyers. "Ecology and Anarcho-syndicalism"

[4] Mark McGuire, (1993), "Book Review Corner", *Rebel Worker*, vol 12, no. 6 (108)). p12.

19. We believe that workplace organizing is the key to saving the environment, in both the short-term and the long-term.

19.1. Because a large proportion of environmental damage takes place at the point of production (as the result of dangerous technologies, poor plant maintenance, hazardous operating procedures, the handling of dangerous substances, poor worker training), and because the workers and their communities are the main victims of this pollution , "[t]rade union struggles for health and safety constitute the first line of defense for an embattled environment"[1].

19.2. The working class, organized in trade unions, allied with communities struggling against environmental abuses can go a long way in stopping the State/ capitalist onslaught against the planet. As we argued above, dealing with brown ecological issues (safety, health etc.) will definitely benefit green ecological issues (wildlife, sea etc.). This sort of mass organizing by the productive working class will do far more to stop the bosses than the small-scale guerrilla and obstruction tactics favored by groups such as Earth First!, such as sabotaging bulldozers[2].

19.3. In the long-term the unions can not only defend the environment but save it. Inspired by the revolutionary ideas of Anarchism, and structured in a non-bureaucratic, decentralized and democratic manner, the unions can be the battering ram that smashes capitalism and the State, by seizing the factories, mines etc. and putting them under the control of the workers (in cooperation with community structures).

19.4. A working class revolution will help the environment in four ways. First, the capitalist/ State system that was the main cause of environmental problems, a system oriented to profit and power, will be replaced by a society based on need-satisfaction and grassroots democracy. Secondly, the excessive levels of consumption by the upper class and the middle class will be eliminated altogether, as

[1] Crompton and Erwin (1991) p80; also Chemical Workers Industrial Union (1991); McDonald (1994).

[2] Bill Meyers. "Ecology and Anarcho-syndicalism", *Ideas and Action*; see Anon. *You Can't Blow Up A Social Relationship: The Anarchist Case Against Terrorism* for a detailed examination of the case for mass organizing and actions instead of small-scale guerrilla and terrorist approaches.

2. Explaining the Environmental Crisis

6. We reject the argument that economic development and economic growth always leads to the destruction of the environment. The implication of this type of argument is either that the environmental crisis is unavoidable and that we should just "grin and bear it", or that the world's economy must be drastically shrunk, and industry replaced with small-scale craft and agricultural production.

6.1. By "development" we mean a sustained structural shift in the economy from the primary sector (farming, mining) towards manufacturing and the service sector; by "economic growth" we mean the expansion of per capita output in a given economy.[1].

6.2. There is nothing inherently environmentally destructive about modern industrial technologies[2]. Many dangerous technologies and substances can be replaced. For example, petrochemical based plastics, which are not biodegradable, can be replaced by starch-based plastics (which safely disintegrate if left outside in a couple of weeks), palm-oil can be used to replace diesel etc.

6.3. There is nothing wrong in and of itself with development and economic growth[3]. The point is that these processes can and must take place on environmentally-sensitive and sustainable lines. Dangerous technologies must be replaced with sustainable ones (eg). nuclear energy with solar energy. Wasteful practices must be ended

[1] Basically the same definitions as those provided by Gould, J.D. (1972), *Economic Growth in History* pp1-2.

[2] Purchase, Graham (1993), "Rethinking the Fall of State-Communism", in *Rebel Worker*, volume 12, no 9 (108) pp15-16. The examples of environmentally-friendly technologies come from Purchase, (1993), pp15-6 and Graham Purchase, (1991), *Anarchist Organization: Suggestions and Possibilities.* Sydney. Black Swan. pp3-5, 21–3.

[3] The following two sections are based on McLoughlin, Conor, (1992), "Does 'Saving The Planet' Mean An End To Industry, Progress And Development?", in *Workers Solidarity* no 36. Ireland.

(eg). the use of disposable containers as opposed to recyclable ones like glass bottles; the production of more of a good than can be used.

6.4. There is still a need for (environmentally-sustainable) development and economic growth in order to deal with poverty and underdevelopment (eg). need for a massive program of house-building.

6.5. In addition, industrial technology holds a number of advantages over small-scale craft production[4]. Industry can produce many types of goods on a larger scale and at a faster rate than craft production, and can thus not only increase the level of economic growth, but also help shorten the working day, and free people from many unpleasant jobs.

7. We reject the argument that the First World is, as a whole, responsible for the environmental crisis[5]. By the "First World" we mean the advanced industrial capitalist countries of West Europe, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and Japan. According to this kind of argument living standards in the First World are excessively high, with the "average" person not only consuming resources at a much higher rate than people elsewhere, but also owning far more things than are remotely neccesary for a comfortable existence. The implication of this argument is that there must be a drastic reduction in First World living standards, and that the rest of the world can never hope to raise their living standards to the levels supposedly enjoyed by the "rich countries."

7.1. The majority of people in the First World — the working class — are not a rich elite living it up at the expense of the planet and the Third World (Africa, Asia, South America, and arguably, parts of the ex-Eastern bloc)[6].There are massive levels of inequality in wealth and power in the First World.

7.2. For example, in the United Kingdom (UK) (Britain and Northern Ireland) at the start of the 1980s, the top 10% of the population received 23.9% of total income while the bottom 10% received only 2.5%. The top 10% of the population also owned four fifths of all

[4] Graham Purchase, (1993), p17.

[5] For an example of this kind of argument, see Ted Trainer, (1991), "Third World Poverty", in Andrew Dobson (ed) The *Green Reader.* Andre Deutsch. London.

[6] The argument presented in this section draws on Bill Meyers. "Ecology and Anarcho-syndicalism", *Ideas and Action* no 13.

5. Mass Organizing and Anarcho-Syndicalism: The Way Forward for the Future of the Planet

18. Mass action and a working class revolution are the only real ways to deal with the environmental crisis.

18.1. The environmental crisis was generated by capitalism and the State, and can only be dealt with by challenging the power of these forces. We believe that only mass organizing and mass actions, as opposed to elections and lobbying, are effective methods of struggle.

18.2. Because of the manner in which capitalism and the State by their very nature generate environmental destruction it is necessary in the long term to overthrow these structures and create a society based on real freedom and production and distribution on the basis of need, not profit. This society can be called Anarchism or stateless socialism.

18.3. The working class is the only force in society capable of accomplish these tasks. As the main victim of the environmental crisis, and as the victim of capitalism as a whole, the working class has a direct interest in dealing with the environmental crisis and in resisting and overturning the capitalist system as a whole. By contrast, the ruling class, and sections of the middle class, are dependent on the continued survival of capitalism and the State, and are also able to avoid the worst effects of the environmental crisis.

18.4. In addition, the working class (and working peasantry) is the source of all social wealth and is thus able, by action at the point of production, to wield a powerful weapon against the bosses and the rulers. We believe that the power of the workers must be brought to bear in the struggle to halt the environmental crisis.

18.4. Finally, because the working class (and working peasantry) produce all social wealth, only these classes can overthrow capitalism and the State and create a free society in their place, because only these classes do not need to exploit.

personal wealth, and 98% of all privately held company shares and stocks. The top 1% itself owned 80% of all stocks and shares. Meanwhile the bottom 80% of the population owned just 10% of the personal wealth, mostly in the form of owning the ho use they live in. These economic inequalities correspond to material deprivation and hardship. A study published in 1979 found that about 32% of the population of the UK (15–17.5 million out of a population of 55.5 million) was living in or near poverty. A 1990 United Nations survey of child health in the UK showed that 25% of children were malnourished to the extent that their growth was stunted[7].

7.3. From these figures it should be clear that the majority of the working class in the First World is not enjoying "very high per capita material living standards". The high levels of consumption that exist in the First World can only be explained by reference to the excessively high living standards of the ruling classes as well as parts of the middle class. In the Third World, too, there is a small ruling elite whose jet-set lifestyle contributes directly to environmental degradation.

7.4. In fact, given that most industry (and hence pollution) is located in the First World, the working class of these countries is among the primary victims of environmental degradation.

7.5. Thus, the majority of people in the First World do not need "de-development" and a scaling down of living standards, but increased (egalitarian and environmentally-sensitive) growth to improve their living standards.

[7] Figures for the UK from Robert Lekachman and Borin van Loon, (1981), *Capitalism for Beginners*. Pantheon Books. New York, esp. 44–5, 67, 70. and *Class War* (1992), *Unfinished Business: The Politics Of Class War*. AK Press and CWF, p. 77. For the USA see Lind, Micheal, *The Next American Nation*, cited in "Stringing up the Yuppies", (24 September 1995), *Sunday Times*, p14; *Business Week* which estimated in 1991 36 million Americans (15% of the total population) were living in poverty; and *New York Times*, Sept . 25, 1992

vance to the working class[13]. To use the distinction we drew above, they focus on "green" environmental issues (wildlife, ozone layer etc.) as opposed to the "brown" environmental issues (health and safety, community development) that working class people tend to emphasize. For example, the Campaign to Save St. Lucia nature reserve that begun in 1989 generally failed to con sult the people who lived in the area, many of whom had been forcibly removed when the reserve was set up

[13] cf. Taylor (1990) pp40-1; Baugh (1991) pp182-3; Cock (1991a) p2; Cock (1991b) pp13-14; Koch, Cooper and Coetzee (1990) p2; Ramphele (1991) p6; also Khan (1990) p36; Marais, H., (1991), "When Green Turns to White," in *Work in Progress*, no 89.; Koch, Cooper and Koetzee (1990) pp24-5; quoted in Koch, Cooper and Coetzee (1990) pp24-5; Ramphele, Mamphela, (1991), p7.

Wildlife Society charges R80 per year), a degree of ignorance around environmental problems, and, finally, a lack of confidence in getting involved in political activity[11]. This explanation is inadequate because the Black working class has, despite these sorts of obstacles, built large and powerful trade union and civic movements.

17.2. Part of the explanation lies with the fact that many working class people have been alienated by the actions of sections of the environmentalist movement. These sections focussed their attention on wilderness and wildlife conservation, and strongly supported the State's establishment of nature reserves. But many of these reserves were established by means of the forced removal of rural communities, who thus lost their land as well as access to natural resources such as fish and building materials. To add insult to injury, many of these nature reserves were (until the 1990s) reserved for "Whites only". These practices can only breed hatred for conservation among the rural poor[12].

17.3. Related to this is the fact that few environmental organizations in South Africa address environmental issues of direct rele-

[11] McDonald, David, (September 1994), "Black Worker, Brown Burden: municipal workers and the environment", *South African Labor Bulletin*, Vol 18, no 4. p76; Ramphele, Mamphela, (1991), "'New Day Rising': Environmental Issues And The Struggle For A New South Africa," in Ramphele, Mamphela (editor), 1991, *Restoring the Land.* London. Panos Institute p6; also Taylor (1989) pp199-200, also 190–2; Taylor, D., (1990), "Can the Environmental Movement Attract and Maintain the Support of Minorities?," in B. Bryant and P. Mohai (eds), *The Proceedings of the Michigan Conference on Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards.* pp38-40; footnote 3 (p 54); the converse argument (that middle class people are generally especially prominent in political and voluntary organizations) is found in Lowe and Goyder (1983) p11; Morrison and Dunlap (1986) p583; Taylor (1989) p184; van Liere and Dunlap (1980) p184.

[12] See Cock (1991a) pp1-2; Cock (1991b), "The Politics of Ecology: Moving Away From The Authoritarian Conservation And Towards Green Politics," Ramphele, Mamphela (editor), 1991, *Restoring the Land.* London. Panos Institute; also see AFRA (1991), "Animals versus People: the Tembe Elephant Park," in Cock, Jacklyn and Eddie Koch, 1991, Going Green. Oxford University Press. Cape Town; Ramphele (1991) p6; Koch, Cooper and Coetzee (1990) pp22-5.; for similar experiences in the USA see Taylor (1990) p42.

3. Capitalism and the State: At the Root of the Environmental Crisis

8. The real blame for the environmental crisis must be laid at the door of capitalism and the State, and the society which these forces have created.

9. Capitalism is an enormously wasteful system of production, which is geared towards competition in the market, and to making profits. Under capitalism, the needs of the working class are not met, a false sort of "over-production" takes place, and pollution is endemic[1]. *See position paper on class struggle for discussion of capitalism.*

9.1. Huge amounts of goods are built to break as soon as possible in order to keep sales up (built-in obsolescence).

9.2. A large number of useless or inefficient goods are promoted and sold by means of high pressure advertising (eg) private cars in place of large-scale public transport.

9.3. We must not make the mistake of assuming that all goods produced under capitalism are actually consumed by ordinary people. Often the bosses produce more of a given good than can be sold on the market, and this can lead to a price collapse and a recession. The bosses' solution is to destroy or stockpile the "extra" goods, rather than distribute them to those who need them (which would cut into profits) (eg). In 1991 there were 200 million tons of grain worldwide which were hoarded to preserve price levels. Three million tons could have eliminated famine in Africa that year.

9.4. It also costs money and cuts into potential profits to install safety equipment and monitor the use of dangerous materials. It is more profitable for the capitalists to shift these costs (sometimes called "externalities") onto the consumer in the for m of pollution. 9.5. We noted above that there are many environmentally-friendly technologies that can replace environmentally destructive ones. Many

[1] This section is based on McLoughlin (1992); *Class War* (1992), pp30-1; and Lekachman and van Loon, (1981), pp62-4.

of these have been bought up and suppressed by vested capitalist interests that do not want technological changes that will threaten their profits[2].

10. The State, like capitalism, is a major cause of environmental degradation. *See position paper on class struggle for discussion of the state.*

10.1. The State is a structure created to allow the minority of bosses and rulers to dominate and exploit the masses of the working class (and working peasants). The State will not willingly enforce strong environmental protection laws against the bosses because it does not want to cut into the profits of the bosses and into its own tax revenue.

10.2. In addition, the rulers of the State are afraid that strong environmental laws will chase away investors (eg). in 1992, capitalists in Holland were able to block a proposed tax on carbon pollution by threatening to relocate in other countries[3].

10.3. The State directly contributes to the environmental crisis in its drive to strengthen its military power against the working class and against rival States. War and the mobilization of resources for war has devastating effects on the environment[4].

10.4. Massive amounts of resources that could be used to introduce environmentally-friendly technologies, promote soil conservation and the like are spent on military projects: worldwide military expenditure amounts to $900 billion a year.

10.5. Military technology such as atomic weapons are more than capable of destroying all life on the planet. Beyond this, many technologies developed in wars have been adapted to industry, resulting in very dangerous products (nuclear weapons — > nuclear reactors; nerve gases — > pesticides).

10.6. Both war and environmental destruction are based on a disrespect for life and the values of domination, conquest and control (over people or nature).

[2] McLoughlin (1992); Purchase (1991), p4.

[3] *Weekly Mail* (22–8 May 1992) p34 for this and other examples.

[4] This section is based on Cock, Jacklyn, (1991a), "Going Green at the Grassroots: The Environment As A Political Issue," in Cock, Jacklyn and Eddie Koch (editors), 1991, *Going Green.* Cape Town. Oxford University Press. pp8-9.

15.6. While in the long-term a global environmental crisis would obviously affect everyone, it is not true that everybody shares an immediate interest in fighting against the environmental crisis: the bosses and the State benefit from the processes that harm the environment and the middle classes can at the very least avoid contact with many environmental hazards[7]. Only the workers and the poor have a direct interest right now in fighting for a clean environment.

16. There is clear evidence of environmental concern and awareness on the part of the Black working class (eg). the involvement of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union in the campaign against Thor Chemicals, linking opposition to the dangerous working co nditions at the Thor plant to opposition to the company's practice of importing toxic waste[8].

17. It is, however, undoubtedly true that the membership of most environmental organizations in South Africa (and in a number of other countries) is mainly White and middle-class[9]. As should be obvious from what we have said before, we reject the view that this membership profile can be explained in terms of the inherently "White" or "petty-bourgeois" nature of environmental issues[10].

17.1. A number of factors make it difficult for Black working class people to get involved in environmental organizations. These include: a lack of time, inability to pay high membership fees (the

[7] see also A. Dobson, (1990), *Green Political Theory: An Introduction.* Unwin Hyman. London. pp152-3.

[8] see Koch (1991), "Rainbow Alliances" for an overview of community and worker struggles around environmental issues since the late 1980s

[9] *On South Africa*, see Ulrich, N. and L. van der Walt, (1994), *Green Politics In South Africa: The Ideological And Social Composition Of The South African Environmentalist Movement, With Special Reference To Earthlife Africa And The Wildlife Society Of Southern Africa.* Sociology Dept. University of the Witwatersrand. For elsewhere, see (eg). see Baugh, J., (1991); Cotgrove, S. and A. Duff, (1980), "Environmentalism, Middle Class Radicalism, and Politics," in *Sociological Review*, Vol 32. pp334,340,342; Lowe, P. and J. Goyder, (1983); Morrison, D.E. and R.E. Dunlap (1986); Taylor, D.E., (1989), "Blacks and The Environment: Towards And Explanation Of The Concern And Action Gap Between Blacks And Whites," in *Environment and Behavior*, vol. 21, no. 2; van Liere, K.D. and R.E. Dunlap, (1980).

[10] For examples of this line of argument see Dobson (1993) p218; Koch, Cooper and Koetzee, (1990), p. iv; Lowe and Goyder (1980), p10; Lowe and Goyder (1983) pp25-6; van Liere and Dunlap (1980) p183.

least 1600 South Africans die from the chronic effects of pesticides every year.

15.2. Working class communities, particularly working class Black townships and squatter camps, also bear the brunt of environmental problems. Pollution levels in Soweto are two and a half times higher than anywhere else in the country, and children in Soweto suffer from more asthma and chest colds, and take longer to recover from respiratory diseases, than children elsewhere[4].

15.3. Because of the racial division of labour in South Africa (which confined Africans to low-paying unskilled and semi-skilled jobs), because of the design of the Apartheid city (dirty industries and dumps were located near townships rather than White suburbs), and because of the homeland system, it is clear that the Black working class is the main victim of South Africa's environmental crisis.

15.4. Therefore, a safe environment is a basic need for the workers and the poor of South Africa. The environment is not just something "out there" such as the veld, sea etc. The environment also refers to where people live and work[5]. We can distinguish between "green" environmental issues (like wildlife, trees, ozone layer etc.), and "brown" environmental issues (like workplace safety and community development)[6]. The two are obviously connected: brown ecological issues (like lack of sewerage facilities) directly affect green ecological issues (like marine life); tackling brown issues will generally improve green ecology.

15.5. Unlike the working class, the bosses and the rulers, including the Black politicians and Black business, are protected from the effects of their greed and appetite for power by their air-conditioned offices and luxury suburban homes.

[4] Cock (1991a) p4; for other examples see Koch (1991),"Rainbow Alliances: Community Struggles Around Environmental Problems," in Cock, Jacklyn and Eddie Koch, 1991, *Going Green.* Oxford University Press. Cape Town. pp21-2; and Khan, Farieda, 1991, "Environmental Sanitation", in Ramphele, Mamphela (editor), 1991, *Restoring the Land.* London. Panos Institute. p132.

[5] Crompton and Erwin, (1991), p80; also David McDonald, (September 1994), "Black Worker, Brown Burden: municipal workers and the environment", *South African Labor Bulletin*, Vol 18, no 4. p73.

[6] McDonald (1994) p73.

10.7. Another example of the links between the State's war against people and its war against the environment: evidence has emerged that the South African Defense Force (SADF) was involved in the smuggling of ivory and rhino horns to fund Unita and Renamo rightwing armed operations in Angola and Mozambique[5]. In this case, rare animals were slaughtered to prop up reactionary movements aligned to the Apartheid state.

11. Capitalism and the State also contribute to environmental degradation by generating massive inequality.

11.1. One reason for the environmental crisis is clearly the excessively high consumption of the ruling classes of the First World and the Third World. Capitalism and the State always result in the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a few.

11.2. Poverty also leads directly to environmental destruction (eg). the homelands system in South Africa. The homelands only make up 13% of the country's surface territory but are home to more than 10 million people, thus creating severe pressure on the land: the land is overgrazed, scarred by dongas, and natural woodlands are denuded[6].

11.3. Poverty is the direct result of the system of capitalism and the State (eg). the capitalists supported the homelands system because they wanted farming in the homelands to subsidize cheap migrant labor by supporting the workers' families, and providing a retirement

[5] Koch, Cooper and Koetzee (1990), pp15-6, 25–27; Ann Eveleth, (September 1–7, 1995), "SADF used ivory to fund war in Angola", in *Mail and Guardian*, p6; Ann Eveleth, (Sept 8–14 1995) "New claims of SADF ivory smuggling", in *Mail and Guardian*, p8.

[6] On the environmental impact of the homelands system see Koch, Cooper and Coetzee (1990), pp6-9; also Cooper (1991) pp177-9). For an analysis of why the capitalists and the government promoted the homelands system and migrant labor, see Callinicos, Luli, (1981), *Gold and Workers 1886–1924*, volume 1 of *A People's History of South Africa.* Ravan Press. Braamfontein, especially Chapter 17; Lacey, M., (1981), *Working For Boroko: The Origins Of A Coercive Labor System In South Africa.* Ravan. Braamfontein.; Legassick, M, (1974), "South Africa: capital accumulation and violence," *Economy and Society* vol. 3, no. 3.; Saul, John S. and Stephen Gelb, (1986), *The Crisis in South Africa*, Zed Books. Revised edition; Posel, D., (1991), *The Making Of Apartheid 1948–61 : Conflict And Compromise.* Clarendon Press. Oxford, esp Chapter 1.

home for old and crippled workers. In addition, they wanted to prevent African peasants from competing with them in agriculture and the land market. The size of the homelands reflects the process of colonial dispossession that resulted in the White farmers owning most of the land. The State supported the homelands system because it promotes the interests of the capitalists and also because it wanted to prevent the development of a urbanized African working class. *See position paper on fighting racism for discussion of racial capitalism in South Africa*

12. It is possible that the very idea that people should dominate and exploit nature only emerged after relationships of domination and exploitation developed within human society[7]. In classless societies, according this theory, people saw themselves as part of nature, but with the emergence of inequality a new worldview in which others (humans and the environment) were seen as things to be manipulated and controlled develops.

13. We reject the idea that the environment can be saved by means of the State, or by electing a Green Party. Not only does the State defend capitalism, but the State is itself one of the main causes of environmental destruction.

[7] *Green Anarchism: Its Origins And Influences*, text of PNR's lecture during the Workers Education Association (Oxford Industrial Branch), Anarchism Course, (24 November 1992), pp21-2.

4. Why Environmental Issues are Directly Relevant to the Working Class

14. At a general level, it is clear that the environmental crisis affects everybody, and threatens the survival of the human race as a whole.

15. However, even though the environmental crisis is a global threat, it is the working class (and working peasantry) that is most severely affected by the various environmental problems[1].

15.1. It is the working class which has to take the dangerous jobs that cause environmental degradation. At least three workers died of exposure to mercury waste at the Thor Chemicals plant in KwaZulu-Natal[2]. The company got off with a R13,500 fine in 1995. Farmers in South Africa (as well as the State) routinely make use of dangerous pesticides which are banned or restricted in their countries of manufacture[3]. The workers who do the actual spraying are often untrained, lack protective clothing, and are often not able to read the labels that explain appropriate safety procedures. As a result, at

[1] Crompton, Rod and Alec Erwin, (1991), "Reds And Greens: Labor And The Environment," in Cock, Jacklyn and Eddie Koch, 1991, *Going Green.* Oxford University Press. Cape Town. p80; Chemical Workers Industrial Union (1991), "The Fight for Health and Safety", in Ramphele, Mamphela (editor), 1991, Restoring the Land. London. Panos Institute. p80; also Koch and Hartford cited in Cock (1991a) p14. For similar arguments for the USA, see J. Baugh, (1991), "African-Americans and the Environment: A Review Essay," in *Policy Studies Journal*, vol. 19, no. 2, p194; Morrison, D.E. and R.E. Dunlap (1986), "Environmentalism And Elitism: A Conceptual And Empirical Analysis," in *Environmental Management*, vol. 10, no. 5, pp586; van Liere, K.D. and R.E. Dunlap, (1980), "The Social Bases of Environmental Concern: A Review Of Hypotheses, Explanations And Empirical Evidence," in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 2. pp183-4, 189–90. Cf. to Lowe, P. and J. Goyder, (1983), Environmental Groups in Politics. George Allen and Unwin. London. pp14-5; McCloughlin (1992).

[2] Crompton and Erwin (1991) pp82-3; *Mail and Guardian* April 1995.

[3] Cooper (1991) p185.