

Environmentalism: More Than Recycling

The following is based on a commentary given by David Orton on CBC's Maritime Noon last fall. It was his contribution to a phone-in program that asked listeners for their response to the question, "Are you an environmentalist?" We reprint it here in the interest of furthering debate and discussion among all those who care deeply about our planet's future health.

To me, an environmentalist is an Earth defender, someone who defends the environment rather than exploiting it. She or he is prepared to put themselves on the line to do this. An Earth defender sees the necessity of extending the sense of self-identity to include the well-being of the Earth.

The public has increasingly come to see that our planet is being destroyed, and that those who are called "environmentalists" are trying to do something about it. That's why those who treat nature as a "resource" for human use and make a living off policies of economic growth have deemed it necessary to adopt a "Trojan Horse" policy. They call themselves "environmentalists," but, of course, they maintain their old ways.

That is where the true defenders of the Earth part company with so-called "environmentalists." To defend the Earth requires action and understanding. We need to understand our relationship to nature and realize that the economic system we are presently using – capitalism – is anti-nature. Humans are not separate from the environment: we are part of it. All life is interconnected: we're all part of a planet-wide green web.

This means, for example, that in opposing the destruction of the natural forest in Nova Scotia – clear cutting, spraying, the reduction of biodiversity through a pulpwood forestry policy – we are actively opposing *our own* destruction. We are, in fact, part of the forest.

An Earth defender takes the ecological health and integrity of the planet as the primary concern: all other concerns flow from this basic premise.

"But I do my part," you may say. "I recycle garbage" and consume in a so-called environmental way – or pick up garbage off the beach. But these things can become a form of escape, a kind of therapy which leads us away from facing the issues that few of us want to face: away from the fact that our economic system is rooted in growth, and that the promotion of consumerism is a part of that growth. The individual corporation in a capitalist economic system must either expand or go under. Yet we live in a finite world of fossil fuels, minerals, agricultural land, clean air and waters, forests and fisheries.

Now we see the United States prepared to go to war to defend an obscene, oil-based lifestyle. Yet, President Bush told us that he too was an "environmentalist."

We had better start thinking and acting to move to a no-growth economy, redistribute wealth on a world scale, take up a less destructive lifestyle and reduce population, particularly in the polluting,

developed world.

There are many green herrings in the environmental debate about who is an “environmentalist.” Earth defenders put aside their personal economic interest, oppose development and advocate ecological sustainability: those who have a stake in the existing order do not, no matter what they call themselves.

When a system is not ecologically responsible, we cannot save it and the planet. To require in Canada that industry be pollution-free, ecologically sustainable, accountable to the local community and working for the long-term benefit of society must mean fundamental change to the existing order. Only when we work for that change can we call ourselves “environmentalists,” defenders of the Earth.

David Orton is active in the Green Web, an independent research group serving the needs of the green movement.

**To obtain any of the Green Web publications, write to us at:
Green Web, R.R. #3, Saltsprings, Nova Scotia, Canada, BOK 1PO
E-mail us at: greenweb@ca.inter.net**

Back to

[The Green Web](#)

[A Taste of Green Web Writings and Left Biocentrism](#)

[Earlier Green Web publications](#)

http://home.ca.inter.net/~greenweb/More_than_recycling.pdf

Last updated: March 6, 2012