

Review: Ecology and Anarchism

Ecology and Anarchism. Essays and Reviews on Contemporary Thought. By Brian Morris. Images. £14.95. 192 pages.

Anarchist Communist Federation

1999

This book is a collection of essays that have appeared over the years in various radical publications, including *Freedom*, *Our Generation*, *Anarchy*, and *Anarchist Studies*. Comrade Morris defines himself in the following terms: "...following Murray Bookchin, I think that Socialist Anarchism is the only viable political tradition that complements ecology, and offers a genuine response to the social and ecological crisis that we now face."

In his introduction, Morris indicates that the underlying orientation of the collection is to support three interlinked theoretical perspectives and social movements—radical humanism, social ecology, and socialist anarchism. So contained within the covers of the book are essays on Thomas Spence, seen as a precursor of anarchism, and the Mexican anarchist Flores Magon, as well as libertarian movements within the French Revolution. Morris's radical humanism means spirited and sustained attacks on the strong mystical currents within the ecological movement and a pitiless struggle with obscurantism, elitism, and theologism. Indeed, the first essay, *Ecology and Mysticism* looks at the ideas of thinkers influential within the ecological movement like Schumacher, Skolimowski, Roszak and Wynne-Tyson all of whom he believes are blazing trails in a false direction towards mystical obscurantism. He concludes that "ecologists need to recognise that the social perspective that complements ecology is provided by anarchism, not by religion...A creative future can be sustained only by a synthesis of ecological principles and anarchist thought." This outlook is reiterated in a further essay on Skolimowski.

Also of interest is the essay on Thomas Spence. Spence has been described as Britain's first modern socialist, and here Morris attempts to claim him as a precursor of modern British class struggle anarchism. Spence's group was on the radical wing of English Jacobinism, and in its London base engaged in producing pamphlets, and a periodical, as well as forms of propaganda like the "anonymous handbill, the charcoaled pavement, the tavern club, perhaps the food riot" (E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*). As Morris shows, Spence, "although a communist, was clearly hostile to any form of state socialism." Morris also points to similar developments among the *sans-culottes* and *Enrages* of the French Revolution.

As the book is a collection of essays over some years in different reviews on a wide range of subjects, some of the topics addressed may be of peripheral interest to those interested in class struggle anarchism. Morris correctly notes that "Anarchism, as a social and political develop-

ment, was primarily a radical response to industrial or monopoly capitalism.” This is in his essay on Lao Tzu, in which he attempts to reclaim the ancient Chinese philosopher, not as a religious mystic, but as the first writer to express the libertarian socialist ideal. Unfortunately, there have been too many writers concentrating on the philosophical roots of anarchism at the expense of the modern movement which sprang out of the movements of the masses against capitalism. Morris is not coming from the essentially radical liberal outlook of these writers, and is attempting to, once more, counter the rampant mysticism influencing the ecological movement. Such philosophical research has some interest, and it would be daft to fall into the trap of workerism, just as one should realise the previous political thrust of the majority of writers engaged in such work.

Overall then, a rewarding read, in particular Morris’s attacks on the cults of religious mysticism that obscure the fundamentally social dimensions of the ecological movement.

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