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Environment

# Three Meanings of Ecosocialism

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**Ian Angus has been a key actor in the organisation of an international ecosocialist conference, through his initiation - together with well-known figures like Joel Kovel and Michael Löwy - of the international ecosocialist conference in Paris in October. Here he is interviewed by the Greek socialist paper *Kokkino*.**

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/ecosoc12.jpg>]

*Let's begin with a big question – "what is ecosocialism?"*

**ANGUS:** Ecosocialism has grown out of two parallel political trends – the spread of Marxist ideas in the green movement and the spread of ecological ideas in the Marxist left. The result is a set of social and political goals, a growing body of ideas, and a global movement.

Ecosocialism's goal is to replace capitalism with a society in which common ownership of the means of production has replaced capitalist ownership, and in which the preservation and restoration of ecosystems will be central to all activity.

As a body of ideas, ecosocialism argues that ecological destruction is not an accidental feature of capitalism, it is built into the system's DNA. The system's insatiable need to increase profits – what's been called "the ecological tyranny of the bottom line" – cannot be reformed away.

With that said, it is important to realize ecosocialist thought is not monolithic – it embodies many different views about theory and practice. For example, there is an ongoing debate about the view, advanced by some ecosocialist writers, that social movements have replaced the working class as the engine of social change.

Finally, ecosocialism is an anti-capitalist movement that varies a lot from place to place. In the imperialist countries, it is a current within existing socialist and green-left movements, seeking to win ecology activists to socialism, and to convince socialists of the vital importance of ecological issues and struggles. In the Third World there is a growing mass pro-ecology movement that incorporates socialist ideas – that's especially true in Latin America, where anti-imperialist governments headed by Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and Fidel Castro in Cuba, are pressing for strong anticapitalist, pro-environment measures.

### **What is the Ecosocialist International Network?**

**ANGUS:** The Ecosocialist International Network was formed in October 2007, at a meeting in Paris that was attended by ecosocialists from 13 countries. Its main goals are to improve communication and coordination among ecosocialists worldwide, and to organize a major ecosocialist conference in Brazil in January 2009, in conjunction with the World Social Forum.

The EIN is a very loose and open organization. Its only organizational structure is a steering committee to plan the Brazil conference. Anyone who supports the broad goals of the ecosocialism is welcome to participate – more information is available on our [website](#).

*How do you respond to socialists who argue that there is no need for specifically "ecosocialist" ideas or activity?*

## Three Meanings of Ecosocialism

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**ANGUS:** In a certain sense they are correct. Marxism embodies a wealth of profound ecological thought, far more than many green activists realize.

But while concern for ecology was a fundamental part of Marx's thought, and the Bolsheviks were certainly aware of the issue, the sad fact is that the Marxist left ignored this issue for many decades. It's important to correct that " and to do so publicly and explicitly.

Using the word "ecosocialism" is a way of signalling loud and clear that we consider climate change not just as another stick to bash capitalism with, but as a critically important issue, one of the principal problems facing humanity in this century.

But there is more involved. Marxism is not a fixed set of eternal truths " it is a living body of thought, a method of understanding society and a tool for social change. Socialists whose views don't evolve to incorporate new social and scientific insights become irrelevant sectarians " we've seen that happen to many individuals and groups over the years.

Just as Marx and Engels studied and adopted ideas from the scientists of their day " Liebig on soil fertility, Morgan on early societies, Darwin on evolution, and many others " so Marxists today must learn from today's scientists, especially about the biggest issues of the day. Ecosocialism aims to do just that.

*Can capitalism solve global warming?*

**ANGUS:** The depends on what you mean by "solve."

Dealing with global warming includes two components " mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation means reducing greenhouse gas emissions so that global warming slows down and eventually reverses. Adaptation means making changes that will enable people to survive in a world where some climate change is inevitable, and where climate chaos is increasingly likely.

In my opinion, capitalism's insatiable need for growth, combined with its massive dependence on fossil fuels as the dominant energy source, mean that it is very unlikely that we will see an effective mitigation program from any major capitalist country.

Scientists say that if the average temperature rises more than 2 degrees, dangerous climate change becomes very probable. There is no sign that any of the industrialized countries will implement measures sufficient to stop such a temperature increase " anything they do will be too little, too late.

But if we do not succeed in bringing this system to an end, capitalism will undoubtedly adapt to the new climate. It will do what capitalism always does " it will impose the greatest burdens on the most vulnerable, on poor people and poor nations. Climate refugees will multiply and millions will die. The imperialist powers will fight against the global south, and amongst themselves, to control the world's resources, including not just fuel but also food. The most barbaric forms of capitalism will intensify and spread.

In short " yes, capitalism can "solve" global warming, but the capitalist solution will be catastrophic for the great majority of the world's people.