
RED AND GREEN DON'T MIX¹

Red and green don't mix. However, this has not stopped a section of the moribund 'left' from hopping on the green bandwagon. In their case it is more a mix of pink and green, which gives you an equally revolting blend.

Red and green don't mix because they are polar opposites. Reds want to create a better society on the basis of the conditions created by modern industrial capitalism while greens want to retreat from those conditions. For reds, modern industrial society is creating the conditions for a future communist society, with bourgeois relations of production being the obstacle to its achievement. Greens on the other hand see modern industrial society as the problem and consider that the answer lies in retreating to some 'simpler' way of life.

According to the greenies, modern industry is too large and produces far too much. They think we need to go back to a way of living that is simpler both in terms of scale and complexity of activity and in terms of the range and quantities of goods that we produce.

Large scale industry is seen as inherently oppressive. The individual is just a small cog in a big machine. He or she can have no control in a large organisation because it requires hierarchical relations between people. With increasing scales of production workers lose all the old skills that made work to some extent fulfilling. In small organisations however the individual can retain control over their actions. Small is beautiful is their catch cry.

Greenies consider that production is excessive both in terms of people consuming goods they do not really need and in terms of environmental sustainability. According to this view we would be happier living more simply and it would be more environmentally viable. People engage in mindless consumerism because of advertising and to compensate for their otherwise empty lives. As for the level of production, resources are so scarce and the environmental impact of many of our production

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processes is so severe that we cannot sustain our present levels of economic activity.

So large scale modern industry is seen as an obstacle to a better world, and one that we have to dismantle. However, this is the exact opposite of the red position. According to the red view, by creating modern large scale industry, capitalism is laying the basis for a more advanced social system. And it is doing this in a number of ways.

Firstly, the concentration of economic activity into large industries means that ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few capitalists while the vast majority are dispossessed of the means of production. As a result the vast majority of people have no material interest in the continuation of the present capitalist system because they do not possess capital. On the other hand if production is small scale and ownership is dispersed there would be a lot more capitalists and small business operators and therefore a lot more people with a stake in the system.

Secondly modern industry is creating a level of material affluence that is absolutely necessary for a more advanced social system. It means freeing people from a life dominated by drudgery. And it means having the leisure time and resources to engage in creative and challenging activities. And this includes activities that have up until now been the exclusive domain of elites or ruling classes, in particular the political, cultural and intellectual life of society.

Another way that modern industry is laying the basis for a new social system is by creating a work force that is better educated and more wide ranging in its capabilities than the ill-educated and narrowly trained workers of the past. This means a work force that has the potential to organise production without bosses and without the narrow traditional division of labour that separates the conceptual and instrumental aspects of work and turns it into something boring and alienating. It also means a work force that is less tolerant of the authoritarian nature of the present-day work environment and therefore more likely to rebel against it.

From a red perspective the problem with the present day economy is not its bigness but rather the power relations between people that stems from the capitalist system of ownership. At the

same time small scale production is associated with sweat shops and with slave and feudal societies of the past that were even more oppressive than the present system.

Now let's look at the green argument that current levels of production are unsustainable. According to this view we are going to run out of resources and we will destroy the ecological systems that we need if we are to survive. The fear of resource scarcity is mainly based on the failure to understand that resources are not just a given stock. They are created by new production methods. For example, the iron ore deposits in Western Australia did not become natural resources until the development of modern open-cut methods of mining in the 1960s. And oil was not a resource until the invention of the internal combustion engine; before that it was considered a nuisance. The example of oil also highlights the role of substitution. Technologies employing either oil or coal developed at the end of the nineteenth century at a time when the main source of energy, fire wood, was being severely depleted. There had been a real concern at that time about the economy grinding to a halt because of a lack of fire wood.

To be gloomy about the future availability of natural resources you would need to show that this process of resource creation through technological change will fail us in the future. There is no sign of this occurring. On the contrary there are lots of new technologies on the horizon. For example, genetic engineering will create new ways of producing food and compensate for soil depletion. There is also the increasing efficiency with which we use resources.

As for industry's impact on the environment, one would need to be convinced that a shrinking economy would be better able to limit environmental impact than a developing one. However, there is a far more compelling case to be made that a modern developing economy can better manage environmental impact. Firstly there are more resources available to do so and secondly there are new technologies to clean up the environment and new ways of producing goods that have less environmental impact.

If these ideas on the environment and resource scarcity sound like conventional conservative views on the subject it is no coincidence. Reds agree with smug conservatives that there are no *physical* barriers to social progress; where they differ is

whether bourgeois property relations present *social* ones. Greenies and their brown 'left' mates think they are being terribly radical when they claim there are physical barriers. In fact they are being even more conservative than the conservatives.