Brian Martin, *Social Defence, Social Change*
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Social defence and the environment

Organising a community for the most effective nonviolent resistance to aggression actually leads to an impressive environmental policy. But before discussing this, it is useful to outline some of the connections between war and the environment and between the environmental and peace movements.

War and the environment

War is normally thought of as a violent struggle whose main victims are people. But the environment is also a prime victim.[1] The ancient Romans, after defeating Carthage, prevented its resurgence by putting salt on its fields to prevent the growing of crops. The Indochina war involved a full-scale attack on the environment by US technology, with conventional bombs saturating the countryside and napalm stripping leaves from trees. The torching of hundreds of Kuwaiti oil wells was a spectacular consequence of the Gulf war. Nuclear war would have catastrophic effects on the environment through blast, heat, radiation, fires and nuclear winter.

[1] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [Arthur H. Westing], *Warfare in a Fragile World: Military Impact on the Human Environment* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1980).

In case this isn't enough, military planners have conceived many "environmental weapons" such as triggering earthquakes and tidal waves. Also waiting in the wings are biological weapons, which could have enormous effects on plants and animals.

Even without war, the military establishments of the world have a major impact on the environment. After all, they take up a significant proportion of the world's economic production, energy use and so forth. Moreover, much of what military forces do involves destruction rather than production: shells are routinely fired against practice landscapes and the occasional nuclear vessel sinks to the bottom of the ocean.

Another connection between military systems and the environment comes through the military imperatives behind certain "commercial" technologies. Nuclear power is the classic case. Nuclear rather than solar power was favoured in part because of military connections. Nuclear research could lead to military applications as well as power production; uranium enrichment plants and nuclear power plants could be used for joint military and civilian purposes (though the anti-nuclear power movement has succeeded in stopping most military use of spent fuel from civilian nuclear power plants); nuclear scientists and engineers who made a name in the nuclear weapons business could continue their careers with nuclear power. Therefore, some of the responsibility for nuclear disasters such as Chernobyl can be attributed to the military. Of course, military nuclear disasters are horrifying enough, especially the 1957 incident at Chelyabinst in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, these are nothing compared to what was—and still is—the likely environmental impact of nuclear war.

These connections between military and civilian nuclear developments are replicated in the areas of chemical and biological weapons. The military continues to be a prime influence in scientific research and technological development. Sometimes the environmental consequence of this is not so great, as in the case of computing. In other cases, such as genetic engineering, the potential for environmental destruction is vast.

A final and fundamental connection between the military and the environment lies in the maintenance of inequality in an industrial society. A great deal of the responsibility for environmental destruction can be attributed to policies which serve the interests of

the rich and powerful minority in industrialised societies. This includes the automobile industry, the oil industry, the chemical industry, the forest industry, and so forth. The rich and powerful shareholders, executives and managers gain the most from these industries. They would not gain so much from a different pattern of development: cities designed around walking and bicycling, reuse of products (rather than new production or even recycling), production for basic needs rather than creation of new wants, and priority given to satisfying work rather than money to buy consumer products.

This is all very well, but what's the connection with the military? Quite simply, the industrial system based on unequal privilege and power can continue only because the military—and the police—are there to smash challenges to it. In industrialised societies, such as the United States and Western Europe, there is seldom a need these days for the military to be brought in against workers or the community. The processes of persuasion through schooling and the media, the legitimacy of electoral politics, plus the cooption of the middle classes through consumerism, serve to maintain the social order without much overt violence. But in other parts of the world, there are fundamental challenges to the system of organised inequality through industrial capitalism, including radical political parties and people's movements.

To be sure, some of these alternatives are based on just as much inequality as industrial capitalism. But they do offer a challenge to First World exploitation of Third World economies, usually justified as part of the process of economic "development." Minerals must be available for extracting, forests for cutting, rivers for damming, and fields for monocultures using artificial fertilisers and pesticides. If the local people resist such activities, then out comes the military to maintain a form of "development" that has enormous impacts on the environment.

The environmental and peace movements

Since there are so many connections between the military system and environmental destruction, it is appropriate that there are strong links between environmental and peace movements. The nuclear issue illustrates the connections. In the late 1950s, concern about nuclear weapons became a major social issue, with a special

emphasis on fallout. This concern faded in the early 1960s, to be replaced by the growing anti-Vietnam war movement. Meanwhile, the environmental movement came of age in the 1970s. With the peace movement moribund, anti-nuclear power activists kept attention on nuclear war through their concern about nuclear proliferation. Then in the 1980s there was a massive resurgence of concern about nuclear weapons. In the 1990s, attention to environmental issues has expanded while the peace movement has faded away.

So, to some extent, each movement has kept the issues of the other alive, on the agenda, when the other is in a low period. Of course, there are frictions about priorities too. But the tendency is towards cooperation, especially with the increasing emphasis on green thinking and politics.

From the point of view of social defence, a second and crucial connection between the environment and peace movements is the use of nonviolent action. The use of nonviolent action as a deliberate choice, for reasons of both principle and tactics, is increasingly frequent.

This may seem an obvious choice for many peace activists, since they are trying to develop an alternative to war: they have used vigils, fasts, marches, rallies, occupations and camps to challenge wars, shipments of weapons and military bases. Yet nonviolent action seems just as much a feature of environmental activism, with a similar array of methods used against nuclear power, forestry operations and chemical plants.

An awareness and experience of the dynamics of nonviolent action is perhaps the most important factor affecting whether a person supports social defence. The increasing sophistication of environmental nonviolent action is creating a group of people who would readily join a social defence movement—should such a movement ever get off the ground.

A community even partially organised for social defence would have a great capacity for resisting assaults on the environment. Since a much wider fraction of the population would be alert to the possibilities for direct action, companies or governments undertaking environmentally damaging activities would have more employees aware of how to offer resistance. They could provide information to resisters in the field, could directly subvert equip-

ment or plans within the organisation, or could organise strikes or work-to-rule campaigns.

Environmental implications of social defence policy

Developing a "social defence policy for the environment" is simply a matter of spelling out general policies for a society to be most able to nonviolently resist aggression and then noting the implications for the environment. Here are some examples.

Energy. Dependence on central energy supplies, such as oil for vehicles or electricity for dwellings, makes a community vulnerable to attack.[2] The alternative is energy efficiency and use of local energy supplies. Solar design of dwellings, for example, means that people will not freeze in winter even if outside energy supplies are cut off.

Using local energy supplies means that an aggressor cannot coerce an entire population by capturing a few strategic points of energy production or distribution. To provide energy self-reliance, local energy supplies would not necessarily be environmentally sound. They could be coal, gas, solar or wind. In practice, local energy self-reliance is much more likely to be based on renewable energy, because deposits of fossil fuels are concentrated in a few locations. Not many suburbs have a coal mine!

It might make sense for communities to have stores of fossil fuels in case of emergency. But stores have a finite lifetime, whereas renewable energy usually lasts longer. (Biofuels such as trees take a while to grow.)

Industry. One obvious target for an aggressor is large-scale industry, such as steel production, automobile production, oil refineries and chemical plants. The production could be diverted to serve the aggressor, or shut down to apply pressure to the community.

Therefore, a community planning for social defence would be wise to replace large-scale industry. There are several options. One is to introduce local small-scale production to produce the same thing. For example, an integrated steel plant can be replaced by numerous

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[2] Amory B. Lovins and L. Hunter Lovins, *Brittle Power: Energy Strategy for National Security* (Boston: Brick House, 1982).

minimills in different locations. Minimills rely on local scrap and are much more able to vary the amount of steel produced.

Another option is to accomplish the things done by large-scale industry in a different way. The things done using the electrical output of large fossil fuel, hydroelectric or nuclear power plants can be done instead by a range of small local measures including insulation, solar design, solar hot water, wind power and others. There is not a direct need for every bit of electricity that is produced, since some is used to heat water or air.

A third option for replacing large-scale industry is to no longer consume the thing that was produced. This applies most obviously to planned obsolescence: throwaway containers and products that quickly break down or go out of fashion.

Of these three options for replacing large-scale industry, the latter two lead to a greatly reduced environmental impact. The first option, namely producing the same outputs using local small-scale operations, could have either a larger or smaller environmental impact. Replacing a coal-fired electricity generating station with burning of coal in households will increase local air pollution and perhaps greenhouse emissions. Steel minimills reduce transport costs for some inputs, but depend on electricity and may not be as energy efficient as an integrated plant.

So, local small-scale production does not *necessarily* lead to reduced environmental impacts, but this is certainly a possibility if the options of doing things a different way or consuming less are taken up.

Goods. To make a society resilient against attack, the goods produced should be designed to be durable, easily repaired and, where relevant, used again or for other purposes. This applies to clothing, building materials, consumer appliances, vehicles, communications equipment and machinery. If new production is sabotaged by an aggressor, people will need to get by with what they have.

There are in the community quite a number of people who are highly skilled in repairing things. They would have plenty of ideas on how to design things for durability and easy repair.

Design for durability, easy repair and use for different purposes goes against the grain of much current production, which is aimed at increasing sales by getting people to scrap the old and buy the

new. The net effect is both increased production and increased environmental impact.

In the short term, a social defence system might require extra production to provide extra tools and goods for communities in case factories were shut down or imports cut off. But in the longer term, with an emphasis on production for durability and easy repair, the environmental impact would be considerably reduced.

Transport. A community's dependence on the automobile is a great vulnerability. There are several groups that can cut off petrol supplies: foreign oil suppliers, oil companies, and workers. Most public transport is also vulnerable to disruption. Rail systems, for example, depend on electricity or diesel; alternatively, a bit of sabotage of the rails can put the system off line.

The most resilient transport system is one based on walking and bicycles, with cheap, simple motorised vehicles for transport of heavy goods. Such a transport system implies a drastic change in town planning. Instead of suburban sprawl, people would need to live close to work, shops and services.

It should be obvious that this prescription for a transport system resilient against aggression and disruption is also one which greatly reduces environmental impacts.

Defence. With entire conversion to social defence, there would be no military production, leading to a reduction in environmental impact. But some of the requirements for social defence would have environmental consequences, as mentioned above: stockpiles of materials and energy supplies, decentralised production (which sometimes would use more materials than centralised manufacture), durable goods (which demand more materials in production, at least in the short term).

Social defence does not mean no defence spending: it means spending for different things.

Population. The size of a community has no obvious connection with the strength of a social defence system. The keys to nonviolent resistance are things such as morale, unity, the willingness to struggle and the capacity to struggle. A large population can succumb to aggression if it is divided and unprepared. A small population can mount an effective nonviolent defence, especially by establishing links with other groups around the world.

Therefore, social defence considerations don't lead to any particular stance in the debates over population size. Needless to say, a population on the edge of survival due to food or fuel shortages is not in a good position to wage nonviolent struggle—or violent struggle for that matter. A healthy surplus of food and other necessities is an advantage. But this is possible with a large or small population.

Wilderness. One of the standard dilemmas for social defence is how to defend unpopulated areas. The best answer I know is social offence: inform the world about the aggression, taking the struggle for legitimacy to the population from which the attack comes.

Whatever the answer to this question, it seems most unlikely that unpopulated areas are a special *advantage* to a social defence system. Hence, social defence gives no prescription for setting up wilderness areas, preserving virgin forests or protecting rare species.

This only goes to show that the changes needed for effective social defence are not identical to those arising from a radical environmental policy. It should not be surprising that there are differences; what is surprising is the number of similarities.

A capacity for social defence should not be treated as the paramount goal. If some changes for social defence lead to impacts on the environment, then these need to be weighed against each other. The outline of issues above suggests that conflicts in goals will be less frequent than compatibilities.

The question of monkeywrenching

Direct action against operations which threaten or harm ecosystems can be classified into two types. First is direct action carried out publicly, such as rallies and people chaining themselves to trees. Second is sabotage of tractors, billboards, survey stakes and so forth. This sabotage, commonly called monkeywrenching, is against property and is carried out covertly. As spelled out in the book *Ecodefense*,[3] harm to humans is to be avoided at all costs, both for moral and political reasons.

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[3] Dave Foreman and Bill Haywood (eds.), *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching* (Tucson, AZ: Ned Ludd Books, 1988, second edition).

One problem facing monkeywrenching is that sabotage is widely seen as morally reprehensible. In capitalist societies, especially the United States, property is considered sacred. Many people get more upset about violence against property than they do about violence against people. It is important to challenge the sacredness of property but those who do so often must sacrifice support.

A more fundamental problem with much monkeywrenching is that it is inherently negative. It is almost always against the actions of someone else. Protest and sabotage can be powerful tools, especially by small activist groups against powerful forces, but by themselves they don't lay the basis for a positive programme.

The provocative journal *Processed World*[4] has had a number of contributions favouring sabotage of computers, office equipment and so forth as a challenge against soul-destroying work. The trouble is that the line between principled attacks on oppressive technology and mindless vandalism is often a thin one for outside observers, and perhaps even for the saboteurs.

The commonalities between monkeywrenching and social defence should be clear. Preparation for social defence implies widespread learning of techniques of nonviolent action (potentially including sabotage) which are already used by monkeywrenchers. More fundamentally, building a self-reliant society would mean stopping many of the capital-intensive, energy-intensive and resource-intensive projects which are the target of monkeywrenching, and replacing them with green social and economic development. Finally, monkeywrenching and social defence would be organised similarly: in a decentralised and locally autonomous way.

Monkeywrenching and social defence potentially provide support for each other. The practice of monkeywrenching develops and exercises skills which would be valuable to a social defence system. Of special importance is the skill and sensitivity to carry out sabotage without any threat to human life.

Much of the nonviolent action undertaken in both the environmental and peace movements has been reactive: used against initiatives taken by developers and militaries. This is certainly the case for monkeywrenching, which is action *against* activities

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4 *Processed World*, 41 Sutter Street #1829, San Francisco CA 94104, USA.

by industries and governments. By contrast, social defence includes a positive programme for social reorganisation which involves mass participation using nonviolent action. As such, it has the most in common with positive programmes for the development of an environmentally sound society, such as the bioregional movement, that incorporate nonviolent action to promote and sustain them.

The infiltration of the US Earth First! movement by the FBI shows that monkeywrenchers need a wider analysis of power structures. It is simplistic to imagine that isolated individuals and groups can use covert actions against developers without a counter-attack. There is a degree of sympathy for monkeywrenchers because environmental perspectives have a large following in society—and this is due to the hard work of environmentalists, both mainstream and radical, in open, public campaigns.

Indeed, it is questionable whether covert violence against property is really such a powerful method of action. It lays the movement open to allegations of "terrorism," however false and misleading they may be. More importantly, the response of monkeywrenchers to government repression is to go even further underground. Dave Foreman, guru of Earth First!, recommends being even more secretive and careful. This is not the way to build a movement for social change. Instead, it encourages action without the benefit of dialogue and debate, and makes it easier to blame environmentalists for irresponsible actions, whether they are carried out by sincere monkeywrenchers or by government agents.

From the point of view of nonviolent struggle, there is much greater potential in public mobilisations like the Redwood Summer campaigns in California which brought together environmentalists and forest workers. The viciousness of the verbal and physical attacks on the leaders of these campaigns—most notably the May 1990 bomb attack on Judi Bari and Daryl Cherney, Earth First! activists committed to a totally open, explicitly nonviolent approach—shows the seriousness with which these efforts are taken by the forest industries and their supporters in government.