

THE NEED FOR ECO-JUSTICE

PETRA K. KELLY

The co-founder of *Die Grünen*, the German Green Party, Petra Kelly has ignited a grassroots movement felt throughout Europe and, increasingly, beyond Europe's borders. Here, Petra Kelly recounts the guiding principles and tenets of the Party, which calls for a complete redrafting of the international political economy.

When we are faced with such critical issues as nuclear experiments and cancer from food poisoning, we find that, like it or not, we are deeply embedded in the natural world. Human beings pollute the natural environment and human beings, assuming a new sense of responsibility to one another and to generations to come, can also restore the natural environment. The question remains: where are the political leaders of the established political parties in the Western world who understand so far what the politics of "environmental ethics" are all about? I stress the established parties: the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Labour Governments. None has yet understood what it means to contain aggressive economic growth in order to save this planet. E. F. Schumacher admirably has pointed out that a non-violent and gentle attitude toward nature must be the ecological basis of all politics.¹ Anyone analyzing Western economics will realize how violent and aggressive the Western approach has been until now. Western economic thinking depends upon insatiable consumption—demanding more and more and larger and larger goods and services to be available at all times. But where is the basic ethic of restraint? Schumacher was right when he declared that small is beautiful. We must develop a consciousness of limits to enable people to act without degrading themselves and their environment. We need eco-justice—ecological balance in the context of economic justice and economic justice in the context of ecological sustainability.

As human beings we have taken the earth for granted. We have never hesitated to exploit it in order to gratify our immediate wants. We have felt free to abuse our fellow humans as well as the earth and its inhabitants and its living things. We must learn that, as the motto of the German Green Party, we have only *borrowed* the earth from our children. We are, in fact, our own best resource for solving the problems we have created. Thus we must become our own best experts and begin to understand how we live, how we work, how we consume, how we produce and how we exploit the Third World.

Petra K. Kelly is the co-founder of *Die Grünen*, the German Green Party.

1. E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

What will it take to turn things around in this present ecological state of crisis? Are we losing the battle to save the earth? The World Climate Conference in Toronto concluded that the dangers threatening us from our own atmosphere are as great as those of a nuclear war. When the earth's climate warms up, deserts will expand, the polar ice caps will melt and the seas will rise up, flooding entire countries. If industry and agriculture continue to develop as they have so far in the West, this dramatic heating of the earth's climate may come in a mere fifty years. In fact, it has started already. Scientists talk of a first-rate non-military threat to international security. The end of life on this planet, I believe, has become conceivable. Creation is slowly dying.

One example of the egoism of the Western industrialized countries is garbage imperialism. Industrial countries, including those in the European Economic Community (EEC), account for 70 percent of carbon dioxide emissions and 84 percent of CFC production. We in the Western countries who over-produce, over-consume and then dump highly poisonous hazardous wastes in developing countries are practicing garbage imperialism. Between 1986 and 1988, over 3.1 million tons of wastes were shipped from industrialized to developing countries. The cash payments for accepting our wastes are often large enough to tempt poor nations to consider mortgaging their public health and ecological integrity for needed currency. Grossly unequal distribution of wealth and power threatens our immediate future. The deepening poverty for two-thirds of humanity and environmental degradation are not separate problems, although our politicians treat them as such.

It is we the rich in the Western economies who are making the world poorer because of our use of disproportionate amounts of the world's energy and resources. For example, 16 million Australians have the same impact on world resources as 1.2 billion Africans. The earth is losing 24 billion tons of top soil per year and yet the world's farmers are trying to feed 86 million more people each year. Western economic policies are trapping poor countries in a cycle of poverty as their incomes fall and their debts rise. Often it is we who exclude the poor from their traditional land so that our multinational companies can grow cash crops for export. Is it then surprising that the world's poorest end up living on land that is most seriously environmentally degraded?

Our first priority in the industrialized countries must be to transform our consumer mentality and our industrial economic growth system and move to ecologically sustainable economies. Conservation must replace consumption as the driving force of our economy. We can only take and use what we really need; ecological green politics is about "enough," not "more and more."

Measuring well-being in terms of good health, clean air, pure water, unpoisoned food and a variety of plants and animals sharing our environment must become the basis of our Western political and economic thinking so that others far less privileged have a real chance. No official economic policy in the West today has taken the global damage resulting from human activity

into consideration. The opposite is true. Parts of our natural base have been destroyed already and other parts are seriously threatened by manufacturing decisions made solely on the grounds of economic gain and growth. In the end, this economic system will pull the rug out from underneath its own feet. We feel that what is ecologically necessary is also economically sound.

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An ecologically based economy does not measure the prosperity of a society in terms of the greatest possible number of goods and services produced (i.e. the GNP), but rather in production methods which can serve the environment, protect human health and result in durable, useful consumer goods. In an ecological society, lifestyles and consumer expectations are characterized by consideration of human health and environment. Present lifestyles and present Western economic policies of the industrial societies endanger the natural conditions of human existence. At present, these lifestyles can be maintained only by an increased exploitation of Third World countries.

Environmental problems cannot be understood outside of an economic context. The poor, for example, are financing the rich at a scale never before known in history. Between 1982 and 1987 Third World countries, as a group, experienced a net negative flow of \$220 billion, including interest payments on development loans and payments for imports.

Rainforests are turning into desert. Every minute 21.5 hectares—forty-three football fields—of tropical forest are destroyed. Two-fifths of the world's people must cook with wood they gather themselves whereas in parts of Southeast Asia, the Pacific and South America tropical rainforests are being cut down to meet the appetite of rich countries for paper and timber. This vicious cycle continues since revenue from the sale of tropical forest timber is needed to meet the interest on debt repayments from poor countries to rich countries. In the Amazon basin last year 6.4 million hectares of jungle were burned to make way for farmland and development. In Costa Rica, where 40 percent of the forest has been destroyed to provide beef for fast food markets created by McDonald's and Burger King, foods like corn and beans as well as US cattlefeed must be imported at high prices. The only ones benefitting from "Big Macs" are rich landowners, grain exporters and fast food merchants.

We can respond personally with non-violent transformations in lifestyle. We can begin by reducing our consumption of goods to a point at which we only use our share of the world's resources. Perhaps an international boycott

of fast food chains could constitute a first step. As a part of the problem, we must be part of the solution.

What are the results of our present economic growth policies? Every year the European Community produces 2 billion tons of waste, including 160 million tons of industrial waste of which 25 million is highly poisonous. Existing facilities for treating industrial waste can handle only 10 million tons per year. The resultant illegal dumping and incineration mocks EEC directives on toxic waste disposal. We must reduce our rubbish mountains drastically by outlawing wasteful packaging and using recyclable containers. We must press for local waste management plans on ecological lines and encourage recycling and the use of recyclable waste to create energy. We must work for an EEC ban on the shipment of hazardous waste from one country to another—in particular to Third World countries—and seek an early halt to dumping of waste at sea. The real present danger of all environmental problems has little to do with any superpower polarities or even with rich-poor polarities on the North-South axis. It has more to do with polarities between human activities and the life-sustaining capacities of the earth—polarities that threaten the ecological security of East and West and North and South alike. In seeking effective environmental solutions, economic imbalances must be redressed, but in an ecologically sound way. What is needed is sustainable development that simultaneously supports an ecological economic system, a more just distribution within and among nations, political reforms and access to knowledge and resources without compromising the ecosystem.

Two hopeful signs have emerged recently. Jubilant environmentalists and ecologists celebrated an unprecedented victory for the Green movement in Eastern Europe: Hungary decided to scrap a multi-billion dollar hydroelectric dam project on the Danube River in Nagymaros, thirty miles from Budapest. Additionally, in the Indian town of Harsud, a town facing imminent destruction by the Narmada dam project, over 60,000 tribal people, landless laborers and peasants gathered in September 1989 in a show of strength to press the message that the people will no longer keep quiet when projects are forced on them in the name of progress.

On other fronts, the people of Baliapal have been fighting their battle against the missile-testing range at Orissa for the past seven years. Agitation has begun against five-star hotels in Goa, India. The message coming from these Green movements in the Third World and Eastern Europe is very clear: cease assaulting the earth. Let us not forget the arms race and underdevelopment—two sides of the same problem. The arms race continues to kill though the weapons themselves may never be used; by their cost alone armaments can kill the poor by causing them to starve. One fifth of the international expenditure on armaments could abolish world hunger by 2000. The arms race, the production of weapons and military equipment are all a waste of money and talent. We should think instead of how these resources—money and skills—could be used for environmental protection, alternative energy sources and prevention of disease and poverty.

We must learn to live on the earth with consciousness. We must realize that the future is increasingly a matter of human choice and human freedom. There must be a fundamental change of politics and economics if the planet is to stay alive. We must learn to address the economic and ecological dimensions together in order to achieve just, realistic and sustainable results. Eco-justice is nothing less than taking seriously the destiny of humanity and the planet on which we live. If there is a future, it will be Green.