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## Cracks in the Concrete of Capitalism

*The Movements of the Interstices*

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In a *Monthly Review* article several years ago, “What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know About Capitalism,” John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff put forward a point of view sometimes heard on the Left: that we cannot save the earth from becoming inhospitable to human life without abandoning capitalism. There is no such thing as “green capitalism,” they maintained, since the very logic of capitalism requires increased production.

In light of the dawning global awareness of climate change, we need to ask ourselves, “What, then, can weaken the power of the capitalist system?”

Bellamy and Magdoff themselves give us the clue. In Marxist and dialectical form, they show what in the present contains the seeds of future. They say we need to listen to what is growing in the interstices of society because that is where the germs of a new society are being born, “just as the bourgeoisie itself arose in the ‘pores’ of feudal society. “

These movements in the interstices are all around, they tell us. They are the Bolivian indigenous groups that are proposing an ethical relation with the Earth, the Pacha Mama; the Vía Campesina

(the Peasants' way); Brazil's Movimento de los Trabajadores sin Tierra (Movement of Workers without Land). They are the ecologist and anti-globalization movements around the world. All these groups want new relations among people and with nature. All oppose the logic of capital.

Curiously, Bellamy and Magdoff only value interstices outside their country and place no importance on something that may be key to the future. That something is movements appearing in the interstices of the United States and Canada.

These are not just ecological movements, although without exception, they do propose a harmonious relationship with nature: intentional communities, eco-villages, movements of urban and organic agriculture, movements to recover public lands for communities, permaculture movements, nonviolent communication, collective and alternative commercial projects, voluntary simplicity movements, and many others. As Detroit activist Grace Lee Boggs put it in an interview with Amy Goodman, the community gardens of Detroit are "the symbol of a new kind of society, of people who grow their own food, of people who try and help each other," a society in which "we begin to think, not so much of getting jobs and advancing our own fortunes, but how we depend on each other."

In short, there are life choices that reject what Bellamy and Magdoff call the logic of capital.

Let's consider the indigenous Bribri here in Costa Rica, who in order to prevent "progress" from destroying natural resources have never allowed bridges to be built over their wonderful rivers. Let's consider people who prefer a job that is modestly remunerated but that satisfies them to a job that is grueling and vacuous but well paid. Finally, let's consider all those people, families and groups that for different reasons have not wanted nor do not want to live the life of globalized consumerism.

What is new in the North American movements is that, in the very heart of developed capitalism, in its ideological bastions, their strength and numbers are growing. That points to a great dissatisfaction with the system and an important questioning of capitalism from within, and not, as up till now, from the periphery.

In Latin America, the attempts to change the capitalist system—Salvador Allende's Chile, El Salvador's liberated territories, Jacobo Arbenz's Guatemala—were crushed because it is easy for the metropole to display all its power on the weak periphery. It is different to confront a challenge that surges forcefully from within. If they continue to grow in the United States and Canada, they could succeed in having significant effect, for three reasons.

The first is that these groups have a common denominator: a considerable and deliberate reduction of consumption, and this is a change at the same time material and ideological. As we have seen in the recent economic and financial crisis, the reduction of consumption materially shakes the capitalist system. The reduction of consumption also shakes the capitalist ideology, which says that we have to consume more and more because in consumption resides happiness.

The second reason these movements may have a significant effect is that very probably changes that occur within the bastions of capitalism weaken it more than the changes on the periphery.

The third is that in these times in which there is an almost total neoliberal control of the world, the movements of the interstices may escape that control and become a feasible “revolutionary” road toward sustainability. According to Bellamy and Magdoff, that is precisely what is happening in certain parts of Latin America. The new element is that now those movements against the logic of capital are gaining strength within the heart of the system itself.