ECOLOGY AND SOCIALISM

It would seem that in the contemporary era the importance of ecological politics has replaced that of socialism as an expression of criticism of the limitations of contemporary capitalist society. In this context the approach of socialism seems to have become antiquated and irrelevant whilst the standpoint of the green movement has become the major basis for developing an alternative to the system of capitalism. In other words, the only manner in which socialism can continue to maintain its relevance is by attempting to establish a political relationship to the aims of the ecological protests. This situation would seem to suggest that the role of socialism is nothing more than a justification of a type of politics that is no longer defined by trying to primarily establish an alternative to capitalism and has instead become an expression of different objectives that are defined by the importance of issues like ecology rather than the objective of developing a democratic type of socialist society. Or to put it precisely the aim of socialism has become understood to be an aspect of what is the primary aim of achieving the aspects of ecological conservation. But this very development would seem to suggest that what is of major economic and political importance is the attempt to uphold the ecological interests of the planet instead of trying to realise the economic and political emancipation of the people from the domination of capital. In other words, socialism has become a secondary expression of this process of struggle to achieve ecological progress and as a result the major role in this process of change is the importance of the various ecological mass movements. This secondary role of the socialist political organisations seems to have been confirmed by their apparently continuing decline when compared to the increasing importance of green movements, and the very aims of socialism have seemed to have become antiquated and of decreasing significance in the context of the continuing popularity of the ecological struggles. In other words, the question of what represents an alternative to capitalism seems to have become expressed by the contemporary significance of the conservation organisations and what seems to be an inevitable decline of the role of the attempt to establish socialism. In other words, the aim of a society based on conservation seems to have replaced the increasingly antiquated perspective of socialism. In this context it would appear to be more realistic to try and incorporate the approach of anti-capitalism with the primary objective of trying to establish a society committed to the highest level of environmental standards. In other words, the problem is that on the one hand the green movement has been ambiguous about the aim of transforming capitalism into socialism, whilst on the other hand Marxism has often ignored the importance of the objectives of ecology because of a rigid conception of socialism based on the material progress expressed by industrialisation. It is necessary to try and establish whether within Marxism these types of limitations are challenged and instead a more progressive conception of the relationship of the role of ecology to the aim of socialism is actually established. In this manner we can possibly establish whether Marxism is able to express the criteria necessary in order to relate ecological concerns to the aims of socialism. The concluding part of this study will attempt to indicate the level of credibility of a contemporary attempt to connect Marxism with ecological concerns. However, it could be argued that this attempt to reconcile Marxism with green politics is ultimately futile because of the opposed objectives of these contrasting standpoints. But we will try to establish that such a conclusion is dogmatic and is not connected to both the historical and contemporary connection of Marxism and ecological principles. It will also be necessary to try and establish that without the development of a genuine relationship between Marxism and green politics it will not be possible to establish the most effective manner by which the aims of socialism and the environment can be realised. In other words, socialism without a connection to the ecological movement is dogmatic and ineffective, and the green struggle unconnected to Marxism can become opportunist and compromised by an acceptance of the continuation of capitalism. Therefore, it will be a major view of this article that both the environmental movement and revolutionary socialism can mutually benefit from the development of a political relationship. The limitations of both of these aspects are connected to the present failure to develop an effective expression in terms of common objectives and aspirations.

The theoretical history of the relationship of environmental issues and the role of socialist theory is discussed by John Bellamy Foster in ‘Socialism and Ecology’ – the return of nature.”(Monthly Review Press, New York 2020) It is suggested by the author that the various initial originators of the understanding of the aim of socialism, like Marx and Engels, were aware of the issue of the role of ecology in terms of developing an understanding of what constitutes a post-capitalist society. This awareness was most importantly expressed in the work of William Morris who outlined what could be considered the understanding of a green socialism. Thus Foster concludes that: “Hence, the premise underlying this work is that socialist thinkers provided systematic if uneven and sometimes contradictory critiques of our present society that were crucial both in their day and ours – a legacy that we can no longer afford to be without in our age of combined ecological and social crisis.”(p22) But what we have to try and establish is whether the various attempts to establish a relationship between ecological issues and socialism is credible or merely an imposition of theory onto reality in an impractical and problematical manner. In other words, is it possible for capitalism to be able to resolve ecological issues caused by its own development without the necessity of revolutionary social transformation that results in the creation of a different type of system? Indeed, it could be suggested that the very history of the Soviet Union indicates that the relationship of the aspect of ecological concerns and the development of an anti-capitalist form of society is not an automatic expression of the process of revolutionary change. Instead, it could be suggested that the development of ecological problems is connected to the very aspect of the economic modernisation of society and so it is simplistic to merely suggest that the end of capitalism will resolve these issues. In other words, the aspect of the creation of material progress in all types of society seems to suggest that the result will be the development of environmental problems. Hence the resolution of this issue has not yet been satisfactorily addressed and instead we have a moral argument in favour of ecological progress that has not yet been connected to the development of practical applicability.

However, it is suggested by Foster that the very development of the theory of revolutionary socialism led to an expression of the attempt to address the issue of the relationship of ecological concerns with the aim of the attempt to achieve socialism. He suggests that William Morris was one of the first left wing intellectuals who attempted to develop an understanding of the connection of capitalism to the development of environmental problems. His approach could be summarised as: “The deepening contradictions of the system were evident in the manifold forms of waste that it generated, including (1)useless goods (2)useless labour; (3)whole new layers of supernumeraries required by the new stage of the system; (4)the degradation of human life; and (5)a destructive relation to the environment.(p131) In other words the process of capital accumulation led to the disregard of the importance of the establishment of a constructive relation of humanity and nature and instead the resources of nature were being exploited in terms of the objectives of the process of capital accumulation. In other words, the expression of the relation of capital to labour was the utilisation of the resources of nature in a wasteful manner which implied that the creation of an alternative and more progressive system would mean that this situation would be changed in terms of the recognition that the connection of the role of production to the environment would have to be established in a different manner that enabled a more rational and less wasteful situation to be promoted. In other words, the issue of progress being made in the class struggle was connected to the development of the capacity of the producers to be able to define the objectives of the aims of economic activity in terms of a different and more constructive relationship of humanity and nature. The aim would be to end the domination of nature in terms of the objectives of capital accumulation and to instead establish a situation in which the producers would define the purpose of production in terms of a more constructive relationship between humanity and nature. The aim would be to create a genuine interaction of nature with the aspect of the role of the economic instead of the present situation of the exploitation of the ecological situation in terms of the expression of the imperatives of capital. In other words, Morris was one of the first socialists to connect the importance of ecology to the role of developing an alternative to the present exploitation of nature for the purpose of capital accumulation. Hence the relationship of the city and countryside would be changed in terms of the development of an economic system in which the emphasis would increasingly be on the demise of the role of industry and its replacement by a more agricultural type of system. It could be suggested that this approach was not realistic, and that the development of industry has to be an important aspect of any modern type of economy. However, it could also be suggested that Morris has established an important objective of any attempt to reconcile ecological objectives with the role of socialism in that he has established that the realisation of ecological objectives in a different and socialist society have to be connected to ending the domination of forms of industrial production and instead trying to create a different situation in which the emphasis is on the importance of less complex types of economic activity. In other words, the material needs of the people have to be realised in terms of the development of a situation in which the role of complex forms of industry that has inherent ecological problems is replaced by the importance of agricultural type of production which can establish a more compatible relationship of economic activity to the environment. It will be suggested that this situation can result in the undermining of the material standards of the people, and so they become poorer in this context. But the very point being made by Morris is that the ability of the workers as dominant producers to be able to establish genuine control over their process of productive activity means that they can define the possibility to establish a material standard that is not detrimental to their interests. In other words, the primary issue is the ability of the producers to be able to define the character and objectives of their productive activity. In this manner the aspect of ecological objectives can be reconciled with the ultimate attempt to establish a more cooperative and egalitarian type of society. The point is that Morris was possibly the most effective of the nineteenth century socialists in terms of indicating the relationship of the objective of ecological considerations with the interests of the workers. In this manner he was able to indicate that the aspect of industrialisation can be problematical because of the collection between the role of environmental issues and the exploitation of the workers. Hence the very objective of the emancipation of labour required the development of the connection between ecology and the workers in a compatible manner. But what was not established by Morris was a perspective that could connect a green type of economy with the realisation of the material interests of the workers in a socialist society. Indeed, it could be argued that this is still the outstanding issue that has to be addressed by left wing adherents in the present period. In other words, the simplicity of a green socialist economy seems to be problematical in relation to the issue of the possibility to establish the prosperity of the people in this type of society. Indeed, this aspect is connected to the apparent problems raised by the defenders of capitalism that the supporters of socialism are not able to establish that this type of society would be more prosperous for its members. Instead, socialism is associated with the apparent poverty of egalitarianism and this type of society would also not be able to resolve the issues connected to the replacement of the apparent dynamism of capitalism with what seems to be a more inefficient economic system. Furthermore, such a development could not guarantee that the ecological problems created by industrialisation would be solved in this new situation. Indeed, it could be argued that the approach of people like Morris was unable to address these types of objections in an effective manner. Instead, Morris assumed in dogmatic terms that ecological issues would be resolved under socialism because of the end of the domination of capital. But this type of assumption is a dogmatic view that seems to ignore the connection of economic development to an inherent generation of ecological problems. Hence Morris may have had an ethical commitment to the aim of establishing a relationship of socialism to the resolving of ecological issues, but in practice his approach is not able to establish a policy to achieve these aims in a credible manner. In other words, socialism cannot overcome the importance of industrialisation which is the very basis for the generation of environmental issues.

The point being made is that on the one hand the objective of socialism is based on the realisation of the material interests of the people which implies the importance of the development of the highest levels of productivity in order to realise these requirements. On the other hand, such an approach implies the necessity of planned production which implies that ecological considerations can be expressed in terms of the reconciliation of the material interests of the people with the aspect of an understanding of the importance of the interests of the environment. Foster suggests that this approach was upheld by Engels: “Engels’s view of nature was not a reified one associated with economic categories of capitalist commodity production, where nature was reduced to something to conquer and exploit. Rather, from the start, he recognized the intrinsic value of nature and hence the tragedy of its estrangement under capitalism.” (p179) But there is a dilemma in that socialism implies the creation of the highest level of productivity in order to create the material goods needed to realise the needs of the people, and so this aspect could contradict the attempt to maintain the highest level of ecological standards. Indeed, it could be suggested that this issue has never been satisfactorily resolved by supporters of socialism. Engels in his ‘Condition of the English working class’ could outline in empirical terms the various aspects of ecological problems that are associated with the process of capital accumulation, but the important unresolved issue concerned how the possible alternative of socialism could resolve the apparently contradictory aspects of the realisation of the material interests of the workers with the establishment of an economy that moderated industrial development because of the importance of the interests of nature or ecological imperatives. In other words what is being assumed is that the situation of the domination of capital that results in these ecological issues will be overcome so that it becomes possible to resolve these aspects in a progressive manner of the establishment of a more constructive and progressive relationship of humanity and nature in connection to the role of labour. Foster contends that: “In focusing on the working class under capitalism in all of its forms – industrial, agricultural, mining – and on the overall environmental conditions of the proletariat, Engels was developing a concept of the working class that was environmental in character, rather than the narrower notion of an industrial proletariat of purely factory workers that was later to prevail among many socialists – and their critics.”(p197) But how did this critique of capitalism also express the possibility for the forces of labour to overcome the domination of capital and so in that manner establish a new and progressive relation to nature? The point is that what had been established was the importance of the domination of capital over labour in the relations of production and this was the cause of ecological problems. Hence the perspective of the end of the ascendency of capital would generate the possibility to transform the ecological situation in a progressive manner. But how would labour be able to act in order to change this situation of their subordination within the relations of production? Thus, the aspect of the ecological limitations of capitalism would continue if labour proved to be unable to overcome the domination of the present economic system. There was no inherent tendency for the situation of environmental problems combined with the exploitation of labour to facilitate the possibility for the transformation of these aspects in a progressive manner. Instead, capitalism would continue to generate ecological issues because of the very complexity connected with the challenges posed by the domination of the present economic system. In other words, ecological progress would only result if this objective could be connected to the development of a feasible perspective of social change. It could be suggested that this very generation of a programme for the transformation of society has not been realised in a convincing manner since Engels’s development of a left-wing form of political economy in the 1840’s. The result of this situation is that the elaboration of a strategy of change based on the connection of ecological objectives with the aim of socialism has not been developed in a convincing manner. But this problem is linked to the failure to develop a credible perspective for the transformation of society.

However, it could be suggested that Engels established the theoretical basis of the possibility to relate the issue of ecology to the aims of socialism in his various articles about the issue of the environment. In his ‘Dialectics of Nature’ Engels argued that: “The reason that social planning is necessary, Engels insisted, is the increasing scale of “the unforeseen effects” and “uncontrolled forces” of human production, leading to increasing ecological contradictions both between individual and class-based production and the needs of society and a whole, and between social development and the larger natural environment.”(p237) In other words the very character of capitalism results in the creation of ecological problems that only the creation of a socialist alternative will be able to resolve and provide an alternative that is more compatible with the interests of the ecological situation. Hence Engels did more than anyone to establish the connection of capitalism with the development of the problem of the environment and so this would mean that the very expression of a principled form of socialist politics would be connected to the importance of a green type of politics. But the problem was that this standpoint was not articulated in a popular manner and so the importance of ecological socialism seemed to be obscure and unimportant. Instead, socialism was primarily connected to the importance of the utilisation of the advances of the capitalist economy with the objective to achieve control of the process of production by the workers. Indeed, the major theoretical problem was that Engels attempted to establish the importance of the role of nature with the expression of dialectical laws that would inevitably but vaguely result in the realisation of socialism by the economic and political actions of the workers. But the problem was that the empirical situation seemed to express the situation of the domination of capital over labour which it was difficult to overcome by the development of collective economic and political action. Instead, the aspect of the ecological problems of the economy and society seemed to be an inherent aspect of the historical situation because of the difficulties of being able to transform this situation by the collective action of the producers. However, Engels outlines in the ‘Dialectics of Nature’ a conception of the ability of humanity to transform economic and political systems because of the very importance of a dynamic relationship with nature: “Natural science, like philosophy, has hitherto entirely neglected the influence of men’s activity on their thought, both know only nature on the one hand and thought on the other. But it is precisely the alteration of nature by man, not solely nature as such, which is the most essential and immediate basis of human thought, and it is in the measure that man has learned to change nature that his intelligence has increased. The naturalistic concept of history….as if nature exclusively reacts on man, and natural conditions exclusively determined his historical development, is therefore one-sided and forgets that man also reacts on nature, changing it and creating new conditions of existence for himself.”(p249) But the point that has not been established is how can the very domination of nature by humanity result in a situation not of exploitation and the wasteful utilisation of ecological resources and instead is able to establish a situation of a harmonious and compatible interconnection. In other words, the context of the superior relation of humanity to nature can have different consequences. Hence it would seem to be necessary to try and establish that the alternative to capitalism of socialism was based on the realisation of a more harmonious relationship of nature to society. But it is questionable whether this understanding was satisfactorily resolved by Engels or other socialist type intellectuals. Instead, various right-wing intellectuals seem to have been able to elaborate a conception of the relation of nature to humanity based on Darwin’s principle of survival of the fittest. They could explain the very inequalities within society in terms of the overall character of the relation of nature and humanity. There was an ecological reason for the development of class inequalities. Was Engels able to provide a credible alternative to this generally elitist standpoint?

Engels did emphasise in his works the importance of labour for understanding the character of society: “As Engels insisted, the evolution of the hand implies tool making, tool making implies labour, labour implies social cooperation, and this leads over time to the development of language and the brain. It is the process of labour, associated with the increasing mastery of the environment, that constitutes the dynamic natural-material explanation for human evolution and human history.” (p282) This means that the very character of this relationship of humanity and nature is connected to the importance of the role of social relations which are developed in historical terms: “For Engels, labour is the key to human evolution and to the subsequent development of human society. It leads the way from natural history of human beings to their social history. From the mastery of tools, hunting and gathering, the domestication of animals, the planned cultivation of crops, to tribe, nation, state and the development of modern human society with its developed science and technology, all human development is in the final analysis dependent on the development of the labour process and production in their widest senses. Like Marx, Engels saw the labour process as the interdependent social metabolism between human beings and nature. But if humanity, in contrast to animals, was distinguished by its capacity to “master” as opposed simply to “use” nature, this mastery has its limits in the social, economic and ecological construction of human society itself.” (p284) Indeed Engels explicitly comments that the supposed domination of humanity over nature is an illusion: “Let us not flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victory over nature. Foe each such victory nature takes its revenge on us…thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over foreign people, like someone standing outside of nature – but that we, with flesh and blood, and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all of our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly.”(p284) Thus the very superiority of humanity is its ability to be able to consciously develop an understanding of a relationship to nature, which implies recognition of the necessity to uphold ecological concerns in terms of the development of the interaction of humanity with the environment. This implies that a socialist society would be superior to capitalism because it would be able to understand the relationship of humanity with the ecological situation in a more effective and progressive manner than had been realised under capitalism. Hence the very conception of social progress was based on an understanding that it was necessary to establish a compatible relationship of society with the role of the environment. The very dynamic of capital accumulation was detrimental to the interests of the ecological situation and so this meant that only the successful realisation of socialism could establish the possibility that this problem could be resolved in terms of the establishment of a more harmonious relationship of humanity and nature. But it was the very emphasis on industrialisation by the Soviet bureaucracy which meant that this understanding of Engels became obscured and ultimately rejected. The relationship of ecological considerations and socialism which had been established by Engels became rejected by the role of the Soviet economy and its emphasis on the logic of maximum production. However, the apparent indifference of the Soviet elite to ecological considerations could not undermine the importance of the establishment of the relationship of socialism to the role of the environment that had been established by Engels and Morris. But the point is that the realisation of this approach would require the demise of the domination of the rule of the bureaucratic elite in the Soviet Union and the establishment of a genuine type of socialist society. However, it could also be suggested that until the present the standpoint of an ecological socialism did not advance beyond the approach of Engels because of an increasing emphasis on specialised issues that did not relate to the objectives of changing society in a direct manner. Only in the recent period has it been possible to evaluate an increasing collection of books that attempt to establish the connection between an ecological critique of capitalism and the aim of socialism. We will attempt to evaluate one of these works in the rest of this article. It will be necessary to try and establish whether the ecological analysis elaborated is the basis for a credible programme of the attempt to realise a green socialist society.

An important interpretation of the Marxist approach concerning the issue of ecology is carried out by Joel Kovel in: “The Enemy of Nature – the end of capitalism or the end of the world?” (second edition: zed books, London 2007) In order to provide a satisfactory analysis of this work it will be necessary to remember the approach of Engels which establishes that the requirements of capital accumulation result in the undermining of the ecological interests of the world. This is the basis of the argument in favour of the development of socialism in order to establish a type of society that can achieve a type of harmony between the role of the economy and the interests of the environment. However, there is an immediate problem because it could be suggested that any type of industrial production has developed the possibility to result in the undermining of the ecological interests of the planet. This means that ecological problems that are created by the industrial production of capitalism will not be overcome and resolved in a manner that is compatible with the interests of the environment. In other words, only a form of simple production that results in the effective end to the role of industry can create a type of society that would be able to achieve the aims of the green movement. But this would mean that the very development of the material production that is required in order to realise the needs of the people would be undermined in order to achieve what seems to be the primary objective of ecological aims. In this context only an authoritarian and elitist type of society would be able to achieve the aims of the environment movement in an effective manner, and so it would seem that there is a contradictory relationship between the approach of democratic socialism and the objectives of a genuine green movement. Indeed, these tensions would seem to explain the problematical character of the relationship between green politics and socialism, because the latter implies the development of industrial production in order to met material needs that seems to contradict the austere type priorities of environmentalism. However, such problems have never been resolved in terms of the theoretical creation of a socialist conception of ecological aims, but instead the supporters of Marxism have tended to support a green approach in activist terms and so ignored the theoretical difficulties involved in upholding this perspective. Indeed, the very challenges for a Marxist conception of ecology has meant that people have tended to essentially support a green perspective without any effective connections to the aims of socialism. This has resulted in a form of activism which means that the various theoretical and political problems associated with this standpoint have been ignored. However, it could be suggested that the very approach of Kovel is based on the underestimation of these theoretical and political challenges because his starting point is that capitalism as the responsibility for the situation of ecological problems implies the necessity of a socialist alternative in order to resolve them. Hence his book: “It tries to give expression to an emerging and still incomplete realization that our all-conquering capitalist system of production, the greatest and proudest of all the modalities of transforming nature which the human species has yet devised, the defining influence in modern culture and the organizer of the modern state, is at heart the enemy of nature and therefore humanity’s executioner as well.”(p.vii) But the very problem with this perspective is that it is questionable whether this understanding is sufficient in order to elaborate a programme for the transformation of the character of society. Indeed, this very understanding seems to be influential in the ecological movement which seems to prefer the approach of trying to reform society in order to increase the importance of environmental objectives and as a result is not interested in the realisation of the objective of the revolutionary transformation of the character of the social formation. The author would suggest that people will become increasingly aware that: ‘however capital may restructure and reform itself to secure accumulation, it is incapable of mending the ecological crisis it provokes.’(pp.viii-ix) But what this hopeful expression of the possibility of the increasing influence of a revolutionary perspective of change, it would seem that the very expression of the activism of the green movement means that it is based on the influence of the view that militant activism will result in the realisation of change within the present system. Indeed, the very insignificant influence of Marxism within this movement would seem to suggest that the prevailing influence is that of a perspective that militant action will result in the realisation of progressive ecological change within the capitalist system. In this situation the increasing importance of the green movement would seem to imply that the role of a militant rank and file movement is able to achieve influence within contemporary society that could result in the realisation of ecological objectives. However, the author seems to ignore this point and instead contends in a dogmatic manner that: “As the ecological crisis grinds on irrespective of capital’s propaganda system and its massive apparatus for fixing the environment, so does capital’s legitimacy begin to fray. With this the possibility of new thinking emerges and begins to flower.” (p.ix) But this would seem to be a dogmatic perspective that seems to ignore the important influence of the view that the present system is dominant and cannot be changed in a radical manner. In this context what has to be recognised is the very militancy of the green movement is based on the understanding that mass pressure can result in the realisation of the objectives of ecology without the necessity of transforming the character of society in a revolutionary manner. Thus, the green movement has replaced social democracy as the most credible expression of a reformist approach, or the view that mass struggle can realise progressive change within the limitations of the present economic and social system. In this context the approach of socialism seems to have become discredited because it seems to represent antiquated views that have become old-fashioned in relation to the changing consciousness of people who have become primarily concerned about issues like that of ecology. Kovel attempts to gloss over this challenge because he suggests that socialism can be made contemporary by the development of a concern with ecological issues. This point would seem to be correct, but it can only be justified if people genuinely support the primary objective of the aim of the transformation of capitalism into socialism. Thus, the importance of ecology can only be considered in terms of its relation to the aim of socialism. But this is not how such issues are presently being understood. Instead, it would seem that ecology is of topical importance because it has replaced the previous relevance of the aim of socialism. In other words, what is of primary political significance is the issue of ecology and in this manner all other aims are subordinated to this approach. Hence there would seem to be a situation of ideological competition between the aims of socialism and ecology and the latter is becoming increasingly important in this context. The forces of Marxism try to ignore this situation of effective political competition between these different objectives and in an inconsistent manner try to reconcile socialism and the environment. But this attempt at a fusion of what seems to be rival objectives does not seem to be convincing, and as a result most of the adherents of the green movement would not necessarily consider themselves to be socialist. Instead in a vague manner they uphold a conception of an ecological society, and the issues of socialism and capitalism are not considered to be of primary importance. In this context the approach of the greens appears to be more feasible because their increasing influence suggests the possibility to realise their objectives within what would be a progressively transformed type of capitalism. Hence what seems to be the very decline in popularity and importance of socialism when compared to the increasingly feasible alternative of green politics would seem to suggest the developing credibility and significance of this standpoint. In other words, socialism is a doctrine of a previous era and indeed can only continue to establish its relevance by attempting to relate to the issue of ecology. However, it could also be suggested that there is a problem with the green movement because of its very ambiguous relationship to the issues of capitalism and socialism. In what type of society would the greens like to realise their objectives? This important issue can be evaded as long as the greens are essentially a protest movement which objects to the policies of various contemporary governments on the issue of ecology. However, this ambiguity would become an important issue if the greens were elected to office in any capitalist society. They would be directly challenged about the type of society they would be promoting and attempting to realise. Hence the greens are able to be credible as a protest movement but would be confronted with important challenges if they became a party of the government of society. In this context the influence of socialism seems to be in decline but it is still superior to the greens because it is able to promote an alternative to capitalism, and in that manner the ambiguity of the ecological movement indicates that they are a party of protest rather than having an aim of government.

The limitations of the greens and socialists is summarised by Kovel in the following manner: “Socialism, though quite ready to entertain the idea that capital is nature’s enemy, is less sure about being nature’s friend. Most socialists, though they stand for a cleaner environment, decline to take the ecological dimension seriously. They tend to support a strategy where the workers would clean up pollution, but are unwilling to follow the radical changes that an ecological point of view implies as to the character of human needs, the fate of industry, and the question of nature’s intrinsic value. Meanwhile, Greens however dedicated they may be to rethinking the latter questions, resist placing capital as the centre of the problem. Green politics tends to be populist or anarchist rather than socialist; hence Greens are quite content to envision an ecologically sane future, in which a suitably regulated capitalism, brought down to size and mixed with other forms, continues to regulate social production.” (pp.xiii-xiv) But the point is that the failure of the Greens to support socialism in an explicit manner does not undermine its ability to develop popular support. In other words, most of the people who adhere to the views of the Greens also consider that it is possible to regulate capitalism in a manner that is compatible with the realisation of ecological objectives. Hence only the small groups of Marxists advocate a conception of the relationship of socialism with green aims and it could be suggested that they do not outline this standpoint in a convincing manner, Thus, it would seem that the Greens have the most credible programme of trying to modify capitalism in radical terms by the attempt to transform this type of society by the introduction of their objectives. The very success of the Greens would seem to suggest that their approach is credible when contrasted to the declining popularity of the role of the socialist groups. However, it can also be argued that the Greens have not been able to introduce their aims within capitalism in an effective manner and so this type of society often remains opposed to the realisation of ecological objectives. Therefore, it would still seem that socialism is necessary if the aims of the greens are to be successful. Hence what seems to be necessary is the establishment of a connection between the greens and the aim of socialism if the attempt to introduce an ecologically type of society is to be effectively realised. Thus, the lack of credibility of the socialist groups would seem to undermine the practical feasibility of this type of perspective. People are not persuaded by the adoption of an environmentally friendly programme by the socialist groups of the sincerity of this objective. Instead, they still consider that only the green organisations are able to express the aims of ecological change in a convincing and consistent manner. In this context the unification of the greens and socialists does not occur, but one of the results of this situation is that the domination of capitalism remains unchallenged. In other words, the problem for the Greens is that it is not possible to consistently achieve their objectives whilst the domination of capital is not ended. But in contrast, it seems that the role of socialism is not connected to the development of the possibility to achieve success in this context and seems to have become relevant in relation to the very tasks that have to be tackled by the green movement. In other words, the very political role of the greens seems to have superseded that of socialism despite the difficulties involved in trying to realise their ecological objectives. Hence it is assumed that only the greens can resolve the issue of their political limitations and socialism seems to be irrelevant in this context. Kovel contends that Marxism can become relevant in this context by becoming more orientated to green concerns: “Marxism, needs, therefore, to become more fully ecological in realizing its potential to speak for nature as well as humanity. In practice this means replacing capitalist with ecocentrically-socialist production through a restoration of use-values open to intrinsic value.” (p9-10) But why should people support this approach given the apparently credible alternative of the role of the green movement? What have socialists able to offer that is superior to the present role of the ecological organisations? Would it not be more practical and credible to suggest that what is required is to promote the development of the capacity of the green organisations to be able to realise their objectives? In other words, the very importance of the ecological groups would seem to suggest that socialism has become irrelevant. Consequently, it does not seem credible to try and suggest that the role of Marxism would be superior to that of the greens in relation to the attempt to realise environmental objectives. It could be suggested that a type of activism of the greens has not been able to realise their objectives, but this problem could be because of a lack of popularity of their movement rather than the issue of the credibility of their objectives. In this context it would seem to become necessary to try and develop the increasing importance of the greens within capitalist society if the possibility to achieve their aims can be realised. In this context the task of Marxists would seem to be to persuade the existing green movement about the credibility of the aim of socialism, and so the attempt to actually convince the greens to support Marxism would seem to be an irrelevance. Indeed, this task would seem to have limited success in that there has been the emergence of green socialist parties. Indeed, it is a popular sentiment that the present capitalist system is the primary cause of ecological problems, and so the only alternative is to create a different type of society. With this popular and important sentiment, it would not seem to be difficult to develop increasing support the establishment of the relationship of green objectives with the aim of achieving a socialist society. Indeed, it could be argued that this approach has been implicitly adopted by many green groups, and it is recognised in popular terms that capitalism is the primary cause of ecological problems. Hence what undermines the ability to consolidate this understanding of the relation of socialism to green themes is the apparent problem of the lack of credibility of the various Marxist groups rather than apparent theoretical problems with their advocacy of an ecological perspective. In this context it would seem that the major issue is to develop the credibility of revolutionary parties rather than to try and modify their green programmes in a radical manner. Indeed, they have to understand that the adoption of an ecological approach is a major aspect in the development of their ability to become relevant to society and in that manner enable them to increase their influence to the extent that they become a practical expression of the generation of radical change within society. In contrast the failure to adopt an ecological approach will only contribute to the increasing decline of the role of the socialist organisations and instead their role will be replaced by that of the green parties. It could be suggested that this development has already occurred and so this seems to establish the irrelevancy of the socialist groups. But the very problems of the green parties because of their ambiguous relationship to the capitalist system indicates that this issue can only be resolved by the adoption of a definite connection of an understanding of the limitations of the present society with the elaboration of a perspective of green socialism. Thus, the combined problem of capitalism is the connection of a situation of exploitation with the generation of ecological issues, and so the very task of revolutionary transformation means the successful realisation of a green socialist society. Formally this understanding has been recognised by many of the socialist groups, but it is still questionable whether they have established a credible perspective for the realisation of both ecological and revolutionary objectives. Indeed, the issue of how to persuade the majority of the people in any given society is not being tackled in relation to the promotion of what are often abstract programmes of change. In other words, the problem of how to convince people of the importance of both socialism and ecological transformation is not being developed in a convincing manner. But it could be suggested that the theoretical contribution of people like Kovel is the beginning of the process of resolving these problems and so the result could be the promotion of a more credible programme of ecological and socialist transformation. We will have to study this book in order to try and establish whether Kovel is able to outline a convincing perspective of change in terms of the development of the connection of green and socialist politics.

The initial chapters of Kovel’s book outline in convincing terms the connection of capitalism with the generation of the problem of the environment because the logic of the accumulation of profits is contrasted with the objective of ecological conservation. In this manner the character of the instrumental and productive aspect of capitalism is opposed to the aims of the interests of the environment. Therefore, the beginning of an ecological approach is one that understands that nature has its own interests in a manner that cannot be reduced to the objectives of capital accumulation: “The precondition of an ecologically rational attitude towards nature is the recognition that nature far surpasses us and has its own intrinsic value, irreducible to our practice. Thus, we achieve differentiation from nature. It is in this light that we would approach the question of transforming practice ecologically – or, as we now recognize to be the same thing, dialectically.” (p151) In this manner the connection between the aim of socialism and ecology is established because only this alternative to capitalism can realise a more constructive relationship when contrasted to the exploitation of nature by the process of capital accumulation. But the problem is that this type of ecological awareness does not result in the development of an automatically credible perspective of change. Only success in the class struggle will result in the possibility to achieve this type of development. Kovel implies that the conclusion that socialism is the only alternative to the problem of ecological regression suggests that this prospect becomes a credible possibility: “The conclusion must be that, irrespective of the particulars of one economic interaction or another, the system as a whole is causing irreparable damage to its ecological foundations, and that it does so precisely as it grows. And since the one underlying feature of all aspects of capital is the relentless pressure to grow, we are obliged to bring down the capitalist system as a whole, and replace it with an ecologically viable alternative, if we want to save our species along with numberless others.”(p155) But the point is that there is no inexorable reason why this understanding of the relationship of capitalism to the problems of the environment should in some inevitable manner produce the generation of a process of change that would transform the situation and realise ecological change. Instead, the very popular acceptance of the validity of capitalism means that people seem to accept the continuation of the present system despite the related awareness that it is the cause of ecological problems. In this context the defence of capitalism seems to have mass justification and the aim of socialism is not popular. Therefore, the continuation of capitalism will occur despite the understanding that it is the major reason for regressive environmental developments. The point is that the lack of credibility of the socialist alternative means that the issue of the ecological problems of capitalism seem to be unresolvable. This results in the development of the green movement as a protest form of activity that appears to lack a credible programme of change. Indeed, this is the very reason for the popularity of this movement because the illusion is developed that the success of mass actions could result in the realisation of developments that enable the interests of the environment to be expressed. In this context the approach of socialism does not seem to be credible because it connects ecological aims to the apparent unrealistic aim of the attempt to establish a different type of society. In contrast the practical activism of the green movement seems to be more credible because the aim of the achievement of a different type of society is effectively rejected in favour of the attempt to realise limited but progressive change within present forms of society. In this context the standpoint of reformism is more popular and can be contrasted to the low levels of support for the revolutionary approach. But Kovel contends that this reformist approach tries to deny the importance of the aspect of the domination of capital over society. Hence only the adoption of a revolutionary perspective can achieve the necessary economic and political changes that will result in the creation of a situation in which the role of the economy and the aspect of ecology become compatible. But the problem that does not seem to be addressed is the apparent lack of credibility and popularity of this type of perspective. It would appear that this standpoint is only supposed by a small group of intellectuals and lacks mass support, and so is impractical.

Kovel summarises his approach in the following terms: “The ecological crisis puts the future at grave risk; capital is the reigning mode of production and capitalist society exists to reproduce, secure and expand capital; capital is the efficient cause of the ecological crisis;…..as capital keeps growing, the crisis grows, too: civilisation and much of nature is doomed……. therefore, it is either capital or our future. If we value the latter, capitalism must be brought down and replaced with an ecologically worthy society.” (p159) But: “Capital rules the world as never before, no substantial alternative to it now commands the interest, much less the loyalty of any significant body of people……Capital…is the realization of a “value” deriving from estranged human power. This has been instituted in private ownership of the means of production, along with a peculiar system of domination – exploited wage labour – in which persons are split internally and between each other and nature. The implication is simple, if profound: in order to overcome capital, two minimal conditions need to be met: first, there must be basic changes in the ownership of productive resources so that ultimately, the earth is no longer privately owned; and second, our productive powers, the core of human nature, have to be liberated, so that people self-determine their transformation of nature.”(p159-160) But there is an important problem of the lack of popular support for the socialist alternative: “These two conditions go together: capital’s power is so uncontested, because the conditions for seriously changing it are far too radical for the great majority of people to contemplate, much less support. We should not be under no illusion whatsoever: the scale of the envisioned changes, and the gap between even a dawning awareness of what would be entailed and the presently prevailing political consciousness is so enormous, as to make a person forget the whole thing.” (p160) This comment would seem to be an argument against the possibility of progressive change. However what Kovel has actually established is the complex difficulties of trying to transform the character of society in radical terms. He has indicated that it will be a problematical task to try and achieve the successful change of capitalism into a green type of socialism. Thus, there is no inevitable or inexorable dynamic that will result in the realisation of socialism. However, this complexity does not mean that socialism is an impossibility. Instead, the very inability of capitalism to be able to achieve genuine ecological objectives indicates that only socialism will be able to realise this type of perspective. Indeed, the major argument in favour of socialism is that it can establish the economic and political basis to achieve environmental aims. But the problem is that this objective seems to be unrealistic and that few people seem to support the approach it upholds. However, the only apparent alternative is the reformist standpoint that rejects the revolutionary transformation of capitalism into socialism. This means that the green movement has to effectively develop an understanding of how capitalism can be made compatible with ecological objectives. However, they tend to deny elaborating this standpoint and instead vaguely imply that activism will result in the realisation of their aims. Therefore, the problem is that of the failure to connect the role of the ecological movement with that of socialism. This is not to suggest that the various revolutionary parties have failed to develop credible types of green programmes, but instead their standpoint seems to have become antiquated because of the decline of the importance of Marxism. Hence the actual issue of the feasibility of Marxism has to be addressed if the aspect of the connection of ecology with that of revolutionary socialism is to become popular. In other words, the task of the overthrow of capitalism has to become considered to be a credible objective because of the effective justification of the role of Marxism and socialist politics. In this context the aim of green objectives can be shown to be most convincingly expressed when connected to the role of a revolutionary approach. But it is questionable whether this task has been carried out because the various Marxist groups are content to be the supporters of the role of the green organisations. The aspect of politics becomes exclusively defined by the ecological parties. In this manner the problematical relationship between Marxism and green politics is not resolved.

The point being made is that this situation implies the undermining of the role of the revolutionary organisations because their importance has been superseded by the development of the primary aspect of the ecological aims which seem to replace those of socialism. However, this very adaptation of the Marxist groups to the role of ecological organisations actually undermines the development of a convincing connection between the aspect of green politics with the objective of opposing capitalism. However, Kovel suggests that the relationship of socialism and ecological concerns means that this regressive dynamic can be overcome and instead a constructive connection can be established: “Ecosocialism is more than socialism as traditionally known, but it is definitely socialism as well. Capital is the efficient cause of the crisis affecting ecologies…the one feature that defines its dynamic above all others, is the commodification of labour power and its reduction to abstract social labour for sale on the market…..But if capital is truly the enemy of nature, then we do not overcome it absent the liberation of labour.”(p216-217) The major problem with this view is that it has been marginalised by a green politics that emphasises the role of praxis in being able to modify and transform the objectives of capitalism in ecological terms. In other words what has occurred is a contrast between the aims of green politics when compared to those of socialism. The result of this contrast is to uphold different objectives in relation to the particular approach being suggested, whether that be of an ecological standpoint or the apparent alternative of socialism. Hence it has only been possible to establish a relationship of socialism and green politics by rejecting its traditional association of the aspect of industrialisation with the creation of the material basis for human emancipation. In other words, socialism was: “Forged at the moment of industrialisation, its transformative impulse tended to remain within the terms of the industrialized domination of nature. Thus, it continued to manifest the technological optimism of the industrial world view, and its associated logic of productivism – all of which feed into the mania for growth. The belief in unlimited technical progress has been beaten back by a host of disasters…. but these setbacks barely touch the core of socialist optimism, that its historical mission is to perfect the industrial system and not overcome it. The productivist logic is grounded in a view of the natural world…from the standpoint of its utility as a force of production….Therefore unless the socialist revolution also undoes the domination of nature, which is to say become ecosocialist, its satisfactions - and the needs and use values in which they are grounded – are going to reproduce the past.”(p229) But this perspective of the acceptance of the values of industrialism and the connected disregard of the environment would not be justified by a genuine revolutionary regime which would recognise the importance of the problems that would be created by an indifference concerning the importance of the interests of the ecological conditions of society. In other words, the revolutionary regime would uphold the highest level of moral and ethical standards in relation to its conception of the attempt to create socialism and so in this context would not be indifferent concerning the importance of ecological objectives. Indeed, it would be in the interests of the people of this society to develop an economy that attempted to resolve issues of environmental problems. Such an aspect would be part of the realisation of the ability of the people to be able to define the character of their society in terms of universal interests and aspirations. In this manner it would be inconceivable to consider that authentic socialism would be created without also having high regard for the objective of achieving ecological progress. The indifference of Stalinism concerning the aspect of the environment was an aspect of the fact that this type of society was the expression of the creation of a new type of exploitation. In other words, it is not conceivable that an authentic type of socialism could be created that had a disregard for the highest standards of ecological development. Indeed, progress in relation to improving the environment would be an expression of the fact that the realisation of socialism was being established in the most effective and principled terms. Hence to conceive of a type of socialism that was based on indifference concerning the aspect of ecology would seem to be a dogmatic view that is not likely to be realised in terms of actual possible developments.

In other words, the important problem of the various perspectives of socialism that were developed by the Bolsheviks and others expressed an indifference about the relation of the ecological situation to the role of production. But surely it would be a very contradictory situation that a genuine socialist regime would be indifferent to the interests of the environment. It would recognise that the very process of developing the ability of the producers to be able to define the character and objectives of the economy is connected to an awareness of the importance of ecological requirements. Indeed, there would be an inherent relationship of these aspects of the aspect of the environment and the development of the ability of the producers to be able to define and express the character of the economy. In other words, the process of the development of a society in which the producers would be able to express its objectives in an emancipatory manner would also recognise the importance of maintaining the environment. Kovel establishes this point in the following terms: “Capital is one such organisation of production that violates eco-systemic integrity through the interposition of exchange value as an instrument of exploitation…. The hope of socialism is to overcome exploitation and bring down the regime of exchange value. Eco-socialism develops this further through the realization of use-values and the appropriation of intrinsic value. From the angle of production, this means building eco-systemic integrity.” (p234 -235) Hence the understanding that the role of the expression of economic activity would be to connect the development of an end to all forms of exploitative domination within the relations of production is connected to awareness of the importance of the interests of the development of an ecological situation in which the role of production is not based on the exploitation of nature in a problematical manner. Instead, the very expression of harmony between nature and the activity of labour is an expression of the realisation of the possibility for the producers to be able to express a capacity to define the character of the economic system. In this manner the importance of the production of commodities for the process of exchange in markets is replaced with the development of a situation in which the workers are able to define the character and objectives of the economic system. Such a development would imply the necessity of the highest standards of upholding the interests of the environment as an expression of this realisation of an economy based on the principles of realising human need instead of the objective of the process of capital accumulation. The major point that is being made is that indifference to the interests of ecology is connected to the very character of capitalism and the aim of the exploitation of labour. Therefore, concern with the ecological situation is not essentially an ethical demand but is instead connected to the very expression of the interests of the workers and the objective of socialism. In this context any success in being able to uphold the integrity of the environment is an expression of being able to change the balance of class forces in favour of the workers and the aims of changing the character of society. Therefore, the importance of ecology is not merely an ethical demand but is instead connected to the very possibility to develop the progress of the workers concerning the task of being able to transform the character of the system. Hence indifference relating to the role of the environment cannot be considered to be beneficial in relation to the tasks involved in trying to transform society and realise the alternative of socialism. The point being made is that the aim of the development of a more constructive relationship of humanity to nature cannot be realised under capitalism because of the imperatives of the process of capital accumulation which is connected to the interests of the present economic system. This is precisely why socialism is connected to the objective of achieving a different situation in which the relation of productive activity to nature acquires a more constructive connection and so does not result in major ecological problems. However, it could also be suggested that the realisation of socialism may not resolve all the outstanding ecological problems created by capitalism. Instead there would only be a serious intention to try and resolve the ecological issues inherited from the capitalist system. Indeed, it would seem that Kovel accepts this problematical issue when he contends that the objective of green socialism has to be developed as an aspect of the role of class struggle: “The notion of eco-socialism is a kind of wager that freely associated labour will generate eco-centric ends, and that the latter will imply, even demand, freely associated labour. Hence the two streams of an eco-socialist process are mutually generative, they develop and propagate themselves in a process whose imaginative envisioning we have called “prefigurative”. What prefiguration sees before us is an integral human ecosystem, this forms itself into larger unities….and these prefigure labour’s free realization.” (p244) But it could be suggested that this perspective does not seem to recognise the very difficulties of developing forms of mass action that represent this aspiration to connect ecological aims with the collective role of the workers. Instead, it would seem that the attempt to realise material benefits within the capitalist system would seem to be a more credible and practical basis of the logic of mass struggles. In this context the aims of ecological objectives seem to be an expression of the aims of intellectuals rather than being the genuine expression of the aims of the workers. But Kovel considers that there is a political dynamic that will mean the approach of ecological socialism becomes popular and a credible basis for the transformation of society. He rejects any suggestion of political pessimism because of the complex difficulties of trying to realise an ecological socialist social formation and instead asserts the possible creation of the development of support for this perspective of change. Hence it would seem in an emphatic and possibly complacent manner he rejects the importance of the issue of the difficulties involved in trying to realise the alternative development of an ecological socialist society. His attitude is that we should try to deny the aspect of the difficulties involved in trying to establish the realisation of a green socialist social formation and instead emphasise the potential to achieve this type of society: “The “another world” is at present no more than a dim possibility, and one would say not even likely, given the mass of violent institutions, crippled human beings, and ruined ecosystems in the reign of capital. But to worry about that is a luxury that cannot be afforded. It saps the will to act, to fight for the only world worth fighting for. No doubt we are capable of supressing ourselves…. after all, a monstrosity such as capitalism does not simply arise through coercion or indoctrination. Even though it is not in human nature as such, it most certainly expresses a potential in human nature. But though we suffer from a permanent liability towards delusion and self-destruction, this remains paired with an affirmative, integrative power which is the birthplace of every person thrown into the world.” (p245) The problem with this confident perspective is that it seems to underestimate the difficulties involved in trying to develop popular support for an ecological socialist perspective. The green parties have become important because they have denied the necessity to develop a definite position concerning the objectives of socialism and instead imply that their aims can be realised within the limitations of the present system. Indeed, Kovel accepts that there are important ideological, economic and political reasons why people may support the continuation of capitalism and so reject the alternative of socialism. But the point is that this very development is connected to the apparent fact that people support a conception of the realisation of their ecological objectives in terms of a modification of the present social system rather than advocating its transformation into a new social mode of production. Indeed, the very success of the green parties would seem to represent the credibility of this standpoint when contrasted with the alternative of the marginal role of the socialist organisations. Their advocacy of the adoption of the aims of ecology within a modified capitalism would seem to be more credible than the apparently unrealistic and unpopular aim of socialism that is still being advocated by various Marxist groups. Furthermore, the history of what could be considered to be socialist societies has not been suggestive of the claim that they have been able to tackle ecological issues in a manner that is superior to that of capitalism. In this manner the contemporary support of socialist parties for ecological aims does not seem to be credible and feasible. Instead, it could be argued that ecological reform of capitalism is the most practical and principled manner in which environmental objectives can be realised.

The very development of the importance of green parties in many contemporary capitalist societies would seem to express the credibility of this perspective of trying to reform in order to achieve ecological objectives. In contrast Marxism seems to be unrealistic because of its very adherence to a perspective of revolutionary change that no longer seems credible or popular. Furthermore, the apparent willingness of many established governments to accept the importance of ecological objectives would seem to express the credibility of this standpoint. In contrast Marxism seems to be marginal and irrelevant. But the point is that this aspect of the unpopularity of Marxism does not necessarily imply that its ecological aims have become irrelevant or unrealisable. Instead, Marxism has to act in a more convincing manner in order to achieve more popular support for its conception of ecological socialism. Kovel maintains that this task can be realised by suggesting that the ownership of the process of production by capital is a denial of the possibility of what can be defined as the commons to be expressed by the role of the collective producers: “On the ground, the struggle will be between those who would enclose the Commons and those who would reclaim it. The former speaks today in the name of capital; the latter meanwhile struggle for the integrity of the ecosystem comprised by the commons and its human community. In other words, the Commons is not a physical place but a kind of event that is happening in a human ecosystem and in which the integrity of the ecosystem is at stake.”(p247) This objective would imply that this possible development can only be realised when the domination of capital in the relations of production is ended and replaced with an alternative based on the expression of the ability of labour being able to establish and realise the objectives of the economic system. Indeed, Kovel indicates that the logical outcome of these developments would be the creation of an eco-socialist type of society.

However, does his perspective of change imply that it would be realised in a convincing manner. He contends that: “Now we are able to specify the motion of ecosocialist politics more concretely. It consists of locating the emergence of the Commons and intervening to favour the victory of eco-centric forces. A great range of struggle can be seen in this light…..Each in its way is a battle for a kind of Commons, a piece of human ecosystem, more integral, more formed, more realized. Each points us towards ecosocialism.” (p247-248) But is this situation genuinely based on an inherent connection of particular mass struggles with the aim of the realisation of an alternative economy and society of the commons? Indeed, it could be suggested that in most situations the aim of ecological change tends to be connected to the possibility to achieve reforms within capitalism. There are not many instances in which popular political parties tend to advocate the genuine transformation of society in radical terms. Instead, the approach of Marxism and its support of a socialist alternative to capitalism has become of secondary importance. Indeed, this would explain the popularity of green parties because they imply the possibility to realise a progressive alternative by modifying aspects of the objectives of capitalism. The result of these developments is that the very increasing importance of the green parties has been connected with the apparent increasing marginalisation of Marxism. It would seem that the significance of ecological aims has replaced that of socialism as being the major expression of how to improve the character of society. In other words, the approaches of Marxism and ecology seem to be in a situation of antagonistic competition and it would seem that the very increasing importance of green politics has contributed to the marginalisation of the standpoint of revolutionary socialism. In this context the connection of socialism and ecology is merely the approach of a few Marxists and in actuality the increasing importance of environmentalism has led to the decline in importance of the anti-capitalist standpoint. In other words, the attempt to connect ecology and socialism is essentially the intention of a few Marxist intellectuals like Kovel and in terms of actual political practice the situation is that of a rivalry between what are opposed ideological trends. There is no popular support for the Marxist attempt to connect green and socialist politics in terms of a compatible unity. Instead, the actual situation is defined by the increasing importance of ecological objectives and the decline of the ideology of socialism. Thus, it would seem that the attempt of Kovel to unite Marxism and ecology is unconvincing.

However, he would contend that the relationship of ecology and socialism is the only basis to maintain the relationship of the role of the economy with adherence to the objectives of ending the relationship of capitalism to the undermining of the interests of the environment. This relationship means that a type of ecological socialism will become increasingly credible in the following terms: “Eco-socialist society is defined by being, achieved by giving oneself to others and restoring a receptive relation to nature. Eco-systemic integrity is to be restored across all the nested circles of human participation – the family, the community, the nation, the international community…For capital, property rights of the individual ego are sacrosanct, and become solidified into class structures, whence they succeed in dispossessing masses of people from their inherent ownership of the means to produce creatively. This is only the legal aspect of a regime of fetishized relations. Within eco-socialism the bounds of the individual ego are surpassed as use-value overcomes exchange value and opens a way for the realization of intrinsic value.” (p270) But the problem is that this perspective can only be theoretical because it has never been realised in practice. Instead, the domination of capitalism means that what is empirically established is the adverse relationship of the role of the present mode of production in terms of the interests of the environment. It would seem that what is historically and empirically established is the exploitation of nature in terms of the requirements of the accumulation of capital. Therefore, the approach of ecological socialism would seem to be a moral ideal that cannot be realised in terms of actual historical developments. Hence the approach of Kovel seems to be an expression of an ethical principle that has little possibility of being established in terms of actual historical developments. In this manner there is a contradiction between theory and practice. It is quite feasible for Kovel to outline the aspects and principles of a society that is based on the aspects of the realisation of an ecological socialism. However, the relationship of theory to practice is more complicated and problematical. This is because of the apparently marginal role of socialism and the lack of popular support for its objectives such as green politics. Instead, it seems to be more practical and credible to attempt to influence the role of capitalism and to introduce ecological aims within this system. Indeed, this would seem to be the approach of the increasingly popular green parties. In contrast, Marxism has become more marginal and so its attempt to express the approach of an ecological socialism seems to lack credibility and lacks the popular basis that would facilitate its realisation. Instead, it would seem more practical to try and introduce the aims of green politics within the context of the assumption that capitalism will be an enduring and dominant system. Indeed, there seems to be some success in this regard with most establishment politicians supporting at least a formal commitment to ecological aims. However, these political problems do not undermine the validity of the socialist perspective outlined by Kovel. He has established convincing reasons why the aims of ecology can only be realised and expressed in a society not primarily based on the imperatives of capital accumulation. His view that only socialism is compatible with ecological principles seems to be continually empirical confirmed by the continual inability of capitalism to be able to introduce convincing measures that would attempt to begin to tackle environmental problems. In this context the marginalisation of Marxism does not invalidate the credibility of its perspective that only socialism can begin to tackle the issues of ecology in a principled and effective manner. Hence the major issue is not the feasibility of the socialist approach to the environment but is instead about the problems created by the marginalisation of Marxism. It is because of the apparently problematical role of socialism because of its consistently un-popular situation which seems to imply that its very objectives of a green society seem to be unrealistic, or that the most that can be hoped for is for the acceptance by the defenders of capitalism of some limited ecological objectives. In this context Kovel outlines some vague principles that could facilitate the process of transition to a society based on green objectives, but he does not tackle the major issue of how to challenge the ideological domination of the capitalist system which results in the discrediting and marginalisation of the socialist alternative. He suggests that there are only two alternatives, either to accept the continued undermining of the interests of the global ecology by the role of capitalism or instead to realise an environmental socialism. But the problem is that this posing of political choices will not result in increased support for the aims of democratic socialism and the establishment of a different and more ecologically harmonious society. The important point is that we also have to establish more convincing reasons why the domination of capitalism should be ended and replaced with the alternative of a democratic socialism. This means that the very task of outlining the standpoint of an ecological socialism has to be connected to the related elaboration of a perspective of why the working class should be able to establish a dominant role within society and so end the domination of capitalism. Hence Kovel has provided a credible understanding of the relationship of socialism to ecological principles, but his approach is not able to establish in convincing terms how this perspective can be realised in political terms. How can the marginalisation of Marxism be ended so that it is able to promote the aims of green socialism in a popular manner and so generate the development of a mass movement that is able to struggle for these aims?

Indeed, it has been the very failure of Marxism to be able to create popular and effective parties in the recent period which explains the situation that it seems that green parties and organisations have been able to strive to realise their objectives in a more effective manner when compared to the increasing marginalisation of the revolutionary socialist parties. It would seem that the greens have often been near to success in obtaining the support of the political system of capitalism for the implementation of ecological principles. Indeed, this very development seems to be an important factor explaining the apparent irrelevance of Marxism. It would seem that the era of Marxism is over and instead its role has been replaced by the dynamic importance of green parties who have obtained increasing public support for the introduction of environmental standards within society. But this aspect is the very important factor that seems to be ignored by Kovel. Instead, he outlines the prospects of a green socialism without also analysing the alternative merits of the green movement. Instead, he assumes that the ecological campaign will inevitably assume a socialist character, and so ignores the significance of actual developments which suggest that what is actually occurring is the replacement of the previous importance of socialist parties with the alternative of green movements. Indeed, most people would contend that the prospects for progressive change are connected to the development of the influence of the ecological organisations. In contrast Marxism seems to have become marginalised and increasingly antiquated. This very issue is not studied by Kovel who instead in an abstract manner outlines the aspects for the development of a green Marxism and socialism, but this very perspective is dogmatic because of this apparently conscious ignoring of actual developments which seem to indicate the increasing importance of the ecological organisations. Hence it is not sufficient to merely outline the criteria for the development of green socialism, it is also necessary to try and establish what should be the relationship of Marxism to the already existing and functioning ecological organisations. In this context we have to discuss what should be the relationship of ecological groups with Marxist parties. But this issue is not tackled by Kovel because he is content to outline the arguments for a green Marxism in abstract terms that are not related to the actual challenges of the present political situation. However, this approach is only dogmatic and is not satisfactory. Instead, what should be the most important priority is to establish the principles of an attempt to develop a principled relationship of the socialist and green movement. The failure by Kovel to tackle this point means that his approach is abstract and dogmatic and not related to the actual political challenges posed by the task of developing socialism with the objectives of ecology. We will attempt to outline a more convincing approach.

But it is also important to address the issue of the development of the role of the green movement which seems to have undermined the necessity for the role of ecological socialism. The various ecological political and activist organisations have been able to promote the importance of environmental issues within contemporary society and in some instances been able to realise the introduction of measures that enable progress to be made in connection to the relation of nature and society. These developments would seem to undermine the necessity of socialist groups and instead imply that it is possible to realise ecological progress within capitalist social formations. However, we would suggest that these measures can only be of a limited character because the primary imperative of the present economic system to represent the expression of capital accumulation means that the role of production for profit ensures that the result is a situation of ecological regression. Hence there is the necessity for the development of an alternative socialist society that would be able to realise the needs of the environment in a more effective manner. Therefore, the continuation of ecological problems within capitalism is an indication of the importance of a perspective that would suggest the role of the environment can be upheld in terms of the realisation of a different socialist society. Hence the character of the ecological situation has not undermined the perspective of the relationship of socialism to the interests of the environment, instead the outstanding issue is the lack of support and credibility for the aims of establishing an alternative to capitalism. The fact that ecological problems continue within capitalism despite some impressive attempts to introduce measures of sustainability is an expression of this necessity for an alternative to the present social system if genuine progress is to be maintaining in upholding the interests of the environment. Hence the important issue is not that capitalism has been able to connect its interests with those of the ecological situation but instead that a green socialism has not become popular and effective. Therefore, the major issue is how to develop the increasing importance of the role of green socialism. This problem is connected to the apparent marginalisation of contemporary socialism and its increasing insignificance. However, Kovel seems to ignore these issues and instead assume that the expression of the aims of green socialism will result in increasing support for its realisation. But this very assumption is what is problematical, and instead we have to outline why green socialism would be more credible than the present attempt to try and reform capitalism in an ecological manner. In this context it is necessary to outline a history of the role of green organisations and why because of their attempt to modify the system in terms of the introduction of ethical values they have not been successful. In other words, the capitalist type of economy is not generally amenable to a process of change such as the introduction of ecological measures in order to improve the condition of the environment. Indeed, the very argument for green socialism is that this type of society is the only genuine basis to be able to introduce ecological measures in a successful manner. However, the most principled socialist parties have become historically marginalised and lack the popularity or power to be able to realise this type of programme. Only the development of their credibility which is based on the expression of a relationship between these types of parties and the people will enable the possibility to make progress for the implementation of green socialism. But how is this development to occur when it seems that the capitalist system is generally omnipotent and able to dominate society in an invincible manner? The only effective manner in which this situation can be changed is by the development of the struggles of the workers which if successful would be able to alter the balance of class forces in favour of the interests of the people. These struggles should be connected to the more explicit expression of ecological objectives as an integral aspect of their character. The role of successful militant actions could enable the introduction of limited measures that enable progress to be made in developing the realisation of ecological objectives. In this manner the situation could become transformed, and the aim of environmental progress would then become an aspect of the very expression of the development of the success of mass struggles.

In other words, the present problem is the lack of connection between the role of the ecological groups and the socialist parties and trade unions. These organisations seem to have different priorities and perspectives. Thus, the green organisations become pressure groups within capitalism and assume a perspective of trying to modify the environmental objectives of society, whilst the trade unions and socialist parties often consider that green issues are of secondary importance. These divisions have to be overcome and instead a process of unity between the socialist parties and trade unions has to be established in terms of a more definite and convincing support for a programme that unites ecological objectives with the expression of the interests of the workers. In this manner the standpoint of ecology will no longer be primarily the expression of the aims of green activists and instead will acquire a more popular character. Hence the development of the mass struggles of the workers will become increasingly connected to the attempt to realise green objectives both within capitalism and in terms of the attempt to generate the possibility for socialism. However, the present marginalisation of Marxist groups means that there is little support for the aims of socialism and so these developments are not likely to occur. Therefore, the very development of a credible green socialist politics requires the possibility of the emergence of a more popular socialist type of politics which would be expressed by the increasing importance of left-wing parties. However, the present inability to be able to realise this development is an indication that the very possibility to be able to promote radical politics is problematical and instead the situation seems to be characterised by the unchallenged domination of parties that support the present system. In this context any gains in relation to ecology are the result of the influence of various activist ecological organisations that can make some advances within the present system. Therefore, the development of a relationship of ecology and socialism does not seem to occur. Hence this situation can only be improved by the emergence of an effective socialist party that would be able to combine principled politics with the ability to be able to be flexible and so facilitate the development of its increasing influence. But the very crisis of the socialist groups seems to suggest that this favourable outcome is not likely to occur. Instead, the only credible option is to support the activism of the green organisations and so assume that ecological changes can occur in this manner of the possible success of activist struggles. Indeed, it could be argued that this is what has happened over the last forty years of increasing popular awareness of the importance of the issue of the environment. This development has meant that what seems to be the most credible perspective is to strive to achieve ecological progress within the limitations of the present capitalist system. The very increasing environmental awareness of people within present society implies the possibility that public opinion can influence the various governments to introduce measures of ecological change. Hence it would seem that the approach of a green socialism is an irrelevancy. However, the very opposition of the defenders of capitalism to the implementation of measures of environmental progress would suggest that the development of a relationship between socialism and ecology is not a contemporary irrelevance. Instead, it is necessary to elaborate this approach so that it can become the basis of developing popular support for a green socialist programme. But in order to make this approach credible it would be necessary to outline how this programme can be connected to a realistic perspective of change. How will it become possible to develop support for the aims of a green socialism?

In this context it is necessary for socialists to try and establish firstly that within capitalism the system is based on the process of accumulation via economic expansion which means that it is not receptive to the moderating role of environmental sustainability. There is a direct contradiction between the requirements of capitalism when contrasted with the relationship of the interests of ecology with the creation of a socialist society. Secondly, this initial conclusion has to be connected to the elaboration of the alternative compatibility of socialism with green objectives. Only a socialist society has the character that enables the interests of the environment to be realised. This very connection means that in order to establish more support for ecological objectives means the development of increasing support for the aim of socialism. Therefore, the lack of popular support for socialism means the continuation of the importance of the political problems connected to the development of the credibility of the perspectives of the realisation of the interests of the environment. In this context the role of various green pressure groups can only express limited success in being able to develop the realisation of measures by various pro capitalist governments that represent the requirements of ecological sustainability. But the problem is that the very ideology of socialism seems to have been seriously discredited by the association of this objective with the role of Stalinism. Instead, only the most right-wing Social Democracy would seem to represent a credible alternative, but this very political formation accepts the situation in which the interests of capital result in the undermining of the role of the environment. Hence there is no alternative than to try and develop a principled relationship between the interests of ecology and the role of a credible type of socialism. But this very possibility seems to be seriously undermined by the lack of popularity of the most principled socialist groups. This means that we can only suggest an ecological approach that would be connected to the attempt to overcome the marginalisation of the left-wing parties.

The most immediate aspect of this type of programme would be that the socialists would be the most principled supporters of the aims of the ecological movement. They would attempt to obtain the support of the trade unions for measures of sustainability and conservation. This development would mean elaborating how it is possible that the interests of working people can be connected to the development of progress concerning the realisation of environmental aims within capitalism, and so indicating how this aspect can contribute to the possibility of establishing a socialist alternative. In other words, the interests of making progress in ecological terms are connected to developing the influence and power of the working class within capitalist society and so in this manner are relevant in relation to enhancing the potential for the creation of a socialist alternative. However, it has been the failure to understand this relationship which has sometimes meant that the working class has been indifferent about ecological aims and principles. Instead, we have to outline how green politics can express the interests of working people and that progress in ecological terms can contribute to increasing the ability of the workers to be able to transform capitalism in a socialist manner. In other words, Marxists have to indicate that green objectives are not merely the concern of the middle class and instead are connected to the development of increasing the influence of the workers within capitalism and in this manner creating the pre-conditions to realise the socialist alternative. This is because ecological aims are generally opposed to the objectives of capital accumulation and instead express different economic principles that are more compatible with the character of socialism. This is precisely why capitalists oppose the realisation of many ecological objectives and instead are often indifferent in this context. However, it has been the failure to establish this relationship of ecology and socialism which has meant that it has often meant that environmental issues seem to be the preoccupation of various activist groups. This situation has not been changed because of the apparent failure of the left-wing organisations to create a credible programme connecting the interests of the working class with green objectives. Instead, we have to show that one of the most important criteria that expresses the increasing ability of the workers to influence the character of society is the increasing effectiveness and importance of a perspective that connects the aims of the workers with ecological objectives. The point being made is that progress in environmental terms is an expression of the increasing ability of the working class to be able to change society in terms of their interests. This means that indifference about ecological aims by the workers can undermine the very ability to be able to realise policies that are in their favour. The point being made is that progress in the realisation of a green programme contributes to changing the balance of class forces in favour of the workers and against the interests of capital. This is why the issue of ecology has to become an aspect of any programme for the promotion of radical change.

But the important problem is that the very aspect of ecology is not expressed in the various programmes of the socialist groups in a systematic and important manner. Instead, there is a general formal understanding that the aspect of the environment will somehow be resolved with the introduction of a socialist type of society, but the very programme that will enable this possibility to be expressed is not outlined in convincing terms. In other words, the issue of ecology becomes problematical for the various Marxist groups because it is an aspect of the expression of an apparent inability to develop a convincing perspective and programme for change. But this situation is connected to the failure of the revolutionary organisations to be able to tackle their apparent inability to become popular and influential. In this context it seems that the most appropriate manner in which the issue of the environment can be tackled is by the activist role of the various green organisations. It would seem that they have the most credible approach in trying to establish the successful realisation of a process of being able to modify aspects of the prevailing capitalist system in terms of the introduction of measures of an environmental nature via the application of political pressure on the major political parties of government. In contrast the marginalised character of the socialist parties would seem to suggest that they are irrelevant in relation to the issue of bring able to advance the introduction of measures of environmental progress within society. Hence it would seem that the result of the marginalisation of the various socialist groups is that the relationship of the interests of the environment and socialism is not established in any convincing manner. Instead, it seems to be more effective to try and develop support for ecological changes within the limitations and context of the prevailing capitalist system. In this context the green organisations would claim that they have been able to promote various changes that advance their objectives, even if they have not been able to realise a situation in which the aims of governments have become primarily related to the aims of ecological change. Thus, the partial success of the green movement actually seems to contrast favourably with the apparent failures of the socialist parties which have seemed to have become increasingly marginal and unable to influence the character of society. In this context it would seem that the approach of green socialism has become antiquated because of the important problems associated with the increasing ineffectiveness of the various left-wing parties. In this context the situation seems to be more favourable to the attempts of green organisations to try and achieve support and consent for the introduction of their policies within capitalist society. It could be argued that they have achieved some success in this perspective and that it contrasts favourably to the apparent continued decline and marginalisation of socialist and Marxist groups. But it could also be argued that the supporters of capitalism will never consistently accept the introduction of ecological policies because this objective contrasts with the interests of the economic system. Hence the connection of the character of capitalism with environmental problems continues to indicate the necessity of the successful realisation of a green programme of socialism. In other words, the programme of green socialism has not been discredited, but what has become problematical is the lack of credibility of the various socialist parties. Only if this issue can be resolved in an effective manner will it become necessary to try and advocate a programme of green socialism in more confident terms. The problem is not with green socialist politics, but instead the primary issue is about the various limitations of the Marxist parties. In other words, the programme of green socialism has not been discredited, but instead what has become an outstanding issue is expressed by the various limitations of the socialist organisations. The decline of the socialist groups seems to indicate that this approach has become discredited and so should be replaced by the more dynamic role of the various green groups. However, this very development does not seem to suggest that progress can be made concerning the attempt to introduce green objectives within society. Instead, only limited progress has been made and so society continues to decline in environmental terms. Thus, it could be argued that despite all the problems it is still necessary to create a credible type of ecological socialism. Trying to indicate how this can be developed, is the concluding aspect of this article.

The initial aspect of the role of Marxists should be to support the attempt of ecology activists to introduce measures within capitalist society that would attempt to improve the environment situation and so result in an increased confidence that changes of this character can be introduced as a result of popular action. In this manner it would not be constructive to suggest in a dogmatic manner that capitalism cannot be changed because of its exploitative character and instead it would be more constructive to try and establish the political criteria that would express the possibility to introduce measures of an ecological character within the present society and so enhance the prospect of being able to ultimately realise a type of environmental socialist social formation. In this context the various green activists would become increasingly impressed by the role of the Marxists in supporting their movement and so could be increasingly receptive concerning the aim of attempting to realise socialism. The types of measures that the greens and Marxists could propose and attempt to be realised would include policies to regulate the pollution created by industry and conservation that upheld the interests of nature. If these types of measures were increasingly successful it would mean that confidence would be developed that resulted in an encouragement to strive to realise a type of ecological socialist society. However, it could be argued that the problem with this perspective is the present marginalisation of Marxism. Indeed, in this context it seems that the approach of a militant green politics is more credible and has a greater chance of success. The ultimate end of the greens is to modify capitalism in a democratic and ecological manner so that this society becomes reformed in terms of introducing an increasing importance of green measures in order to be able to reconcile the present system with the aims of the ecological movement. Indeed, it could be argued that the increasing influence of the greens seems to suggest that this perspective is increasingly credible. However, it could also be suggested that ultimately the capitalist system cannot be improved in this manner because the interests of the process of accumulation are opposed to the aims of environmental sustainability. Hence ecological problems continue to be important and do not seem to be resolved. This means there is still a credible argument for the realisation of a socialist alternative in order to achieve a situation of increasing harmony between the role of production and the interests of the environment. But the problem is that the apparent marginalisation of socialist organisations means that this perspective seems to be problematical and so despite the difficulties there is no alternative than to try to introduce ecological measures within the present capitalist system. But the problem is that the various green parties do not develop sufficient popular support that would result in their election into government of the major capitalist countries. The very marginalisation of the green parties means that the possibility to realise an increasing ecological perspective is called into question. However, the unpopularity of the revolutionary socialist parties means that their approach also seems to be unrealistic. In these circumstances the problematical relationship of the socialists concerning the possibility to achieve ecological objectives is not resolved. Instead, the only credible alternative seems to be to try and realise limited changes within capitalism. In other words, the various green parties whilst they have become more popular than the various Marxist parties, they have still not been able to develop a credible strategy that would enable them to realise their ecological objectives. Instead, they become a powerless expression of green objectives within capitalist society. The result of this situation is that the prospect of developing an influential expression of ecological aims within capitalism is not realised in an effective manner. Both the Greens and the Marxists lack the apparent ability to be able to promote a viable strategy of change. The result of this situation is that both of these forces are movements of protest within capitalism and so are not able to express the character of being an effective force for the development of the realisation of their objectives. Instead, the Greens are a popular but minority force for their objectives and the radical socialist parties have become increasingly marginalised and apparently irrelevant. Therefore, a strategy needs to be developed that would facilitate a transformation of this situation.

How can the marginalisation of Marxists be overcome and how can the Greens become more effective? We would suggest that the actual perspective of ecological change is very popular, but what is constantly problematic is the issue of how to realise these objectives. It is necessary to suggest that instead of green aims being vaguely promoted as a collection of almost abstract ideals that the connection between the role of possible collective struggle and the attempt to achieve ecological objectives is established in a more systematic manner. In this manner the issue of opposing the consolidation of the domination of capital over labour is connected to a programme of upholding the interests of the environment. For example, opposing the undermining of the role of nature that is an inherent aspect of the role of capital accumulation. In this manner the collective interests of labour become more closely associated with the ecological aims and the result is the elaboration of a strategy that would facilitate the possibility for the workers to increase their influence in society by also being able to maintain the integrity of the environment. Such a development could also mean the development of a closer relationship of green organisations with those of the working class. The result is that the very attempt to oppose the aims of capital by labour become closely connected to the expression of the objective of achieving ecological aims such as upholding the integral character of nature. In other words, the aspect of collective struggle by labour becomes associated with the popular and militant actions of the green movement, and so an expression of unity between these two forms of mass struggle is achieved in practical terms. Such a development also means that the aim of the domination of capitalism is associated with ecological regression whilst the integrity of the environment is connected to the attempts of labour to defend its collective interests against the attempts of the defenders of the present economic system to facilitate its situation of domination. In this manner a new strategy of change is being developed in that the issue of ecology has become a vital expression of the very credibility of a programme of change. Hence progress in this context is an aspect of an attempt to change the balance of class forces in favour of the realisation of the aim of socialism. Thus, an indifference towards the interests of the environment would indicate that the workers had not yet overcome the influence of bourgeois ideology and so had not yet been able to become conscious supporters of the alternative of socialism. In other words, the very character of a programme for the realisation of socialism has become closely associated with the understanding that ecological progress is an integral aspect of the role of class struggle and the possibility of success in this context. Therefore, a failure to achieve measures of progressive ecological change would be an indication that the situation was defined by the ability of the capitalist class to be able to maintain its domination over society. But the achievement of measures of an environmental character would indicate that success was being realised in terms of the increasing influence of the role of the working class within society. In this manner the character of the class struggle would be connected to success being made in ecological terms. The very developing capacity of the workers to support the realisation of ecological aims would be an indication that progress was being made in the class struggle and that a green type of socialism was becoming an increasingly credible possibility. However, it has been the failure to establish this type of connection of the working class to ecological aims which has meant that the aims of the green movement have been the exclusive expression of the role of parties which have often been indifferent about the interests of the workers. The failure to connect the green movement with the role of the workers has been an enduring problem that has not yet been resolved. It could be argued that the relationship of the ecological movement with socialist organisations is not likely to be realised because of the decline in importance of the latter. But we would suggest that it is the very adoption of a green perspective by the socialist parties that is an important aspect of trying to develop their importance in the contemporary period.

In other words, the adoption of a programme of ecological socialism will not inevitably result in the revival of the various socialist parties, but we would suggest that without this development the chances of the expression of the possibility for successful political activity are undermined in a serious manner. If the socialist parties can promote the aspect of an ecological programme in more consistent terms, they would then develop an increasing possibility to establish a situation of possible cooperation with the green organisations. However, some people would suggest that this approach is opportunist because the green parties are not sympathetic concerning the ultimate aim of socialism as advocated by the Marxist groups. This is a valid point and so the initial expression of an alliance has to be about support for a commonly agreed collection of policies that would represent the immediate objective of trying to achieve ecological progress within existing capitalist society. If progress could be made in this context it may result in increasing cooperation between the socialist groups and green organisations. Such a development could only have a constructive aspect in relation to creating the conditions for the expression of a connection between the aspects of ecology and the promotion of the aim of socialism. However, it would seem that this perspective is presently flawed by the continuing marginalisation of the Marxist and socialist organisations. In this situation it would seem that the green groups are able to effectively advance the realisation of their objectives without the necessity of making alliances with the Marxist groups. Hence the issue of the marginalisation of the Marxist parties has to be addressed in an effective manner if the possibility of a green and socialist alliance is to be constructed. Without the political progress of the Marxist groups, it would seem that it is more productive for the green organisations to act in an exclusive manner in order to promote the possibility to realise their objectives. Indeed, it could be argued that they have made limited success in these terms. However, we would ultimately suggest that the contradiction between the interests of capital when compared to those of the environment is an indication of the continuing necessity for the importance of the increasing influence of the socialist approach if the objective of a green politics is to be realised. In this context the developing importance of green politics has not ended the necessity for the increasing role of socialist organisations. Instead, the creation of an alliance between the green movement and the socialist parties is still a possible basis for the increasing developing of the prospect for the realisation of ecological aims. The continued connection of capitalism with environmental problem is an expression of the importance of the role of socialism if genuine ecological change is to be realised. However, this standpoint will not seem to be credible if the Marxist groups continued to be marginalised and unimportant. Only the increasing influence of these organisations will provide genuine credibility to the understanding that socialism is required in order to provide support for the aim of achieving ecological change that will act to end the problems created by capitalism for the undermining of the importance of nature.

However, it will be suggested that this perspective is dogmatic and that the various green parties have been able to make progress without the necessity of developing a relationship to Marxism and socialism. Indeed, in empirical terms this conclusion would seem to be justified given the increasing support and influence of green parties within capitalist society. It has been possible to introduce limited measures of change based on the expression of the importance of the green parties and organisations within the present type of system. However, it can also be suggested that this type of change has only been partially successful and that problems of an ecological character continue to be important and not likely to be resolved. Therefore, the adverse relationship of the interests of the environment when compared to the aims of capital accumulation is a continuing indication of the necessity for socialism. This aspect is not undermined by the apparent lack of credibility of the socialist parties. Instead, we would suggest that the very development of a green type of socialism is still central to the issue of the realisation of ecological objectives. This is why it is not an irrelevant issue to still try and outline the importance of the aim of socialism for the achievement of environmental aims. The attempt to overcome the marginalisation of socialism is an important aspect of trying to achieve the success of the objectives of the green movement.

In other words, the very issue of the success of both the socialist and green organisations is connected to the issue of whether they can achieve an effective process of unity that would enable them to be able to promote their objectives in a more convincing manner. The realisation of this task would mean the actual expression of a more effective conception of how a green socialist society could be realised in terms of the generation of struggles of the people in order to achieve this objective. It is the very lack of a connection between the ecological and socialist movements that undermines the possibility to achieve a greater level of success in terms of the achievement of their objectives. In other words, both the ecological and socialist forces would be strengthened if they sufficiently realised that they had common objectives and so should unite in a more consistent manner in order to try and achieve their aims. This development would not mean the undermining of the integrity of either the green or the socialist movements. Instead, what would be realised should be an increasing expression of political clarity concerning this possibility to achieve a coherent strategy of the attempt to replace a capitalist society that is based on the generation of environmental problems. In other words, the green movement is essentially unprincipled if it tries to disconnect its objectives from the aim of achieving a socialist society and the socialists are dogmatic and not practical if they attempt to argue in favour of their standpoint in a manner that is not connected to the importance of the role of the environment. Instead, both the greens and socialists have a more credible type of politics if they recognise the similarities of their perspectives and so as a result attempt to develop a common programme of change. In this context the socialists would become more politically relevant and no longer dogmatic and old fashioned, whilst the greens would be able to reject the illusion that it is possible to reform capitalist society by the successful introduction of environmental measures. Instead, it would be possible to reject the limitations of both the greens and socialists and instead to unite on the basis of a superior programme and perspective. This development would not result in inevitable success but at least it would become possible to be able to provide an aspect of greater political clarity concerning the character of the objectives of both the greens and socialists. The socialists would have become relevant and contemporary, whilst the greens would be able to reject its illusions in reformism in a more convincing and constructive manner. But this potential unity of the greens and socialists does not occur because of the continuation of the influence of dogmatism and sectarianism. However, some socialists have joined green parties and attempted to influence its political character, but they have generally been unsuccessful in this task. Therefore, what seems to be required is the development of a united front of the different groups in order to create a common programme for the expression of attempting to change capitalism in terms of the increasing realisation of green objectives. If this task had some level of success, it would then become possible to pose the issue of the creation of an ecological socialist society. However, it is actually the continuation of differences about what is possible within capitalism that presently undermines the realisation of this green and socialist alliance. Hence it is necessary to convince the supporters of green organisations of the necessity of the aim of socialism. The present failures with regards to this task means that the potential for an alliance of the greens and socialists is generally not being realised. This results in the fact of a division between the organisation of the greens and socialists, and this is often expressed by the promotion of different political standpoints. Hence what is required is for someone to argue in favour of the unity of the green and socialist movements around support for agreed objectives. Unfortunately, Kovel does not address this issue and instead argues in favour of a green socialism whilst ignoring the importance of the actually constituted environmental movement. This one-sided approach is unsatisfactory and dogmatic and instead implies that the situation is favourable to the realisation of a green socialism. Instead of this rigid approach we need to tackle the complexities of the division between green and socialist organisations and instead attempt to outline a convincing perspective of unity.

In other words, the issue is that without a relationship to socialist politics the approach of the greens is based on the primary objective of trying to modify the character of present capitalist society in terms of the realisation of environmental aims. But the problem is that the defenders of this system tend to undermine the possibility to realise this perspective because of the emphasis on the importance of the process of capital accumulation at the expense of ecological objectives. In contrast the supporters of socialism outline a critique of capitalism that unites this aim with the role of the realisation of ecological aims, but the credibility of this approach seems to be undermined by the marginalisation of the various socialist groups. Hence it would seem that the only credible approach is the essentially reformist perspective of the green organisations who attempt to modify the character of capitalist society in terms of the realisation of their aims. But the problem is that this approach has only had limited success. There would still seem to be the necessity of the realisation of socialism if green objectives are to be realised in a consistent and principled manner. Hence the approach of green socialism has not been shown to be falsified by empirical developments, but the possibility to realise this perspective seems to be undermined by the continuing aspect of the marginalisation of the Marxist groups. The result of these regressive developments is that capitalism continues to be dominant despite the fact that problems such as a deteriorating ecological situation are not improved. These problems indicate that there is not an inherent inevitable process of radical change in order to resolve problems like that of the environment. Instead, the capitalist system continues to be dominant despite the fact that many people understand its problems like that of ecological regression. In other words, the major issue is not that of trying to establish the situation of environmental problems but is rathe that it does not seem possible to resolve these issues in an effective and progressive manner. Instead, the capitalist system continues to be dominant despite the fact that people recognise the relationship of this system to a situation of undermining the integrity of the environment. To some extent these issues seem to be resolved by the militant character of the green movement which seems to have become the most important militant expression of protest within the present system. But this expression of protest is no substitute for the development of a more effective perspective that would enable the aims of the green movement to be consistently realised. However, these problems are often ignored because it would seem that the very influence of the greens within present society is an indication of their increasing success. However, the achievement of some limited ecological objectives does not mean that the primary aims of the greens to achieve an environmentally orientated society is being advanced or realised in an effective manner. But at least the greens have an important political role within present society. In contrast the revolutionary socialist groups are marginal and so do seem able to promote the aims of a green socialism in a convincing and credible manner. Only the development of the possibility for these revolutionary groups to be able to end their present marginal role would mean that the approach of green socialism would acquire more credibility. But this is the very issue that is ignored by Kovel. Instead, he outlines a perspective of environmental socialism that is generally considered to be credible because of the increasing problems created by the adverse relationship of capitalism to the role of ecology. But the point is that this situation does not discredit the defenders of the present economic system because the socialist alternative does not seem to be a feasible alternative. Therefore, socialists have to create support for a programme of green socialism and in that manner attempt to facilitate mass activity in order to realise this objective. But the present marginalisation of the socialist parties creates difficulties in developing success in relation to this perspective. However, the very approach of green socialism could contribute towards the development of the contemporary relevance of the Marxist groups. But this means that it is necessary to outline a conception of an ecological socialist society. But it can be suggested that Kovel does not carry out this task in a convincing manner.

In other words, the important issue that has to be addressed is how can it be possible to establish the credibility of a society based on the role of ecological principles that is also able to establish the democratic organisation of production. Therefore, how will this type of society be more economically efficient than capitalism and yet adhere to the highest level of ecological standards? It could be suggested that people like Kovel have outlined the principles and aspects of a green socialist society, but they have not sufficiently discussed the details involved in trying to realise the aims and objectives of this type of social formation. Primarily how can we convince people that this type of system would be able to achieve ecological aims in a manner that was superior to capitalism? In attempting to address this issue we would have to outline in a convincing manner how the democratic participation of the people in the organisation of an economy would enable them to be able to realise ethical types of objectives such as environmental progress because this is connected to the expression of the involvement of workers in the economic system. Thus, people would have to become convinced that improvements in ecological terms cannot be consistently realised within capitalism and that instead it is necessary to establish the alternative of socialism if environmental objectives are to be achieved. In other words, people have to become convinced that socialism will represent a superior economic system that enables ecological aims to be realised. But this possibility means that the very approach of Marxism has to become more popular and so seem to be more credible and realistic. Thus, the increasing influence of Marxism has to be the basis of the expression of the importance of ecological socialism. But such a development is not inevitable and indeed Marxism seems to have become marginalised within contemporary capitalist society. In other words, the potential development of ecological socialism is undermined by the apparent decline of Marxism and its increasing lack of credibility. In contrast the activism of the green movement has become increasingly popular and influential and so it would seem that this development represents the most promising basis for the success of environmental politics. In this context the apparent marginalisation of Marxism means that the most effective manner in which the interests of ecology can be advanced is by the role of the green movement. In this context there does not seem to be the possibility of a green and socialist alliance. Indeed, it could be suggested that the greens have been able to make some advances within capitalism by the popular organisation of mass struggles and increasing influence on the role of public opinion. In contrast the forces of socialism often seem to have become marginal and irrelevant. However, in this situation the very task of Marxists is to promote a programme of green socialism and to elaborate how under capitalism the aims of the environmental movement cannot be consistently realised. There is no inevitable prospect of success in this situation but it would seem that the socialists have no other option if they are to suggest in increasingly effective terms that their approach is connected to the aims of the green movement. It is being contended that the capitalist system cannot consistently realised environmental aims and that the only alternative is to realise a green socialist society. This approach is being suggested in order to obtain the support of the greens for this perspective. However, the socialists will only be credible if they establish a genuine relationship with the ecological movement. But it has been failure in this regard which has meant that the socialists have not developed sympathy within the green organisations. It is this separation of the socialists from the greens which has meant that the result is a lack of influence of socialism. How can this situation be changed and the influence of socialists within the green movement established?

It could be suggested that this perspective is optimistic because there is no inherent relationship between the greens and socialists. This point seems to be established by the general adherence of the greens to a reformist approach of trying to realise their objectives within the role of capitalist society. Therefore, it is necessary to try and resolve these differences in a manner that could establish a closer connection between the greens and socialists. In other words, the socialists have to be able to suggest in a more convincing manner that the objectives of the greens cannot be consistently realised within a capitalist society. This means that they have to be able to contend that the aims of the greens cannot be achieved within the limitations of a capitalist system that is based on the aim of accumulation and so undermines the realisation of the approach of conservation. What is required is that the socialists are able to outline how the type of society that they are advocating is the only one that can express the aims of conservation in a consistent and principled manner. In contrast the primacy of accumulation of the capitalist system means that the objective of expansion undermines the realisation of the interests of the ecological aspect of society. But this is the very approach that socialists have failed to establish in convincing terms. Instead, the greens seem to uphold the view that capitalism can be modified in ethical terms and so this would imply the possibility to express their ecological objectives. They seem to advocate a situation in which the role of capitalism is modified by the influence of green principles. Therefore, the socialists have to be able to establish that this perspective of the ecologists is not credible and instead the accumulation imperatives of the present system constantly undermine the realisation of the interests of the environment. What is ultimately problematical is the view that capitalism can be consistently reformed in progressive terms which would enable environmental measures to be introduced in a consistent manner. Instead, the imperatives of the process of accumulation means that the interests of ecology are generally undermined within the capitalist system. Only the introduction of a different economic system based on the aims of realising the needs of the people and the ecological interests will ensure that the consistent expression of a green approach becomes realised. This perspective is effectively supported by the greens because they vaguely uphold the aim of a different type of economy based on the interests of the people and the environment. However, they reject the importance of revolutionary struggle in order to realise this aim. Hence the ultimate problem is that of the reformist approach of the greens which means that they advocate modifying the present system in ecological terms and so reject the aim of revolutionary transformation. Therefore, the socialists have to elaborate the view that the realisation of a society based on green principles has to be based on the undermining of capitalism and the establishment of a socialist alternative. But the problem is that the approach of socialism does not seem to be credible and has not obtained popular support. This situation means that the greens seem to be more effective in trying to reform capitalism in terms of proposing the introduction of environmental measures. Only the development of the popular support for socialism will create the basis for the promotion of a strategy of relating ecological aims with the ending of the domination of capitalism. Therefore, the major problem is not the lack of credibility of a programme of green socialism but instead the apparent issue of the failure to develop an effective expression of support for the alternative of socialism. In this situation it seems to be more realistic to support the attempt of the greens to try and modify the character of capitalism in terms of the introduction of ecological principles. Indeed, it could be suggested that limited success has been realised in this situation of the popular role of green parties. Most governments are committed to the introduction of measures of conservation, but the requirements of the expansionist logic of capitalism means that only limited success has been realised. This is why the programme of green socialism remains valid. The problem is not the apparent unrealistic character of this perspective, but instead the political issues associated by the continual marginalisation of the Marxist groups. Therefore, in general terms the programme of an ethical socialism is continually relevant because of the ecological problems created by the capitalist system, but the challenging issue is the failure to create effective revolutionary parties. This situation indicates that there is no inherent dynamic of progressive change within society and instead the enduring crisis of the socialist groups is an indication that capitalism is a system that is not presently challenged in an effective manner. In this situation the importance of the ecological problems of capitalism does not result in the generation of a process of change. Instead, the capitalist system remains dominant despite the situation of enduring ecological problems.

In other words, the ecological problems created by capitalism will continue to be important because of the failure to develop an effective challenge to the continued domination of the system. However, the process of creating an alternative to this situation is connected to achieving the support of the greens for a socialist perspective as the basis to resolve the problems of the ecological situation. But the problem of the apparent lack of credibility of the various socialist parties means that this issue will not be resolved on a short-term basis. Instead, a process of a long-term attempt to create popular and effective socialist organisations is necessary if the very issue of the relation of ecological politics to a left-wing approach is to even begin to be realised. This means that the socialist organisations have to introduce measures that can facilitate their popular development. Only with this situation will the greens begin to seriously consider the viability of a united front with the socialist groups. Hence political developments seem to depend on the ability or not of the socialist parties to be able to become more popular and important organisations. This means that the various contending socialist groups have to consider the possibility of unity in order to generate their possibility to become more popular. If this development was to occur, then the prospect of unity with the green groups would become a serious prospect. However, there is a problem in that the various ecological parties are not presently sympathetic towards the aims of socialism. Therefore, changes within the groups would have to occur which would make them more amenable to the objective of the achieving of a socialist transformation of society. But without this development the prospect of unity between the socialist groups and the green organisations is not likely to occur. However, if these difficulties can be resolved, and there is no inevitable development in this regard, then the possibility of political unity can be achieved. In this context the prospect to struggle to achieve a green socialist society would be advanced. However, we have to suggest that this aim would not necessarily be achieved under these more favourable circumstances. But what we have to suggest is that the most credible basis to strive to realise a green socialist society will have been created. On the one hand the greens will have become more principled and have acquired definite objectives concerning their aims, whilst on the other hand the socialists will have acquired increasing popular support and have developed a superior organisational basis in order to facilitate the realisation of their aims. But the present disunity of the greens and socialists means that the combination of ideological integrity with the role of a mass organisation is not realised. The greens remain pragmatist even if they are popular, whilst the socialists have a definite and principled objective, but they are also insignificant. Hence if these limitations can be overcome by the establishment of a genuine expression of united organisation, then it may be possible to strive to realise a green socialist society in a more effective and popular manner. However, this development does not seem likely at the present moment in time, and so the greens remain popular but often opportunist, whilst the socialists seem to be principled but ineffective and not significant. If these disadvantages can be overcome by the development of a process of genuine unity then it could be suggested that the attempt to realise the objectives of a green socialist society could be advanced.

However orthodox supporters of the green movement will maintain that they have nothing to gain from an alliance with what are presently insignificant and unpopular socialist parties. On the other hand, some socialists will claim that their political integrity will be compromised by a situation of what could be considered to be unprincipled unification with the greens. In order to tackle these problems, we would suggest the development of the basics of a programme that would seem to suggest that the development of unity is both principled and credible. This programme would be based on the perspective of trying to realise progressive ecological change within capitalism, and various policies would be suggested in order to express this type of approach. But it would also be understood that consistent environmental progress cannot be maintained within a capitalist system that is based on the imperatives of accumulation and expansion. Therefore, the ultimate aim will be to establish a green socialist society in order to realise ecological objectives in a more consistent and principled manner. Thus, the Marxists have to convince the supporters of the green movement of the validity of this perspective. If they do not seem convincing in this context, the Marxists should still aim to support the greens in their attempts to realise their aims within capitalism. This type of united struggle should contribute towards gaining the increasing support of the orthodox greens for the objectives of an ecological socialist society. But even if this process is not realised, the socialists will have established a principled political role by attempting to contribute towards the realisation of environmental objectives within capitalism. Such an involvement can only facilitate the possibility to establish more credibility for the approach of green socialism. In other words, whatever is the outcome of the role of the green socialists within the environmental movement they have established a creditable process of political participation in a contemporary political struggle. This role can only ultimately contribute to the development of the possibility of increased support for socialism.

Therefore, whatever is the outcome of the interaction of the socialists and the green movement the interests of trying to end the role of capitalism can only be advanced. On the one hand the very process of struggle by greens and socialists can result in the introduction of environmental measures that result in the improvement of the ecological situation. On the other hand, this process of political unity can ultimately create more popular support for the aim of a green socialism. Therefore, it would be a sectarian mistake for socialists to reject the possibility of involvement with the ecological movement. Instead, a situation of cooperation – whatever its outcome – can only be to the benefit for the interests of a green socialism. Hence, we would suggest that the objectives of green socialists should be to establish a relationship with the ecological movement in order to strive for environmental changes within capitalism and to connect any progress in this context to the ultimate aim of attempting to facilitate the realisation of an ecological socialist society.