

EDITORIAL NOTE

Nearly forty years ago, American historian Roderick Nash wrote that in “a real sense environmental history fitted into the framework of New Left History [because it] would indeed be history ‘from the bottom up,’ except that here the exploited element would be the biota and the land itself.”¹ By aligning the field with a perspective that attempts to occupy the marginal and oppositional, Nash’s interpretation suggested the important intersections between the two emerging fields of inquiry in their formative years. Since Nash, pivotal works in environmental history have shared their methodological foundations with works in left history. Take, for example, the compatibility of a historically materialist framework with the models of analysis of Donald Worster and Richard White, each of whom emphasise the importance of understanding nature and ecology historically through the extension of more classic Marxist examinations of modes of production, labour, and social and cultural conditions.² Or, Nancy J. Jacobs, who in *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History*, has more recently demonstrated how such themes may be extended both geographically and topically in her exploration of changing human ecologies through successive productive and political regimes ranging from agro-pastoralism to intensive irrigation as well as from colonialism to apartheid.³

Despite the value of such scholarship, much more can be done to bring together the methods of left and environmental history. Former *Left History* editor Liza Piper noted that—while left modes of analysis have had the capacity to inform environmental history, activism, and politics—the merging of the two spheres has remained “unmatched by historical analysis.”⁴ Thus, even as current works in the field draw upon Marxist or post-structural tools of analysis to critically investigate issues of environmental injustice or alternative ways of knowing about nature, much of environmental historiography has either remained tethered to mainstream topics and themes or has not broken free of such traditional confines as the wilderness/culture dichotomy. This edition of *Left History* attempts to expand the disciplinary boundaries of environmental history. It explores and problematizes the confluence between environmental and left history. The essays in the issue establish a multi-disciplinary and theoretically diverse approach that takes into account both the social and ecological ramifications of capitalist exploitation.

In “Seeing Like a Protester: Nature, Power, and Environmental Struggles”, Marco Armiero demonstrates how the application of a conflict-based methodology can help to expose not only the social divisions of capitalist societies, but also the fact that such social relationships are embedded within the natural, making the inequalities conducive to struggle deeply ecological and tied to the land and environment. By reaffirming that nature matters, Armiero challenges the widely held assumption that nature and labour are alienated from each other. His

case studies of nineteenth-century forestry and twentieth-century waste disposal reveal the profound interconnectedness between people, power, and ecologies. Conflicts and landscapes are, therefore, shown to be indicative of the convergence of changing social and ecological relationships. Continuing with the post-war Italian context, Wilko Graf von Hardenburg and Paolo Pelizzari describe the unease with which Italian Communists—particularly those of the Italian Communist Party—approached the environmental question. They did so in conjunction with the rise of Italian ‘ecologismo politico’ and with respect to the growing ambiguities and injustices rooted in industrial models of development and growth. Examining the tensions between the traditional Communist concern with the working conditions within the factory environment and the growth of mainstream environmentalism, “The Environmental Question, Employment, and Development in Italy’s Left, 1945-1990” contributes to an understanding of the historical political divergences between the left wing and environmental movements in many Western societies. This is especially true, the authors argue, when new environmental challenges threaten a movement’s traditional, in this case Marxist, beliefs.

Peter McCord tackles the issue of heterogeneity within left environmental approaches in his work, “Divergences on the Left: The Environmentalisms of Rachel Carson and Murray Bookchin.” McCord assesses the different strategic and rhetorical devices, sources, critiques and correctives of these intellectual architects of postwar environmentalism. He finds that, from its inception, the environmental movement evolved along different reformist and radical paths and he provides a much-needed critical examination of the historical roots of both liberal and radical environmentalism. “Masculinity, Modernism and the Ambivalence of Nature”, Catriona Sandilands’ reading of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, asserts connections between nature, place, and sexuality. She suggests that the text articulates a “nascent queer ecology” that seeks to understand how “unnatural” sexualities exist within nature. In counterposing naturalised articulations of sexuality with modernist understandings of rural and urban landscapes, Sandilands reminds us that environmental history must also investigate how our understandings of nature and the “natural” are built upon profoundly gendered sets of ideas and cannot be separated from sexual and cultural politics.

The utility of visual texts to left environmental history is apparent in the issue’s two photo essays. In “The Urban Periphery and the Rural Fringe: West Ham’s Hybrid Landscape”, Jim Clifford employs photographs, maps, and GIS data to explore the patch-worked continuum of early twentieth-century London’s development to reveal a space formed by both human and natural elements. With a similar focus on contested landscapes, “Remembering the Struggle for the Environment” considers changes and controversies in Hamilton’s waterfront development since the 1960s as part of the wider project of environmental activism in North America. Despite sanctioned attempts to order growth and land

use, both articles indicate that even consciously designed spaces contain divergent and conflicting perspectives and purposes.

Joanna Dean's review essay "Big Game and the State: the History of the Hunt in Canada" critically examines the flourishing subset of current environmental historical scholarship regarding hunting and wildlife management in Canada, much of which she attributes to the recent and swelling of national interest in the field that has also been shored up by enthusiastic publishing mandates. These new works, Dean shows, revise the existing literature in innovative ways to incorporate new themes ranging from imperialism to aboriginal rights and novel approaches to issues of sport, state power, and science, thus creating a body of work which rounds out more traditional understandings of conservation with analyses of identity and ecology.

Left History would like to thank NiCHE—the Network in Canadian History and Environment/Nouvelle initiative canadienne en histoire de l'environnement—for their generous support for this issue. NiCHE has been working since 2004 to bring together historians, geographers, and other researchers who study nature and humans in Canada's past and the organization has already made a wide range of important contributions to the field of environmental history in Canada. You can learn more about the organization through their website: <<http://niche.uwo.ca>>.

Finally, we would like to thank our outgoing editors Tarah Brookfield and I.L. McPhedran for their hard work on the journal over the past two years. They are dearly missed and we will work to maintain the high standards they established during their tenure as editors.

The Editors
Summer 2008

NOTES

- 1 Roderick Nash, "American Environmental History: A New Teaching Frontier", *Pacific Historical Review*, 41 (1972), 363.
- 2 See Donald Worster, "Appendix: Doing Environmental History", in Alfred J Crosby and Donald Worster, Eds., *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press, 1988), and Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River*, New York (Hill & White, 1995).
- 3 Nancy J. Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- 4 Liza Piper, "Nature, History, and Marx", *Left History* 11.1 (Spring, 2006), 43-44.

LEFT HISTORY

An Interdisciplinary Journal of Historical Inquiry & Debate



Established in 1993, Left History is a refereed bi-annual scholarly journal run out of York University. With an editorial board of prominent Canadian and international left historians, Left History features articles from a variety of theoretical approaches by both established and new scholars. New issues of Left History regularly include feminist, marxist, and postmodernist deliberations on topics such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, culture, the state, labour, the environment, theory, and method.

Subscription Rates (in US dollars outside Canada):

\$16 per year for individuals

\$10 per year for students

\$50 per year for institutions

RECENT ISSUES

Vol 12, No 2 (Fall/Winter 2007): Domestic Service Special Issue

Michele A. Johnson, *"Problematic Bodies": Negotiations and Terminations in Domestic Service in Jamaica, 1920-1970* * Susan E. Brown, *Assessing Men and Maids: The Female Servant Tax and Meanings of Productive Labour in late-eighteenth-century Britain* * Lucy Delap, *"Campaigns of Curiosity": Class Crossing and Role Reversal in British Domestic Service, 1890-1950* * Mary Cathryn Cain, *Race, Republicanism and Domestic Service in the Antebellum United States* * With review essays by Susanna Miranda, Craig Heron, and Victor G. Devinatz.

Vol 12, No 1 (Spring/Summer 2007)

Vinayak Chaturvedi, *A Critical Theory of Subalternity: Class in Indian Historiography* * Eric Strikwerda, *"Married men should, I feel, be treated differently": Work, Relief, and unemployed Men on the Urban Canadian Prairie, 1929-32* * Daniel Fridman and David Sheinin, *Wild Bulls, Discarded Foreigners, and Brash Champions: US Empire and the Cultural Constructions of Argentine Boxers* * An interview with John McWilliam * With review essays by Pheobe S. Kropp, Jeanne Theoharis and Geoff Eley.

Left History
Dept. of History, York University
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, ON, Canada M3J 1P3

lethist@yorku.ca
P P Yorku.ca/lethist
416-736-2100
fax: 416-736-5838

Studies in Political Economy

A SOCIALIST REVIEW



NOT FOR FAT CATS
(They just can't digest it.)

A Canadian scholarly journal providing detailed analysis
of current issues and informed commentary on topics
in Canadian and international political economy

In Our Current Issue

Social Housing; The New Philanthropy; Child Care;
Norway's Financial Reforms; Work-Life Balance; Social Unionism;
Rowell-Sirois Commission; André Gorz

In Upcoming Issues

TILMA; Benefit Theory; French Cooperatives;
The Economic Case for Immigration;
Human Development and Socialist Transformation

A complete list of back issues is available at www.carleton.ca/spe

| Subscriptions to <i>SPE</i> : | 1 year (2 issues) | 2 years (4 issues) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Student, Senior, Unwaged | \$20 | \$35 |
| Regular | \$40 | \$70 |
| Sustaining | \$70 | \$100 |
| Institutions | \$100 | \$175 |

For orders shipped outside Canada, please pay full amount in US funds

Studies in Political Economy: A Socialist Review
Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa Ontario K1S 5B6 Canada
e: spe@carleton.ca • www.carleton.ca/spe