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way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being … Fighting was his element."

The same could be said of Bookchin, although that quotation should be followed by one from William Morris's The Dream of John Ball, which Murray used to open The Ecology of Freedom: "I pondered all these things, and how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name."

Murray Bookchin, RIP.

I am grateful to Paul Glavin, Walter Hergt, Matt Hern, Yvonne Liu, Joe Lowndes, and Mark Lance for their helpful comments on various drafts of this essay.

terms provided by his grandiose narrative of historical development. I no longer do so, and I suppose that every generation has the right to its own delusions.[37]

But the events recounted above are not simply another story of youthful hubris and disenchantment. For my sake, the two and a half years that I spent in Bookchin's nucleus left a lasting and fundamentally positive imprint upon me, despite the conflicts and contradictions. Most importantly, they allowed me to briefly imagine that my life had merged with larger historical tendencies, which was electrifying and stimulated revolutionary appetites in me that have yet to subside. It also fostered an enduring love of learning and a more nuanced sense of my capacity as a political actor. I suspect that many of my peers would make similar claims.

There will never be another Bookchin sect, and it is unlikely that there will ever be another anarchist sect of any sort. The theoretical premises necessary for such a formation — the idea of a universal history, of primary and secondary contradictions, etc. — have not fared well in the culture at large. Likewise, oppositional movements now have too much experience with democracy to tolerate a group like the one that Bookchin created (and we should not forget that he bears some responsibility for this maturation).

In my view, the problems that I have described in this essay are not an indictment of the revolutionary project that Bookchin embraced, but merely the particular way in which he formulated it. Though he did not solve humanity's age-old problems nor elaborate a doctrine comparable to Marxism, this does not prove that the undertaking to which he gave his life is any less valuable or that it is impossible. It simply shows that it is very, very difficult.

Although Murray was a militant of an entirely different caliber, some comments that Engels made at Marx's funeral are applicable to him. He was, Engels said of Marx, "before all else a revolutionist. His real mission in life was to contribute, in one

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This was certainly the case with Bookchin's cadre. All the young people who relocated to Burlington to work with him left the city between 1991 and 1992. A sizable group went to Germany to learn the language and study continental philosophy (Adorno, in particular). Others, including myself, went to New York City to enroll in the New School for Social Research's graduate program in philosophy. Some just disappeared. This dispersal marked the end of the last time that Bookchin earnestly attempted to build up a core group to institute his views.

Murray was a passionate, intelligent, difficult, needy, charismatic, arrogant, funny, and generous man: in other words, he was contradictory, like all of us. I have tried to capture some of the conflicted elements of his being and lifework in this essay. Though my perspective is unflattering at times, I believe that such a critical view has to be part of any serious appraisal of his legacy. Revolutionary movements too often assume a conservative posture toward their own history.

I have mixed feelings as I reflect upon my years with Bookchin. Although I was only in my early twenties at the time, I find it extraordinary to think that I understood myself in the

[37] Irving Howe described similar experiences in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1930s: "Never before, and surely never since, have I lived at so high, so intense a pitch, or been so absorbed in ideas beyond the smallness of self. It began to seem as if the very shape of reality could be molded by our will, as if those really attuned to the inner rhythms of History might bend it to submission. I kept going through the motions of ordinary days: I went to college, had a few odd jobs, dated girls occasionally, lived or at least slept at home. But what mattered — burningly — was the movement, claiming my energies, releasing my fantasies, shielding me day and night from commonplace boredom." Irving Howe, A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Biography (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace and Jonanovich, 1982), 42. There are striking parallels between the first three decades of Bookchin and Howe's respective lives: both were Jews of Eastern European descent, they were born within six months of one another, both were raised in the Bronx, both were members of the SWP, and both joined the Army.

with voluntarism: dismissal of the material conditions of social change.

This was manifest in many ways, but the most striking for me was Bookchin's silence on white supremacy and racism, which he never addressed in any but the most cursory fashion. His inattention to the topic meant that he was oblivious to one of the most important factors in the constitution of the world that he sought to change, and assured that his work would never inspire a large section of the public.

I recall marveling at how strange it was that Bookchin had settled in Vermont, the whitest state in America, and also that the organizations that he built were always overwhelmingly white (between 90 and 100 percent), and his cadre exclusively so. Though I never personally witnessed what I recognized as an obvious act of prejudice, it was clear to me that Bookchin lived in a bubble. What I did not grasp at the time was that Bookchin's voluntarism sanctioned his blindness: if social change is a question of will alone, then there is scarce reason to understand — much less wrestle with politically — the social conditions experienced by the broader population. The subjective preparation of the revolutionary elite is the only task that truly matters.

Dispersal and Resonance

Revolutionary groups aim to transform society and, by doing so, undermine the conditions that make them necessary: after all, they would have no reason to exist once they "cross over to the other shore," to take a phrase from Trotsky's comments on sectarianism.[36] That said, it is more common for such groups to transform their members — not society — in such a way that erodes the conditions of their own existence.

[36]Leon Trotsky, The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974), 109.

When Murray Bookchin died on July 30, 2006, one of the most ambitious and compelling figures of the anti-authoritarian Left passed.

He was an author, educator, and activist, although above all he was a revolutionary who gave his life to a single, colossal task: devising a revolutionary project that could heal the wounds within humanity and the split between it and the natural world. He tried to outline the theoretical principles of this endeavor, build organizations capable of transforming the world around those principles, and forge a cadre with the wisdom necessary to fight for them while enduring the inevitable ups and downs of political life. He had much in common with other sect builders of the socialist Left — such as Max Shachtman, Josef Weber, and Raya Dunayevskaya, for example — who, in their respective times and latitudes, also attempted to salvage the revolutionary enterprise from the disaster that was Russian Communism and the many calamities of the twentieth century.[1]

Was Bookchin successful?

No, he was not. He did not create a new revolutionary doctrine that was adequate to his aims or one, for instance, that possessed the transformative force of Marxism. His work simply lacks the coherence and subtlety necessary to register on that scale. His ideas have also not captured the imagination of sizable numbers of people; they are not part of the debate

[1]Bookchin was a member of Shachtman's Socialist Workers Party and Josef Weber's Movement for a Democracy of Content. For an excellent to discussion of the degree which Weber's views prefigured many of Bookchin's later contributions, see: Marcel van der Linden, "The Prehistory of Post-Scarcity Anarchism: Josef Weber and the Movement for a Democracy of Content (1947 — 1964)," Anarchist Studies 9 (2001), 127 — 145. For a consideration of Max Shachtman, see Maurice Isserman, If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 35 — 76 and Peter Drucker, Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the "American Century" (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994).

on the Left; they have never had an influence among serious academics; and those who wholeheartedly embrace his views today are few indeed. His theoretical legacy sits on the margins of intellectual life.

His attempt to construct the organizational framework for a renewed revolutionary movement met a similar fate: not one of the organizations or periodicals that he initiated or co-initiated survives. The Institute for Social Ecology, which he co-created in 1974 to propagate his views, fell apart in 2005 after years of fiscal crisis and declining enrollment. The Left Green Network, which he co-founded in 1989 to advance his anti-statist, anti-capitalist convictions within the Greens, dissipated in 1991. The Anarchos group, which he led in the 1960s, disbanded more than a generation ago. Likewise, none of the magazines or newsletters that he founded, co-founded, or inspired continue to publish (Anarchos, Comment, Green Perspectives, Left Green Perspectives, Left Green Notes, and Harbinger, among others).

His effort to build a cadre capable of instituting his views achieved the same results. Since the 1960s, if not earlier, Bookchin surrounded himself with small groups of disciples and proteges, whose intellectual and political abilities he tried to cultivate. Each of these groups disintegrated at one moment or another, and all but a handful of their individual members distanced themselves from him politically. He had scant supporters at the time of his death.

Does my harsh assessment — in which I judge Bookchin according to the standards that he set for himself — capture

[2] Although Bookchin never used the word "sect" to describe his efforts and surely would have rejected it, it is applicable nonetheless. The Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary describes a sect as "a separate group adhering to a distinctive doctrine or way of thinking or to a particular leader … a school of philosophy or of philosophic opinion … a group holding similar political, economic, or other views." Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary, s.v. "Sect."

especially when it could have been addressed in so many other ways.

Another tactic was to distinguish himself from allies that he found problematic by inventing new names for his views: at one point, he was no longer a Green but rather a Left Green; for a time; he advanced what he called radical social ecology, not just social ecology; at a certain moment, he abandoned the term "libertarian municipalism" for "communalism"; at another he decided that he had to forsake anarchism for "social anarchism" (and later give up on anarchism altogether).

He initiated these splits no matter what the political cost or how isolated they left him.[34] For example, Murray, Janet, and Gary quit the Left Green Network shortly after leaving our local Green group. They cited the breakup of our local, tendencies toward party formation within the Greens nationally, and Murray's declining health as reasons for their withdrawal.[35] These were all plausible, but they stepped down precisely when the Network was growing from a passive, paper-based caucus into a real organization driven by Bookchin's followers and inspired by his views. Perhaps the most flagrant instance of this occurred when Murray began denouncing anarchism at the height of the anti-globalization movement. This was the first time in decades that anarchism had been a presence in public life, and it should have been a triumphal moment for him, given that he had done more than any other thinker to redeem the anarchist vision in the second half of the twentieth century. And, yet, instead of embracing the occasion, he retreated into bitter, doctrinal carping.

Finally, his conviction that a small group of individuals can transform history implied the classic problem associated

[34] At times, Bookchin seemed relish in his own isolation, as if it were a sign of grace.

[35] Murray Bookchin, Janet Biehl, Gary Sisco, "Burlington Greens Depart from the Network," Left Green Notes, February/March 1991, p. 7.

tremely talented polemicist — in fact, he did some of his best writing in this context — but he was too harsh at times. Beat poet Gary Snyder once complained to the Los Angeles Times that Murray "writes like a Stalinist thug."[33]

Another strategy was to break with supporters whom he found dubious for one reason or another. I experienced this within months of my arrival in Burlington, when he left the local Green group that he had founded, inspired, and led. The issue that caused the divide was extremely minor: during a campaign for local city office, one of our candidates conspired with the candidate from the Democratic Party to go easy on one another during a debate but to make things hard for the candidate from the Progressives (our left-wing rival). This was a typical political machination, but on a negligible scale: no more than a few dozen people paid attention to those debates at the most. However, for Murray, this was an outrageous transgression of our group's moral rectitude. The evil seed of opportunism had been sown among us! I still remember the fierce arguments that erupted in the Bookchin home when our group met to try to resolve the matter: accusations were made, people shouted, and a table was even flipped over. It seemed as though the world was coming to an end. Shortly afterwards, Murray, Janet, and their closest ally, Gary Sisco, separated, while the rest of us went on to form a new group. At the time, I admired Murray's willingness to make even small matters a question of principle, but it now strikes me as absurd that he would rupture a group that he had spent years building over such a trifling problem,

Foreman (Boston: South End Press, 1991); Which Way for the Ecology Movement? (Edinburgh and San Francisco: AK Press, 1993); Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm (San Francisco: A.K. Press, 1995), Re-enchanting Humanity: A Defense of the Human Spirit Against Anti-humanism, Misanthropy, Mysticism, and Primitivism (London: Cassell, 1995).

[33] Bob Sipchen, "Ecology's Family Feud: Murray Bookchin Turns up the Volume on a Noisy Debate," Los Angeles Times, March 27, 1989, p. 1.

the breadth of his achievement as an agent for social change? No, it does not. Though he never became the revolutionary Prometheus that he aspired to become, he did leave a significant — albeit more modest and complicated — patrimony. This is undoubtedly true for those who participated in his attempt to build a revolutionary sect.[2] For example, I spent years in close association with Bookchin and continue to be challenged and inspired by the experience. It was thrilling, disappointing, and — above all — it dramatically expanded my idea of what it means to be a radical.

I first met Murray at the Institute for Social Ecology's "Ecology and Society" program in the summer of 1989, where I attended two of his lecture classes. This prompted me to move to his adopted home of Burlington, Vermont six months later to work with him more closely. At the time, he was energetically building his revolutionary nucleus and encouraged young people from around the country to join him. There were roughly two-dozen individuals engaged in the undertaking when I arrived. Most were in their early twenties and, as a whole, highly idealistic, dedicated, and thoughtful. The majority had turned to Bookchin after having had frustrating experiences with other tendencies on the Left.

I self-consciously apprenticed myself to him and quickly became one of his core disciples. I was his teaching assistant at the Institute for Social Ecology in the summer of 1990, a member of the editorial collective of his Left Green Perspectives for a year, and served as the Left Green Network's "Clearinghouse Coordinator," with Bookchin's companion Janet Biehl, between 1990 and 1991. I also belonged to the Burlington Greens, the activist group that he was leading when I first came to the city, and participated in the classes on history and philosophy that he was giving in his home at the time. In addition, I spent countless hours in private or semi-private discussions with him. He guided me, educated me, and encouraged me, and I tried to support and commiserate with him as well as I could. Our as-

sociation waned after I left Vermont in 1992, although we maintained friendly contact until his death.

I will explore my experience in Bookchin's inner circle in this essay. My goal is to illustrate some of the strengths and weaknesses of his particular approach to revolutionary organizing, and also to show how he could inspire a project that — while it might have seemed cultish and exaggerated to those on the outside — was tremendously compelling for a small group of well-meaning, committed, and intelligent young people who were searching for an alternative.

* * *

Bookchin's project rested upon a sweeping narrative of natural evolution and humanity's role within it. Life, in his view, has the tendency to shape itself into increasingly differentiated and self-directed forms, as evidenced, for example, by the growth of organic life from simple matter. The emergence of humanity is a qualitative transformation in the history of life, given that we alone have the capacity to reason and thus the ability to self-consciously foster the evolutionary tendencies that made our existence possible. In his words, we are potentially "nature rendered self-conscious."[3]

To honor our evolutionary heritage, we must create a society whose metabolism with the natural world is ecologically sound and whose internal relationships are democratic and decentralized. It is solely these social forms that possess the wholeness and freedom that life requires.

According to Bookchin, we approximated this in our early history while living in what he called "organic societies." Then, humans had relatively egalitarian cultural practices and a sympathetic, if uninformed, relationship to nature. "Let us frankly

[3]Murray Bookchin, The Philosophy of Social Ecology, 1st edition, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1990), 45.

(DIANAT) by 'C'"). Clark now casts Bookchin as a "divisive, debilitating force" and "an obstacle."[30]

Although I never saw Bookchin demand obsequiousness, he encouraged it indirectly. For instance, he constantly spoke about his ill health and implied that his death was imminent. He did this when I first met him in 1989, nearly two decades before he actually died, and I have heard accounts of similar behavior twenty years before that. These remarks created a tragic aura around him, and the feeling that we should treasure every moment with him.

The corollary of his ethical conception of politics was an obsession with defending his views against threats. Indeed, Bookchin probably spent more time battling competing thinkers and tendencies on the Left and in the environmental movement than actually elaborating his own ideas.

For example, he authored what seemed to be an endless number of polemics.[31] His earliest significant polemic was "Listen, Marxist!", which he published around the time that he released several foundational essays ("Ecology and Revolutionary Thought" and "Post-Scarcity Anarchism," specifically). There were also his intra-environmental movement polemics against "deep ecologists" and factions within the Greens (e.g., Defending the Earth: A Dialogue Between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman and Which Way for the Ecology Movement?); his major anarchist movement polemic, Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm; and his sweeping, catch-all polemic, Re-enchanting Humanity: A Defense of the Human Spirit Against Anti-humanism, Misanthropy, Mysticism, and Primitivism.[32] Bookchin was an ex-

[30]John Clark, "Municipal Dreams" in Andrew Light, Social Ecology After Bookchin (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998), p. 183.

[31]These polemics must be at least partially understood as a substitute for political battles that Murray called for but was unable to fight due to his marginality.

[32]Defending the Earth: A Dialogue Between Murray Bookchin and Dave

ability to elicit insights from within our own circles. Slavishness was quite common. For example, the local Green group active at the time of my arrival in Burlington revolved almost entirely around Murray, and he assumed a near oracle-like posture during the classes that he gave on history and philosophy. In those classes, he simply read from manuscripts that he was preparing, interrupting himself only for occasional digressions (typically to polemicize against another thinker). We sat around him in the room, furiously taking notes. We submitted no papers and took no exams: our job was solely to absorb his insights.

This slavishness had its counterpart in equally corrosive outbursts thrown by disillusioned onetime followers or activists who resented Murray's status. As for the latter, hecklers tried to disrupt Murray's classes every summer at the Institute for Social Ecology and were a concern whenever he spoke publicly. With respect to the former, John Clark was the most extreme example. For a time, Clark revered Bookchin as the "foremost contemporary anarchist theorist,"[27] celebrated his "magnificent contribution,"[28] and even edited an entire volume in his honor.[29] However, only some years after the publication of his Bookchin festschrift, Clark began publishing a steady stream of articles attacking him, apparently because Clark felt that Murray had snubbed him. He published numerous, often pathetic anti-Bookchin diatribes (such as "Confession to Comrade Murray Bookchin, Chairman and General Secretary of the Social Ecologist Party and Founder of Dialectical Naturalism

"advanced" sectors of the population. This sanctioned the use of very esoteric discourse and, to a degree, made it necessary as a bonding element in our political community.

[27]John Clark, "Murray Bookchin," Encyclopedia of the American Left, ed. Paul Buhle et al. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 102.

[28]John Clark, Renewing the Earth: The Promise of Social Ecology, A Celebration of the Work of Murray Bookchin (London: Green Print, 1990), 3.

[29]I refer to the book cited in the previous note.

acknowledge," Bookchin wrote, "that organic societies spontaneously evolved values that we rarely can improve."[4]

However, instead of building upon this early achievement, we made a tragic departure from our evolutionary itinerary. "[I]n the intermediate zone between first [non-human] nature and second [human]…social evolution began to assume a highly aberrant form. The effort of organic societies like bands and tribes to elaborate nonhierarchical, egalitarian social forms was arrested…social evolution was divested from the realization and fulfillment of a cooperative society into a direction that yielded hierarchical, class-oriented, and Statist institutions."[5] In lieu of becoming "nature rendered self-conscious" and raising "evolution to a level of self reflexivity that has always been latent in the very emergence of the natural world,"[6] humans created an irrational society that undermines its own cultural accomplishments, imposes needless miseries on vast swaths of the population, and threatens the very survival of the ecosystem. Relationships — within society and between society and nature — that should have been complementary became and remain antagonistic. The world is in crisis[7] as a result, which is "very much a crisis in the emergence of society out of biology, [and] the contradictions (the rise of hierarchy, domi-

[4]Murray Bookchin, The Ecology of Freedom: the Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy (Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books, 1982), 319.

[5]Murray Bookchin, The Philosophy of Social Ecology, 178. The same passage also exists in Murray Bookchin, "Ecologizing the dialectic," in John Clark, Renewing the Earth: The Promise of Social Ecology, A Celebration of the Work of Murray Bookchin (London: Green Print, 1990), 211.

[6]Murray Bookchin, The Philosophy of Social Ecology, 1st edition, 182 — 183.

[7]Bookchin used the word "crisis" throughout his writings, including in the title of many of his essays and also a book (The Modern Crisis). Commenting on the medical roots of the term's usage in social theory, Seyla Benhabib notes: "'crisis' designates a stage in the development of a disease that is a turning point and during which the decisive diagnosis concerning the healing or worsening of the patient is reached". Seyla Benhabib, Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 20.

nation, patriarchy, classes, and the State) that unfolded, with this development."[8]

Indeed, we will remain basically inhuman until we overcome this impasse. "In a very real sense, then, we are still unfinished as human beings," Bookchin asserted, "because we have not as yet fulfilled our potentiality for cooperation, understanding, and rational behavior."[9] "Human beings are too intelligent not to live in a rational society, not to live with institutions formed by reason…In so far as they do not, human beings remain dangerously wayward and unformed creatures."[10]

The task, then, for those faithful to life's evolutionary mission is to facilitate a massive change in human affairs. "After some ten millennia of a very ambiguous social evolution, we must reenter natural evolution," to accomplish "no less a humanization of nature than a naturalization of humanity"[11] in which "an emancipated humanity will become the voice, indeed the expression, of a natural evolution rendered self-conscious, caring, and sympathetic to the pain, suffering, and incoherent aspects of an evolution left to its own, often wayward, unfolding. Nature, due to human rational intervention, will thence acquire the intentionality, power of developing more complex life-forms, and capacity to differentiate itself."[12] Humanity will serve and also complete its own heritage by creating an environmentally sound society, by building directly democratic institutions that enable all to participate in determining the direction of social life, and by replacing capitalism

[8]Bookchin, The Philosophy of Social Ecology, 1st edition, 163 — 164.

[9]Bookchin, Re-enchanting Humanity: A Defense of the Human Spirit Against Anti-humanism, Misanthropy, Mysticism, and Primitivism (London: Cassell, 1995), 235.

[10]Bookchin, The Philosophy of Social Ecology, 2nd edition, (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1996), 160.

[11]Bookchin, The Ecology of Freedom, 315.

[12]Murray Bookchin, Remaking Society (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989), 202 — 203.

development that, if applied to the world, would eliminate hierarchy and reconcile humanity with nature. Second, we held that capitalism would destroy the ecosystem if we did not apply his principles. In other words, we felt that we not only should embrace his teachings in order to build a good society but also that we had to do so if we wanted to prevent an ecological apocalypse. Accordingly, Bookchin's ideas played a quasi-religious role for us, and he became something of a prophet.

As one might expect, his centrality tended to close us off from insights that other traditions and thinkers had to offer: since Bookchin advanced the truth, other theorists advanced deceptions by definition. There was a tension between this closure and Bookchin's insistence that we educate ourselves. Indeed, this strain grew increasingly acute as we worked our way through the many important texts that he recommended to us and became eager to confront contemporary authors. I remember that he often dissuaded us from exploring writers who — he seemed to fear — might threaten his hold upon us. He regularly did so by ridiculing or otherwise denigrating them, personally (I recall that this was especially true in his comments about Foucault and Adorno). Other times, he would simply ask in exasperation, "What could you possibly find in their work?"

This hermeticism also encouraged us to develop a political vocabulary and style so unique that it was difficult to communicate with and learn from other activists. For example, even at the height of Bookchin's influence, few would have understood what we were saying if we articulated ourselves in his catch phrases alone (consider: "an 'intelligentsia' should study 'organic societies' if it wants to 'render nature self-conscious'").[26]

Likewise, Bookchin's elevated stature nurtured a highly undemocratic political culture among us that compromised our

[26]The tendency toward hermeticism had a political logic. Specifically, we assumed that it was not possible to build a mass movement at the present juncture, given the generalized historical decline that we presumed to see around us, and thus we felt compelled to address ourselves to more

rial accumulation, and strongly emphasized social status in the form of noble titles rather than the ownership of fungible property."[24] To invert one of Marx's more incisive phrases, it is not being that determines consciousness, but consciousness that determines being.

Bookchin's conception of revolutionary activism was intoxicating. If we followed his lead, we believed that we would become the rightful heirs of the revolutionary tradition in particular and the western tradition in general and able to rectify the wrong committed when humanity took off down its "aberrant" path so many millennia ago. History, we thought, was at a crossroads and we, intrepid, high-minded militants, would soon determine its direction. The days were fast approaching in which we would settle "the fate of history" after fighting "mimetic combat on the plans of destiny," to cite Daniel Bell's apposite discussion of sectarianism in Marxian Socialism in the United States.[25]

Dilemmas

Of course, there were significant problems in Bookchin's attempt to build a cadre. These left a strong impression upon me and illustrated some of the limitations of his ideal of revolutionism. I will outline the most salient difficulties below. They were: closure, defensiveness, and a disregard for the material conditions of social change.

But, to contextualize, Bookchin's exalted position within our milieu was not a result of his vanity or narcissism but rather two basic assumptions that he and all his followers shared. First, we believed that he had discovered principles of social

[24] Murray Bookchin, The Third Revolution: Popular Movements in the Revolutionary Era, Vol. 1 (London: Cassell, 1998), ix.

[25] Daniel Bell, Marxian Socialism in the United States (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 10, n. 13.

with a cooperative economy structured around moral — not market — imperatives.

Dictates

It was this macro-historical perspective that we absorbed from Bookchin's works and accepted as the framework for our activities when we relocated to Burlington to collaborate with him. His outlook was exhilarating, because it placed our activism on an epochal plane, but it also implied significant responsibilities, too, if we were to become political actors capable of accomplishing the world-historical transformation that he envisioned. I will outline three of the cardinal tenets of membership in Bookchin's core circle: education, the primacy of morality, and boldness.

First of all, we had to educate ourselves.[13] Murray urged us to develop a basic familiarity with the history of revolutionary movements and the critical tradition in ideas. We were expected to study his voluminous writings, major thinkers such as Marx and Hegel, and lesser-known authors that he deemed important (Hans Jonas, Lewis Mumford, and others). Comprehending his work and the associated theorists required greater intellectual exertion than had ever been demanded of me before — his vocabulary alone was a challenge — but my peers and I soldiered through because we believed that something

[13] Of course, Bookchin did not intend for us to get an education in the conventional sense of the term. In fact, I enrolled in Goddard College's "off-campus" program in order to work with him, which meant, in essence, forsaking a college education. Goddard's program did not require its students to attend classes, to follow a specific curriculum, or, it seemed, to do anything at all. I welcomed this, because it enabled me to live in Burlington and devote myself to movement activities exclusively. I do not regret the choice. I suspect that I learned more from Bookchin than I ever would have in a college or university. And how could traditional academic life compete against active participation in a milieu dedicated to transforming the world?

very important was at stake. He did his best to encourage us and typically gave lengthy responses to the queries about our readings that we brought him during breaks in meetings or in private exchanges. In fact, it was difficult for him to resist launching into extended disquisitions on the texts at hand, so much so that it became sort of a game among us to see who could ask the question that would spark the longest monologue.

Murray counseled us not only to explore key revolutionary thinkers and events, but also to acquaint ourselves with major moments in the western tradition, from the ancient Greeks to the present. He believed that we could and should assimilate the best aspects of this legacy into our movement. The extraordinary breadth of historical and theoretical references in his work seemed to show that this was possible, as did his equally wide-ranging teaching. Indeed, shortly before I arrived, he had begun giving two, bi-weekly lecture classes in his living room: one, "The Politics of Cosmology," examined the history of philosophy from the Pre-Socratics to contemporary scholars; the other, "The Third Revolution," considered the fate of revolutionary movements from the Middle Ages to the Spanish Civil War (and was the basis for his four-volume book by the same name). No idea was too abstract or event too remote to be incorporated into our transformative project.

Bookchin urged us to make study a political priority as well. He often reminisced about the dedication to education among revolutionary workers before World War II. I remember an anecdote that he once shared with me about a class on Marx's Capital that he attended while a member of a Communist youth group: the students and teacher played a game in which the youngsters cited a random passage from Marx's classic tome, and the instructor's challenge was to recall its precise location in the text. He succeeded invariably, to the glee and amazement of the youth. This vignette and others like it helped us imagine what a serious culture of study beyond the academy might look

impotently paced his office while the world around him turned upside down, strangely twisting his hand behind his back as he circled the room. Lenin, who was full of determination (of course) and unburdened by strange physical ticks (of course), "grabbled the hands of time," said Murray, "and pushed history forward" when he took power.

Bookchin often regaled us with stories like these, which seemed to transport us from Burlington, Vermont — an insipid college town if there ever was one — directly into the revolutionary battlefields of yore. They also inspired us to believe that we too could become what he sometimes called an "educational vanguard," which would "keep the terrible pathologies of our day under control, at the very least, and abolish them at the very most."[23]

This voluntarism was consistent with his broader view of historical development. For Bookchin, it is our ideas and values — not society's economic base — that determine the course of events (in the "final instance"). He wove this principle into all of his historical writings, whether he was examining revolutionary movements or broader topics in the history of civilization. For example, consider the following discussion of the rise of capitalism in The Third Revolution: "If cultural factors were merely reflexes of economic ones, capitalism would have emerged at almost any time in the past, as far back as antiquity. Capitalists in sizable numbers lived in ancient Greece and Rome as well as many parts of medieval Europe, and they were no less acquisitive or enterprising in their pursuit of wealth than our own bourgeoisie. But what prevented them from taking a commanding position in social life — assuming that they tried to do so — was precisely a host of cultural factors that favored the ownership of land over capital, denigrated mate-

[23] Murray Bookchin, "Reflections: An Overview of the Roots of Social Ecology," Harbinger: A Journal of Social Ecology, Vol. 3, No. 1, (Fall 2002) Accessed on June 14, 2007. (www.social-ecology.org)

spurned the innocuous radicalism of academic dissidents, who "find their public arena in the classroom and who are operating according to a syllabus."[18] He admired figures like Denis Diderot, and the "men and women who created the intellectual ferment that gave rise to the pamphlets and the literature that finally did so much to nourish the great French Revolution of 1789 to 1795"[19]; the oppositional thinkers in pre-revolutionary Russia who later became Stalin's victims; or John Dewey and Charles Beard in the United States. However, the "avatar" of this social type for Bookchin was Leon Trotsky, "a totally mobilized personality who dared to challenge an entire empire until a pickax was buried in his skull" by one of Stalin's assassins.[20] In fact, Murray's own life seemed to embody such dedicated, militant engagement: all of his written work and oratory were directed to social movements, not the university.[21] "Today," he declared at an assembly of the Youth Greens, "we are faced with the task of developing an intelligentsia, not a new body of intellectuals."[22]

Bookchin lauded the ability of a revolutionary vanguard to take the initiative and transform social affairs, particularly toward the end of his life, when Lenin became a favorite example of his and a constant source of discussion. I have a vivid memory of the time that he recounted the 1917 Bolshevik seizure of power for me while sitting on a plastic chair in his living room one winter afternoon. He described Russian Prime Minister Alexander Kerensky as a dissolute, indecisive man who

15, 1985. Accessed on June 14, 2007. (www.nybooks.com)

[18] Murray Bookchin, "Intelligentsia and the New Intellectuals," Alternative Forum, Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall, 1991. Accessed on June 14, 2007. (dwardmac.pitzer.edu)

[19] Ibid.

[20] Murray Bookchin, "On The Last Intellectuals," Telos, 73 (Fall 1987): 184.

[21] He never attended college, except to take some classes in radio technology after World War II, and held no long-term academic posts. His "position" at the Institute for Social Ecology was purely nominal.

[22] Murray Bookchin, "Intelligentsia and the New Intellectuals."

like and to believe that we, too, could create one. Indeed, under his influence, I and others studied on our own, attended his lecture classes, and formed an extensive network of study groups. For a time, it was possible to participate in weekly study groups on Hegel, Marx, the French Revolution, cities, as well as other weighty topics and theorists; there were so many study groups, and they were of such high quality, that people used to say that we had started an underground university.

Of course, the critical insights that we developed through study would wither if locked in the confines of a library or a discussion circle. As Marx said, the point was to change the world, not just interpret it.

For Bookchin, politics was fundamentally an ethical activity. Although it is popularly understood as a ritualistic contest for power among elites, and classical socialists define it as an epiphenomenal expression of underlying class contradictions, Bookchin conceived of politics as the framework through which humans mediate their relationships with one another and, as such, it is essentially ethical and linked to the state only incidentally. These views reflected his ecological perspective (which is inherently relational), but also the influence of pre-modern thinkers such as Aristotle as well as the New Left's moralism.[14]

Framing our activity in highly ethical terms fostered an unusually strong commitment to honesty, accountability, and the principled discussion of ideas among us. It also encouraged a deep eagerness to sacrifice for the cause, which is one of the reasons why our small group was so productive. Most of our work took place through the Greens, which Murray then regarded as the movement most likely to embrace his social and ecological vision. We were all active in the Burlington Greens, through which we attempted to bring a radically democratic

[14] For example, consider Aristotle's statement: "The study of ethics may not improperly be termed a study of politics." (Rhetoric, Book I, c. II, #7).

and environmental perspective to local politics. As members of this group, we published newsletters, sponsored public forums, and fielded candidates for local, municipal office.[15] We were also active in the Left Green Network, which was a North American organization dedicated to promoting an anti-statist, anti-capitalist perspective in the environmental movement and an ecological perspective in the broader revolutionary Left. On behalf of this organization, we held regional and national conferences, released position papers, and published a magazine (Left Green Notes). Finally, we were involved in building an international Left Green tendency. This took place through Murray's publication (Left Green Perspectives) and also by cultivating comradely relationships with individual Left Green militants around the world (we were particularly close to Jutta Ditfurth, a leader of the leftwing — i.e., "fundi" — faction of the German Greens).

This ethical perspective instilled great confidence in us and made our denunciation of capitalism and the state particularly resolute. Unlike Marxists, we did not to regard capitalism as a necessary step in the long march toward human freedom, but rather as a travesty to be condemned for reducing everything in its path to the commodity nexus. Likewise, our position on the state was categorical: it was not an instrument that could be harnessed to liberatory ends, but rather an institution that exists only to the extent that genuine democracy does not.

Bookchin's moral views also gave us a way to respond to the Left's historic inability to create a just, egalitarian society. Though one can cast the revolutionary tradition as a legacy of unmitigated failure, this was not — we believed — a consequence of an inherent deficiency in the project but rather a lack of moral probity on the part of its leading protagonists. Communists did not have enough faith in human creativity to prevent their movement from becoming a brutal bureaucratic machine; the classical anarchists lacked the courage to dispense with their naive dedication to popular spontaneity; and New Left militants had been too weak to resist the many enticements that they encountered on their "long march through the institutions." The revolutionary cause lives on — we felt — for the audacious few willing to embrace it in its fullness.

The third principle of militancy that Murray attempted to impart to us was the need for boldness. He convinced us that small groups of people can change the world if they are willing to take risks and swim against the tide of history. His own biography was full of examples of how fruitful this can be. He innovated theoretically, achieved some renown as an author, and managed to support himself through his intellectual endeavors, all because he had had the temerity to buck convention. I recall a small, framed poster that hung on the wall near his bed. There were four or five paragraphs of text under large black letters demanding "Arms for Hungary!" He had penned these words in 1956 in support of the rebels who had risen up against Communist rule in their country.[16] I regarded this flyer as a reminder — and his attempt to remind himself — of the virtues of a life lived in defiance of prevailing orthodoxies (leftwing or otherwise).

Murray urged us to make ourselves into revolutionary intellectuals or, to use his preferred word, the "intelligentsia." He disdained salaried, academic thinkers as well as party bureaucrats. He despised the way that political parties cultivate servility and dogmatism in their ranks (for a time, he saw the Communist Party as one of the worst offenders, which he believed had created a "police mentality" among its members.[17] He also

[15] Bookchin made a sharp distinction between the city and the state, which was the premise of his argument that electoral campaigns at the municipal level can be a legitimate form of community activism (not statecraft).

[16] This leaflet was surely part of the Movement for a Democracy of Content's campaign on the half of the Hungarian rebels. Bookchin was an active participant in the effort. See, Marcel van der Linden, ibid.

[17] Murray Bookchin, Letter to the Editor, New York Review of Books, August