



Capitalism and the ecological crisis

Ecosocialists (and other socialists) recognize that capitalism is a political/economic system that, like earlier systems, affects all aspects of life in the places that are subject to it. In its modern form, it has four main features:

1. All economic decisions are made by an elite with no public accountability, based on **maximizing profit**.

Competition for profit drives industries relentlessly to produce more and more goods and services whether they are needed or not, to cheapen production costs by driving down workers' living standards and offloading the environmental costs onto society, to shorten the usable lifespan of products by designing in obsolescence and creating disposable commodities, and to maximally expand the luxury consumption market. The effects on the environment are clear: wasteful and ever-increasing resource consumption, pollution, and massive production of the greenhouse gases that are the byproduct of nearly every component of the economy.

2. **The state** functions to shore up and protect the economic elite; elections are designed to keep power in the hands of the capitalist parties.

Without the state – its laws, enforcers, prisons, semblance of democracy – the corporations could not maintain the destructive system referred to above. Plus, importantly, if the main (if unstated) function of our “leaders” is to uphold this system, then we cannot expect them to do anything about it, other than too-little, too-late “reforms.” In the USA and Canada, the political system is dominated by two or three (mostly indistinguishable) parties, and the environmental crisis has continued to worsen, whichever party is in power. As ecosocialists, we believe in working outside the framework of these capitalist parties.

3. **Education**, mainstream **news**, and **advertising** encourage wasteful consumption, patriotism, and faith in the free market.

People are taught, directly or indirectly, that our economic/political system is fundamentally democratic and that participation in the political system consists of voting and possibly writing to elected representatives or signing petitions. They are taught that people's place in society is determined mainly by their ability and their effort rather than the circumstances they live in; that racism and patriarchy are either long gone or a matter of individual attitude rather than bedrocks of the system itself; that the state acts on behalf of all citizens rather than the ruling class; and that devotion and allegiance to the state is among the highest virtues. They are taught that there is no viable alternative to the current system, that this is in effect the “end of history.” Of course, there are alternative sources of information and knowledge, and part of our task is to figure out how to expand on these sources and use them to cut through the myths that stand in the way of system change.

4. **Imperialism** maintains the dominance of the elites of the Global North (aka “developed” nations), control over resources, access to cheap labor, and growing markets for consumer goods. Most explicitly imperialism involves the use or threat of military force, but it goes far beyond this, including the domination of international institutions such as the UN and the World Bank, relations of economic dependency based on foreign “aid” and the work of NGOs, and “free-trade” agreements. In addition to the ruthless exploitation of workers in the South, the results are massive environmental degradation in areas where mining, factory farming, and chemical factories operate with few restrictions. Within the Global North, entrenched patriarchy and racism help maintain the status quo, making it difficult for working people to see their common enemy in the capitalist class. Resources are extracted from indigenous lands with no regard for the peoples who have lived there for thousands of years, and toxic waste ends up in city neighborhoods populated by people of color or on indigenous land. Resistance to the exploitation is growing in both Global South and North, As in the Global South, resistance to this exploitation is growing in the North, and ecosocialists must stand in solidarity with these struggles and find ways to become more involved in these struggles.