

# **Roadmap for the Social Ecology and Communalism (SEC) Network -**

April 2022

## **State of play**

The collapse of biodiversity and the poisoning of nature that have been observed for the past few decades are direct responses to the decline in the variety of human relations and in everything having a communal element.

It is the ruthless toll of capitalism, the great organiser for alienated labour, food industrialisation and globalised commodification, as well as political decay.

This leads to a never-ending crisis economy with its share of multi-faceted misery, which is increasingly regarded as a cause of indignation and rocketed rioting across the world. This legitimate anger risks turning into hatred of others and a continuation of the illusory belief in parties advocating a nation-state that suppresses popular sovereignty.

Far from fighting capitalism, the party system has only one objective: competing for state power. Once in charge, parties do little more than ratify the destructive logic of capitalism and deprive us of our collective power.

Representative democracy, the reassuring face of that system, has been treated as an impassable democratic horizon. It is, however, at the end of its rope as is shown by the recurring refusal to vote. Fortunately, political parties are no longer inspiring people's dreams. As the vote-catching left has definitively lost its soul, two major trends cross the political/media landscape: a neo-liberal technocracy increasingly moving towards authoritarianism and widespread surveillance. On the other hand, there is a reactionary, identity-based and racist bloc, whose views have never been so trivialised by the mass media.

Facing this disastrous scenario, we find a lack of prospects, a political vacuum due to the exhausted illusions which have been long held by a left that is obviously captivated by neo-liberal practices and simply aims to humanise them...

Simultaneously, however, there is a strong concern for emancipation and choices that can make life worth living again. Networks are springing up everywhere, both in rural and urban areas, reforging links. Struggles combining ecology and social issues (against useless projects; against the loss of public services in rural areas; against educational, energy, health and transport policies; against patriarchy, etc.) are also developing. Many such struggles advocate the end of capitalism. But what will happen to the broader masses of people when that end comes if nothing has been proposed to prepare the future?

## **Social ecology as a step aside**

Social Ecology originated from this state of play, as ecological challenges are rooted in social injustices and the logics of domination feeding them. It is the framework that enables us to set out our fields of action and our own prospective priorities. While progressively moving away from

capitalist rationales, it proposes a horizon of social decentralisation and of reintegrated human communities anchoring their activities locally in a dynamic balance with their natural environment, and connecting with each other via confederations.

### **Communalism as a political tool**

This analysis gives rise to the need for us to organise so as to encourage as much involvement as possible at the communal level in the discussions and decisions concerning them.

This political organisation is what we call “communalism“, as it is based on a confederation of free communes.

The communalist project, as theorised by Murray Bookchin, is – quite reasonably – based on the long and rich history of the revolutionary movements for broad-based emancipation. This libertarian approach advocates decentralisation, the abolition of all forms of domination and exploitation, and engages with nature from a local perspective, while avoiding any retreat into a chauvinistic localism or parochialism.

Political and social issues are thus an integral part of ecology. The communalist choice clearly involves an overcoming of party practices and representative democracy by direct democracy, in tension with state institutions. It stands firm on the margins, through practice, in restricted territories, in communes and wherever human groups seek to regain control of their lives (housing, peasant agriculture, health, energy and essential goods production, arts, etc.). No alternative project can really succeed without the development of a movement bringing together both the struggles against any kind of domination and for dignity, and the tangible alternatives that are consciously sought outside capitalism. It is therefore necessary to multiply exchanges between such spaces, to create solidarity bonds within and between communes, regions and internationally.

Having this communalist culture and practice, the many lived experiences underway – including in social pedagogy, alternative teaching, popular education, shared housing and places, self-managed production, collective farms, anti-patriarchal struggles, feminist struggles, active solidarity with migrants or the Zones to Defend (ZADs in France) – can help enrich this political dynamic, which would start at the local level, to federate on a territory (e.g., a municipality, a city neighbourhood, a valley or a watershed in the mountains).

### **The call:**

Building Social Ecology and Communalism cannot be enacted, nor rely on any kind of power grab. We can no longer wait for the great day. We must now deliver a constructive process by linking up the many practical collective initiatives. We invite you to contribute to such a quiet link-building, to this growing mycelium. Regardless of whether you are involved in unions, associations, informal groups, associations for the maintenance of peasant agriculture (AMAPs in

France), integral cooperatives or simply as an individual in the struggle against market domination.

Based on these social movements, we are no longer seeking to delegate our political power but to seize it directly within our popular and decision-making assemblies. This whole process will enable us to build our own communal self-institutions in tension with the state. Together, by turning those assemblies into spaces where communality can be rebuilt and learnt, we'll be able to determine our real needs. Firstly, this is about articulating a counterforce ready to compel current municipal powers to take the communalist assemblies' proposals forward. We should indeed aim at a direct and effective democracy. This is also about a shared establishment of politics as a strong link in our diversities, and embedded in nature. But it is also a conscious and determined step towards a final exit from capitalism and for a social ecology. It is up to all of us to create this promising emancipatory movement first locally, then regionally and beyond.

*This roadmap is only a first step towards the collective development of a strategy that will be further developed as we move forward. The road is made by walking; let us walk by questioning ourselves; let us change by changing ourselves!*