

James O'Connor: The Second Contradiction of Capitalism

A few months ago I sent out a copy of Garrett Hardin's highly influential 1968 article from Science magazine, The Tragedy of the Commons (attached below), and was pleasantly surprised to find not only that it was widely known and respected by many of my recipients, but since my acquaintance with it half a century ago had become required reading in Environmental Science classes throughout the world.

Of course, when I first read it, there were fewer than a handful of college courses in such things as Environmental Science or Ecology. For those of us who got into environmental politics by the seat of our pants (as a matter of straightforward self defense), and learned ecology as part of our on-the-job training, it's both gratifying and kind of bittersweet to see the struggle taken on by those who are actually trained for the job of saving the environment (often in the same schools and classes as their counterparts in business and industry who are employed to less salutary purpose).

Today I'm sending out an article I had never seen until today, but one which I think of as in the same league as Hardin's and about which I suspect many of you will respond to me saying this too is a respected classic in the field.

I hope so, because it's an article that has been widely influential in environmental actions over the past quarter century (and widely attacked by mainstream apologists for business as usual). But I'm sure that many of you, like me, though we've encountered its ideas in theory and action, will not have read it before.

James O'Connor's "The Second Contradiction of Capitalism" was the introductory article to the first issue of Capitalism Nature Socialism: A Journal of Socialist Ecology (which he co-founded in 1988 and co-edited until 2003, and which is still running online - www.csnjournal.org). For many years the Director of the Center for Political Ecology at UC Santa Cruz, he was generally recognized as having, with this article, laid the groundwork for contemporary ecosocialism, a philosophy that is probably best known as the theoretical underpinning of a great variety of Green Parties throughout the world as well as of the Social Democracy ideas informing Green New Deal proposals in the US.

http://www.columbia.edu/~lnp3/second_contradiction.htm