What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know About Capitalism

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Capitalism and Growth

• The process of capital accumulation generates growth.
• Businesses must either grow or die.
• Looking at past data:
  – If the GDP growth rate is not substantially greater than the increase in population, people lose jobs.
Geographical Expansion

• Looking for new markets.
• Looking for new resources.
• Looking for cheap labor.
• Land grabbing.

Cultural Support Behind Wealth Accumulation

• People are not inherently selfish but are encouraged to become so in response to the pressures and characteristics of the system.
• Advertising and marketing.
• Business-politics-law-media connections.
• Idea that what is good for the capitalists is good for the society.
### Can Capitalism be Ecologically Reformed?

- Energy efficiency
- Nuclear power
- Large scale engineering (mega-engineering)
- Cap-and-trade marketing schemes.

### What Can Be Done?

- Standards
- Taxes
- Contraction and convergence type of arrangements.
  - If we stay on the growth path, continue consuming “green”, is there way out?
Another Economic System?

• To heal the “metabolic drift” between the economy and the environment means new ways of living, manufacturing, growing food, transportations, etc.
• A new social metabolism rooted in egalitarianism, community and a sustainable relation to earth.
• Examples:
  – La Via Campesina
  – Brazil’s MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra)
  – Climate Justice movements
  – Permacultures and community farming
  – Cradle-to-cradle ecological design principles.