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Book review

Green Capitalism

- Reviews section -

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This book lives up to the description on the tin, but goes rather further. Daniel Tanuro examines why green capitalism is an oxymoron, noting that nature and capital speak different languages. Capitalism requires ever increasing economic growth, because firms need to compete against each other to survive, seeking new profit to reinvest in new capital, so they are not eliminated by rivals. Nature is reduced to monocultures by ever increasing growth and ever increasing growth tends to disrupt ecological cycles. We live in a market based world, so attempts to deal with the climate crisis have used market mechanism such as carbon trading. Tanuro shows that these have failed to halt emissions. and plans for a so called 'green economy' aim to commodify nature, yet such commodification values short term exchange value, not long term sustainability.

Derek Wall, International coordinator of the Green Party of England, reviews *Green Capitalism: why can't work* by Daniel Tanuro. Derek is author of *The Sustainable Economics of Elinor Ostrom*.

The book focusses on climate change, surveying a number of key debates to argue that climate change is already damaging the environment and that social change is needed to combat it. Much of the book recounts debates that most of us on the ecosocialist left will already be familiar with but does so in a clear, concise and persuasive manner. It is a resource for activists of very great utility.

Its great strength is to be found in the last chapter which discusses the politics of ecosocialism. It argues that 'productivism' is unsustainable, which means capitalism must be rejected but also that forms of socialism that promote ever increasing material growth are also impossible. It notes the ecological strains of thought in Marx's work but is critical of Marx's approach to energy accounting.

Clearly, as Tanuro argues, Stalinist approaches devastated Russia's natural environment, but he also notes that most on the left in the 20th century were also productivists and anti-ecological. A greener socialism will require some work, but a green politics that is Malthusian or consumer orientated is profoundly problematic. Malthusians blame human beings in general and call for brutal reductions in consumption and population. Other greens may simply call for individual lifestyle change which is an inadequate response.

Tanuro has produced a searching examination of what it means to produce a politics that is adequate to the task we face; halting or at least slowing accelerating climate change, so we can make a cooperative and sustainable human future. He shows that Marxism resources this task but is honest about the limits of many forms of socialist in regard to ecology.

I think any reader whether green, left or green left will have disagreements with particular aspects of the book but will find it valuable and thought provoking. Strategic thought about how we challenge the threats to our world is essential, this book moves beyond broad slogans and is a useful inspiration to focused action.