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Chapter one

Thematic Introduction

Decommodification, Democracy, and the Battle for the Commons

By Dennis Soron & Gordon Laxer

In the early 1990s, coin-operated "oxygen booths" began to appear in smog choked cities such as Tokyo, Mexico City, and Beijing, offering the overtaxed lungs of urbanites a brief respite from car exhaust, dust, and other pollutants. The fledgling field of consumer breath delivery was born. As inadequate as these booths may have been as a response to contaminated air, they promised to be at least as effective as Beijing's earlier experiment in adding rose-scented air freshener to water sprayed onto city streets.

Following the debut of the O2 Spa Bar in Toronto in 1996, upscale "oxygen bars" appealing to a health-conscious, yuppie clientele opened in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Reno, Bombay, and other cities. Customers pay one or two dollars per minute to "gas up" on pure oxygen, often infused with patented aroma blends like "Cloud Lime," "Eclipse," and "Revitalize." As oxygen treatments grew more popular in health resorts and spas, tie-in products were spawned: oxygen pills; oxygenated face creams and fruit drinks; oxygenating liquid supplements such as "Oxy-Up"; even portable oxygen canisters, designed like bottled spring water for on-the-go personal use. One on-line entrepreneur gushes about the "way-cool" business opportunities offered by oxygen-related products and services, promising investors up to 500 per cent profit margins (A Way-Cool Profit Center).

Passed over in this chirpy sales pitch is whether these products benefit people worried about deteriorating air quality. What is striking is the cheerful lack of concern for the conditions that generate demand for commodified oxygen. Only the narrowest concern for private gain could construe the relentless poisoning of the earth's atmosphere as a "way-cool" opportunity. Others might conclude that there is something seriously wrong when people feel compelled to pay for oxygen, which people have always had free access to by simply breathing the atmosphere, which is a common gift for all.

Though marginal, the "oxygen industry" illustrates the stark incompatibility between maximizing opportunities for private profit and ensuring human and ecological well-being. It draws attention to the irrationality of an economic system in which the evisceration of the social and environmental commons is seen as a by-product of progress or an "opportunity" for more profitable commodities, rather than an urgent collective problem. Today, commodities proliferate while meaningful democratic options shrink. Frivolous consumer choices multiply, but a sense of political impotence sets in about our capacity to confront effectively

mounting social and environmental problems: global South poverty, global warming, deteriorating essential public services.

THE BATTLE FOR THE COMMONS

Challenging the prevailing sense of political pessimism, this book develops the twin notions of commodification and decommodification as means to understand many contemporary democratic struggles. It builds upon both previous academic discussions and "the promising critique of commodification that is developing within the anti-globalization movement" (McNally, 2002, p. 232). While the chapters take up a variety of specific issues—body parts, water, land, labour, public services, consumer culture, the knowledge economy, and beyond—from diverse perspectives, the book has two main goals. First, it examines central dimensions of the assault waged on "the commons" by the commodifying and privatizing thrust of global capitalism. Second, it engages with alternatives to neoliberal globalism from both the work of progressive intellectuals and a range of contemporary struggles to defend and democratically reinvent the commons by "decommodifying" much of collective life.

By "neoliberal globalism," we mean an ideology that attempts to create a seamless link amongst recent technological innovations, current trends towards greater global integration, and pro-capitalist governance. Neoliberal globalism mandates that all countries encourage foreign ownership and control of their economies, remove foreign exchange protections, cut public services, and balance budgets while cutting corporate taxes. Government-owned enterprises must be sold. The neoliberal globalism regime includes the norms, institutions, and laws that support corporate profitability along neoliberal lines. Governments turn away from citizens' concerns, and, outside imperial USA itself, the sovereignty of political communities. Instead, they focus on exports and on enshrining transnational corporate rights, often acting as junior partners to the US Empire. Countries are currently locked into neoliberal principles by structural adjustment programs in the South and by neoliberal agreements such as NAFTA in the North.

Recently, the notion of "the commons" has gained renewed currency in scholarly and popular works critical of both "neoliberal globalism" and US imperialism. Generally, the commons refers to those areas of social and natural life that are under communal stewardship, comprising collective resources and rights for all, by virtue of citizenship, irrespective of capacity to pay. As Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke (2001) argue, the decisive impetus of global capitalism today is "the

commodification of the commons—areas like seeds and genes, culture and heritage, health and education, even air and water—access to which was once considered a fundamental right" (p. 4). Similarly, Naomi Klein (2001) suggests that a war on the commons is being waged through many changes "whose common thread might broadly be described as the privatization of every aspect of life, and

the transformation of every activity and value into a commodity"(p. 4). The commodification identified by these authors involves the transformation of collective goods, whose use and allocation are determined, at least in principle, through democratic decisions and common rights, into privately owned goods, produced for profit rather than use value. As the oxygen industry case suggests, opportunities for profit expand when the commons shrink and people are deprived of common rights and adequate access to viable non-commodified sources of clean air, water, food, shelter, land, transportation, health care, and education.

In view of this predicament, struggles to reinvent the commons and deepen democracy today require confronting the capitalist drive to commodify nearly all aspects of existence and defending collective life from private appropriation and capitalist market regulation. As Ralph Miliband (1995) argues, restoring democratic control over our fate requires us "to extend the areas of 'decommodification' from which market forces are excluded" (p. 117). Barlow and Clarke (2001) take a minimalist position and call for "drawing a line around the commons" and insisting that key collective goods and services like health care and education remain uncommodified and under public control (p. 182). More radically, Ellen Meiksins Wood (1999b) argues that liberating collective life from capital's dominance will require struggling for "the decommodification of as many spheres of life as possible and their democratization" (p. 25).

"Decommodification" is not simply an abstract possibility pointed to by intellectuals. As David McNally (2002) argues, "if there is one thing that links together the wide range of social justice struggles occurring around the globe, it is opposition to commodification" (p. 232). Thus, when landless peasants in Brazil occupy land, indigenous people in India mobilize against giant dam projects, workers in Bolivia oppose water privatization, or unemployed Argentinians demand public spending and job creation, they all insist that social justice and collective welfare should not be subordinate to private profit-making. They demand that these aspects of the commons be shielded from commodification and market regulation. Thus, "decommodification" offers a useful umbrella concept for drawing together otherwise dispersed and localized struggles against capitalist globalization.

RETHINKING "COMMODIFICATION"

What do we mean by "commodification," and what are the grounds for opposing it? Commodification is the production of a good or service for a profit. GDP measures the profitable portions of the economy including positive ones like producing necessities for everyday living and negative ones like an oil spill in the ocean,

which also adds to the GDP (Cobb, Halsead, & Rowe, 1995). GDP measures the visible market transactions, mainly the profitable portions or commodified parts, of the economy.1 But it ignores enormous economic portions like unpaid work. If

work or nature is not commodified, it cannot bring a profit.

Many things are bought and sold in capitalist markets, things not created for these purposes. The most notable examples are what Karl Polanyi (1957) called "fictitious commodities"—land, labour, and money—pivotal elements that, while bought and sold, are not strictly commodities:

> *Labour is only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself, which in its turn is not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life, be stored or mobilized; land is only another name for nature, which is not produced by man [sic]; actual money, finally, is merely a token of purchasing power which, as a rule, is not produced at all, but comes into being through the mechanism of banking or state finance. None of them is produced for sale. The commodity of description of labour, land and money is entirely fictitious. (p. 72)*

However "fictitious," such "commodities" are the basis of an economic system in which all elements of production are brought into the market and regulated primarily by commercial imperatives. Today, the commercial patenting of gene sequences in traditional medicinal plants and human genes indicating susceptibility to certain types of disease are the new commodity fictions. In these instances, profits derive not from "producing" something new, but simply by extending private property rights to domains previously outside capitalist markets.

Free market enthusiasts wonder why anyone would oppose commodification because, in their view, commodities are the lifeblood of capitalist market economies—the proud outcome of its sophisticated social and technical division of labour; the incarnation of value in exchange, the source of profit, and hence the catalyst for endless innovation and growth; the means of transforming dormant nature and other non-market spheres into objects of human use and enjoyment. To remove public authorities from allocating social goods is hardly to be deplored, for the market is a coordinating mechanism, acutely responsive to the revealed preferences of "sovereign consumers" and thus the very embodiment of democracy.

In this view, paring back the public sector and allowing the market to provide for most human needs liberates productive resources from the arbitrary and wasteful hands of the state. What invariably results, it is assumed, is increased efficiency, reduced costs, and a greater range of goods and services. If private profit, as opposed to "the common good," is the impetus for delivering diverse commodities to the market, it is also what, via the "invisible hand," spurs continual growth, innovation, and technological development that benefit all.

In contrast to this rose-tinted conception, criticisms of commodification hinge on two considerations: first, from principled objections to the inappropriate treatment of some particular thing, being, or activity as a "commodity"; sec-

ond, from practical concerns about how commodification and capitalist market regulation restrict the range of collective and individual choice and leave key social needs unsatisfied.

How do we determine what can properly be regarded as a commodity? This question carries us into a range of complex moral debates. Commodities are most commonly regarded as "things" that can be used, exchanged, altered, withheld, or destroyed according to their owner's desire, without regard to intrusive notions of moral responsibility or intrinsic value. Thus, to regard an object as a "commodity" is to assume that its primary "value" resides in its monetary worth and that markets are the most appropriate means to regulate its production, exchange, and enjoyment. As Elizabeth S. Anderson (1990) has argued, "to the extent that moral principles or ethical ideals preclude the application of market norms to a good, we may say that the good is not a (proper) commodity" (p. 72). For many social "goods," she suggests, allowing market norms to override moral considerations can result in a failure to value such goods appropriately. For example, slavery is condemned because it enables some people to treat others inappropriately, as simply objects of use or gain.

Arguments against slavery can be extended to many other "goods" that are devalued when treated as mere commodities. As Margaret Jane Radin (1996) argues, today's expansion of global capitalism means that "the contemporary arena of moral and political debate is full of painful and puzzling controversies about what things can properly be bought and sold: babies? sexual services? kidneys and corneas? environmental pollution permits?" (p. xiii). Radin's moral concern with "contested commodities" is echoed and extended in this book, particularly in Harrison's discussion of selling human body parts, Bakker's analysis of struggles over commodifying water, and Sumner's discussion of commodifying knowledge. The growing number of "contested commodities" challenges us to re-examine continually our assumptions about the appropriate scope of capitalist markets. As novel as they may seem, however, these conundrums return us to long-familiar debates over the "fictitious commodities" of labour and land (or, more broadly, the natural environment). Indeed, as McNally and Müller's chapters make clear, the fact that labour and the environment are seldom seen currently as "contested commodities" reveals today's political predicament. Why? What are the consequences of valuing these "goods" primarily as "commodities"?

A key moral issue in commodifying labour is the abandonment of collective responsibility for individual welfare and subordinating subsistence rights to the capricious whims of the market. As Gosta Esping-Andersen (1990) asserts, "in the Middle Ages it was not the labour contract, but the family, the church, or the lord that decided a person's capacity for survival" (p. 37). Stripped of "pre-commodified" social protections and rendered entirely dependent upon the "cash nexus" for survival, workers in capitalist society, he argues, become dehumanized commodities, "captive to powers beyond their control … [and] easily destroyed

by even minor social contingencies, such as illness, and by macro-events, such as the business cycle" (p. 37). In contrast to other commodities, labour-power is not

an object that can be manipulated at will or withheld from the market, but is inseparable from the physically vulnerable and emotionally complex person who owns it. As Polanyi (1957) suggests, "the alleged commodity 'labour power' cannot be shoved about, indiscriminately, or left unused, without affecting also the human individual who happens to be the bearer of this particular commodity"(p. 73). Thus, as Esping-Andersen emphasizes, society's responsibility to at least partially "decommodify" labour has been the mainspring of social policy in capitalist societies from the Speenhamland system of poor relief in the 1790s in England, to contemporary welfare states.

When a good or service is commodified, access to it depends on one's ability to pay. In contrast to public goods supplied freely by the "commons" or the state, commodities have capitalist market prices, set not to ensure access but to yield maximum profits. High profit rates are compatible with situations where large numbers have no ability to buy goods, regardless of their importance to individual well-being, social participation, or self-development. We see this logic in the US today, where private insurance companies reap vast profits even as millions have little or no access to adequate health care. Indeed, when a commodity is needed or desired by large numbers, prices rise, which systematically restricts its availability. Hence, for many goods today—basic foodstuffs in Eastern Europe, aids drugs in Africa, electricity and water in Johannesburg's shanty-towns—capitalist markets tolerate massive exclusion. In such cases, the market's profit logic conflicts with egalitarian traditions of universal public services and collective commitments to meet human needs.

Once a good or service is commodified, Colin Leys (2001) argues, it becomes "liable to constant transformation under the logic of capitalist competition" (p. 90)—entailing competition in price, advertising, innovations in packaging and design, and so on. The outcome may not be diversification of supply and lower prices, but market-control by large suppliers, monopolistic pricing, and a stark uniformity of goods. Attempts to lower costs can include changing the composition of a good to make its production and delivery cheaper, standardizing components to achieve economies of scale, using lower-grade materials, minimizing labour intensive services, or off-loading some production work to consumers. These measures can alter the quality or even safety of various goods, producing such things as chemically-laced food, dumbed-down television programming, substandard rental housing, contaminated drinking water, or online education services. Cost-minimizing imperatives also require continual efforts to raise productivity and increase surpluses wrung from workers by introducing labour-saving technologies, changing the pace and organization of work, lowering wages, reducing benefits, and undermining safety. As anti-sweatshop and fair-trade activists today underline, such

exploitation is a vital, but largely hidden, dimension of the commodities we buy daily. Rosemary Hennessy (2001) reminds us that commodification "invariably depends on the lives and labour of invisible others" (p. 142). As Jennifer Sumner also emphasizes, we must continually strive to reconnect the commodity form with the underlying relationships and social processes it tends to obscure.

Similarly, certain forms of ecological thought—as Birgit Müller and Anita Krajnc's chapters powerfully remind us—hold that treating the environment as a commodity fails to value nature appropriately. As the precondition for all life, and as a complex, intricate, and interdependent system with its own requirements for self-reproduction, nature's value is immeasurable. Recognizing this, many noncapitalist societies accorded nature a supreme spiritual value, acknowledged human dependence, offered rituals of gratitude for its countless gifts, and remained acutely attuned to the inexhaustible wonder of its many beauties and sensual delights. This approach contrasts markedly with the crass, utilitarian mindset in today's capitalism, in which, as Richard Swift (2002) puts it, the planet's diverse gifts are merely disenchanted objects of use, raw materials for the treadmill of production, "nature's free inputs into the creation of commodities" (p. 110). As Andrew Bard Schmookler argues, "in the grip of a system that breaks everything down into commodity form … [t]he living planet is dismembered, as land becomes real estate, forests become lumber, oceans become fisheries and sinks" (quoted in Foster, 2002; p. 55).

Our failure to confront mounting environmental crises shows how pervasive commodification leads to democratic incapacity. As Polanyi (1957) argues, commodifying land, labour, and other dimensions of collective life means subordinating "the substance of society itself to the laws of the market" (p. 71). Recognizing this, most communities have striven to ensure that the use of human labour and nature's resources remains determined by extra-economic criteria: custom, religion, hereditary duty, reciprocal obligation, and political direction. In contrast to historical situations in which economic life was largely embedded in and guided by broad societal norms, however inegalitarian and unjust, capitalist regulation means that the allocation of goods, services, labour, and investment is largely determined by the impersonal will of the market. As Ellen Meiksins Wood (2002) puts it, "all aspects of life that become market commodities are removed from the sphere of democratic accountability, answering not to the will of the people but to the demands of the markets and profit" (para. 11). Capitalist regulation means that many decisions of broad collective significance are removed from the public, political sphere. Thus, commodifying the commons depoliticizes and "economizes" areas of life that would otherwise fall under conscious collective deliberation. The outcome depletes the scope and content of popular democracy.

CAPITALISM VERSUS DEMOCRACY—THE DOUBLE MOVEMENT

Capitalists' intense pressure to commodify everything sounds like a new phenomenon associated with the most recent phase of global integration. However, the issue of commodification has long been central to critiques of capitalism as exploitive and destructive. Marx begins his book Capital with a discussion of commodified social relationships as destroyers of "idyllic," patriarchal community relations, leaving the cash nexus as the only remaining social bond. Karl Polanyi described how

commodification separated labour from other activities, subjecting it to the market and thereby annihilating non-contractual forms of kinship, neighbourhood, and other organic forms of existence. Kees van der Pijl (1998, p. 12) notes that early twentieth-century art often focused on commodification—depicting an atomized society of disoriented, dehumanized individuals. Cubist paintings, such as Fernand Leger's Soldiers Playing at Cards, show humans composed of machine-like body parts, from which all organic life has been removed.

The drive to commodify has usually met resistance, sometimes to slow it down, at other times in robustly reversing the trend. Karl Polanyi (1957) famously called such reactions a "double movement":

> *Social history of the nineteenth century was thus the result of a double movement: the extension of the market organization in respect to genuine commodities was accompanied by its restriction in respect to fictitious ones. While on the one hand markets spread all over the face of the globe … on the other hand a network of measures and policies was integrated into powerful institutions designed to check the action of the market relative to labour, land, and money. (p. 76)*

Over the past two centuries, democracy and capitalism have been in contention, now in open battle, now in uneasy compromise. The Greeks, who invented the term democracy, understood its radical meaning. "The real difference between democracy and oligarchy is poverty and wealth," wrote Aristotle (1908). "The rich are few and the poor many … where the poor rule, that is a democracy" (p. 116). Aristotle's version was the way democracy was understood in the main tradition of Western political thought down through the nineteenth century. It is essentially the same radical conception that citizen activists mean today by "democracy from below" or "deep democracy." We use the term in this radical sense. Democracy was seen by the upper classes as dangerous because it meant "rule by the poor, the ignorant, and incompetent, at the expense of the leisured, civilized, propertied classes." It signalled "class rule, rule by the wrong class" (Macpherson, 1977, pp. 9–10). In other words, rule by the people. John Ball, a leader of the 1381 English Peasants Revolt was said to have declared, "Things cannot go well in England, nor ever will, until all goods are held in common, and until there will be neither serfs nor gentlemen, and we shall all be equal" (Beer, 1929, p. 28). Ball's statement shows that contests over equality and democracy have been historically based, and are not debates dreamed up by political philosophers.

Attempts to expand capitalism have engaged pro-business forces versus their democratic adversaries over the extent to which people, nature, and essential services can be bought and sold for profit. The contest has been based on contradictions between two expansionary ethics—capitalism versus democracy. Capitalism is a revolutionary system, continually attempting to remake society by relentlessly pursuing profits. Success often depends on destroying bonds of community—abo-

riginals, farm families tied to the land, associations of workers—on narrowing the "public" sphere over which the ethic of democracy applies. The bonds of community are necessary for the functioning of democracies. When a good or service is commodified for profit, the opportunity to make collective, deliberative decisions is replaced by the capitalist market. In contrast, struggles to win bottom-up democracy involve enabling people to determine their social, political, and economic lives as collectivities.

The principles underlying capitalism and democracy are opposed. Capitalism is based on individual greed and inequality, while democracy is premised on the common good and equality. Economic privilege based on property rights produces vast inequalities between those with lots of capital and those with little or none. In contrast, democracy is about achieving equality amongst citizens, securing personal rights, and making collective decisions about the common good. When expanded beyond a limited sphere, democracy "may challenge, indiscriminately and irreverently, all forms of privilege" and encroach on the capacity of capital to invest profitably and discipline its work force (Bowles & Gintis, 1986, p. 5). This possibility is why the Trilateral Commission, founded in 1973 by David Rockefeller and others to bring corporate and political leaders in North America, Western Europe, and Japan together to fend off attacks on capitalism, identified an "excess of democracy" as a major threat. "The democratic spirit is egalitarian, individualistic, populist, and impatient with the distinctions of class and rank," the Trilateralists' first book stated. "The spread of that spirit ... may pose an intrinsic threat" (Crozier et al., 1975, p. 162).

Of the two expansionary systems, capitalism has more often been on top. But impulses for deep democracy kept capitalists from commodifying much of what they wanted to. In the global North, extensions of the franchise from property holding males, to male workers, to women, and then to racial minorities and immigrants brought great demands for the state to bring into the commons parts that had been alienated, privatized, and commodified or to offer new public services with access on the basis of citizenship. The result was that "labour" became citizens with rights to a social wage and a degree of freedom from total dependence on the capitalist labour market. Some "resources" reverted to nature through the creation and expansion of national parks, and services such as education and health care were removed from the for-profit sphere and largely decommodified. In

the 1950s to 1970s, popular-democratic movements in the global South achieved victories for decolonization, "inwardly directed development," and the deglobalizing of transnational corporations in a massive wave of nationalizations.

Sometimes there were gains in decommodifying land. After Mexico's 1910 revolution, for instance, the state recognized ejidos, communal ownership of land expropriated from large landowners and returned to the peasants. These gains were reversed in conjunction with NAFTA.

Expansionary democracy and expansionary capitalism have both engaged with other forces: pre-capitalist societies and traditional conservatives who often opposed both commodification and popular sovereignty. Traditional conservatives

opposed free market capitalism because they thought it would undermine stability, class harmony, loyalty, and productivity. German Historical School proponents such as Friedrich List and Adolph Wagner advocated patriarchal families, a paternalistic welfare state, and absolutism as guarantors of discipline, efficiency, and stability (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 10). It was conservatives who, in the 1880s, brought in the first modern welfare state to undercut the appeal of socialism. As Bismarck stated, "If Social Democracy did not exist … then the moderate advances which we have managed to push through in the area of social reform would not yet exist" (quoted in Therborn, 1984, p. 15). Bismarck's reforms included sickness, accident, and old age protections based on a conservative social insurance model that created distinct sets of rights and privileges amongst status groups. Their effect was to decommodify labour partially.

Thus an historical explanation that sees contentions as largely between capitalism and democracy is not sufficient. The direction of change resulted from contestations amongst three main forces, with traditional conservatives playing an important part. In the three actor contestations, there were shifting pairings between two of them against the third. Currently, traditional conservatives generally ally with neoliberals in Thatcherism, Reaganism, and their successors. But in welfare state formation and important struggles for decommodification, Red-Tory couplings [socialists with conservatives], either as tacit alliances or in symbiotic contention with each other, as in Bismarck's Germany, have been crucial. Bowles and Gintis (1986) argue that the contradictory logics of democracy and capitalism were able to coexist only through a succession of compromises that involved broad collective understandings about proper spheres for business, governments, workers, and citizens. The Keynesian welfare state, or Great Compromise, "represented some form of accommodation between the demands for political and economic democracy from below and the needs of capital" (Gamble, 1988, p. 24).

The compromise recognized that business had exclusive rights to private property, including management rights to determine unilaterally an enterprise's strategic

direction. But the sphere for private property rights steadily shrank, as the public sphere in the global North grew from about 10 per cent of the economy in the late 1800s to about half the economy by the 1970s (Desai, 2000).2 While the public sphere bought commodified goods and services, the overall effect of public sphere growth was to remove a rising share of the economy from profit making. Global expenditures on education now exceed US $2 trillion. In health care, they are over US $3.5 trillion (Barlow & Clarke, 2001, p. 84).

While popular with voters, the growth of public services was unpopular with capitalists because it removed a rising share of the economy from capitalist profitability, squeezed investment opportunities, and partially decommodified people.
The ethic of equality and citizenship covered a growing set of services, offsetting much of the social authority of capitalist markets. The public sphere's expansion contributed powerfully to the 1970s crisis in corporate profitability. Capitalism's logic of "who has the most money can buy the best services" was replaced with "equal rights regardless of ability to pay." Thus, the balance of class forces shifted,

and workers were partially freed from having to depend wholly on capitalist employment to survive. As well, workers gained collective bargaining rights and came to expect rising real wages. A private sphere of the "personal" was reserved for the family, gender relations, and the voluntary sector. The system worked with considerable consensus, if not always harmoniously or fairly, as long as each stuck to its own recognized sector.

This uneasy compromise fell apart in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the Left led powerful movements for decommodification, autocentric development, and deglobalizing transnational corporations. This sparked a capitalist counterreaction—the current wave of neoliberal globalism. The Trilateral Commission challenged not only democracy, but also the economic nationalism that underpinned a wave of government takeovers of transnational corporations in the early 1970s. Their neoliberal agenda intended to throw back expansionary movements for popular and national sovereignty and recommodify much of what had been moved to non-profit sectors. Current negotiations on the General Agreement on Trade in Services (the gats) in Geneva, which Ellen Gould discusses in chapter five, are attempting to reverse this.

THE NEOLIBERAL COUNTER-REVOLUTION AND THE "NEW ENCLOSURES"

Even zealous proponents of neoliberal globalism deny its essentially political nature. Thus, we are continually assured by media, corporate, and government elites that neoliberal globalism has not been politically shaped, but instead is "an inevitable destiny thrust upon us by economic progress and technological change" (Singer, 1999, p. 186). Critics have been suspicious of the claim that neoliberal

restructuring is simply adapting to unavoidable exigencies of the global market and see it as "a political enterprise based upon the wish to widen the scope of the private sector, to weaken government's capacity to direct economic life according to criteria determined by democratic deliberation and decision" (Miliband, 1995, p. 107). Critics depict today's drive to commodify or "recommodify" extensive areas of social and natural life as both perennial expansive impulses of capitalism and part of a political struggle to overcome the "crisis of accumulation" associated with the end of the long post-war economic boom.

The neoliberal counter-revolution reversed long-standing trends in the global North, in which organized labour, social democratic parties, and citizens groups had deployed liberal-democratic institutions to regulate business, achieve new rights and material benefits for ordinary citizens, and press the state to remain at least partially independent of corporate interests. Practically, the reversal has involved attempts to pare back the welfare state's regulative and redistributive activities while intensifying its disciplinary ones. As well, it removed restrictions and obligations on corporations that had been in place since the inception of mass democracy. A key part of this process has been the creation of binding interna-

tional agreements and supra-governmental institutions (NAFTA, the WTO, etc.) whose express purpose is to safeguard corporate capital's investment and trade rights against popular-democratic control.

A central aspect of the neoliberal offensive has been the attack on state regulations, policies, and collective provisioning that had partially shielded people from direct market pressures and limited the spheres of public life and the commons that could be commodified. Thus, as Miliband (1995) argues, the neoliberal project is a concerted assault upon those, "decommodified areas [which] already exist in capitalist economies, and are largely the product of pressure from below in the decades following World ii to ensure that access to health, education and other services should be viewed as rights inherent in citizenship, without any regard to ability to pay" (p. 117).

Capitalists attack "decommodified areas" because they exclude key domains of collective life, and much of the economy, from profit making. They also create disincentives for wage work and private consumption, extend government reach into economic life, and increase taxes. Worse, they provide an everyday alternative to capitalism, in which services are provided to each citizen according to her need, rather than according to her ability to pay. Historically, powerful workers movements in the North overcame corporate animosity by mobilizing the votes of the many to establish government-guaranteed social citizenship rights and by union power to wrest concessions from capital. Thus, the balance of class forces shifted and workers were partially freed from capitalist market dependency in earning a living.

Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) calls the neoliberal rollbacks of Keynesian welfare states "recommodification." This process radically reduces the "decommodified" goods and services available to citizens as a matter of right and increases the number of human needs that must rely on markets to be met. Recommodification requires abrogating regulations and social rights that have offset the commodity status of labour and that shield workers from extreme exploitation and vulnerability. Neoliberal states recommodify workers by compelling them into labour markets on terms beneficial to employers—by restricting eligibility for income supports and social benefits, attacking collective bargaining rights, introducing punitive "workfare" schemes, relaxing labour standards, and bringing in low wage workers from abroad. As well, states have increasingly disciplined people and enforced social order in conditions of growing inequality and social insecurity—cracking down stiffly on protest and dissent; enlarging prison, policing, and surveillance systems; spearheading "law and order" campaigns; curtailing civil rights; and so on.

In much of the global South, neoliberal recommodification of labour has been accompanied by measures that strip communities of self-determination. The global South has been increasingly seen simply as a repository of cheap labour and natural resources. Taking advantage of the South's debt crisis and vulnerabilities to financial collapse and capital flight, Northern-dominated institutions such as the imf and World Bank have pushed countries to adopt neoliberal measures called

"structural adjustment programs." These mandate the neoliberal globalism policies outlined earlier. Despite pledges to reduce poverty, the main purpose of these programs is to ensure loan repayments to Northern bankers and to enable transnationals [tncs] the right to enter and do as they please. In many places, the result has been increased poverty and suffering, extreme environmental damage, and undermining of the preconditions for genuine democracy and economic development (Bello, 2003). A key dimension has been the "proletarianization" of peasants, driven from the land by debt, foreclosures, and expanding corporate agribusinesses. Dispossessed peasants form huge pools of cheap, disposable labour for tncs, and add to exploitable migrant workers heading to the North.

Under strict control by Northern-dominated financial institutions and unilateral US power, foreign corporations and banks increasingly limit the options of impoverished countries. Locked into debt-repayments and unequal economic exchange, Southern countries today largely experience "the market" not as a liberating force, but as a source of compulsion and domination. It strips them of control over their collective resources, deprives them of state subsidies and protections, which are common in the North, and undermines their ability to protect their social and environmental commons.

Taking advantage of scientific breakthroughs and new "intellectual" property rights for tncs, corporations have patented and privatized growing segments of the environmental commons. We now witness the rising private monopolization of biology and chemical goods—seeds, plants, life-saving pharmaceutical goods and medical treatments, foodstuffs, fertilizers, industrial materials, and the genetic make-up of life. Similarly, by struggling against public services and public provision, corporations have colonized new domains of the public sector—education, health care, hydro power, welfare case management, water purification services. The corporate-backed gats initiative threatens to open up much more. These attempts are politically contested and may be reversed.

As well, speculation with the "fictitious commodity" of money in deregulated international financial markets has destabilized national currencies, devastated local economies and created intense insecurities. Commodification extends its global reach through the spread of consumer culture, which entices us to construct our identities and social bonds out of the commodities we consume. This superficially diverse, but ultimately homogenizing, culture threatens to erode the rich plurality of world cultures and immobilize genuinely creative and transformative energies with endless waves of pre-packaged gratification.

As Patrick Bond (2000) argues, neoliberalism has steered us dangerously towards a free market utopia, whose lodestars are "the universal rule of property, and the commodification of all aspects of daily life everywhere." As Bond and McNally emphasize, such developments are not novel excesses of "globalization" or "corporate rule." They are better seen as continuations of private appropriation, as the "enclosures" of communal property and resources that accompanied capitalism from its inception. The "new enclosures" of the neoliberal era, while perhaps unprecedented in their extremity, draw attention to historical conflicts

between capitalist property rights and universal citizenship rights, between imperialism and popular sovereignty, between private economic power and collective democracy. In this context, we present a "decommodification" strategy as both a useful guiding principle and a practical possibility for people struggling to assert control over their lives.

DECOMMODIFICATION AND THE STRUGGLE TO RECLAIM THE COMMONS

"Decommodification" appears to be an ambiguous goal, negating commodification rather than creating positive alternatives. In this light, it is understandable why critics such as Radin have mistakenly equated this goal with a thoroughgoing rejection of commodities, consumption, and markets. However, as David McNally (1993) has argued, the chief moral and political issue at stake here is not the simple existence of commodities and markets per se, but market regulation of social and economic life. Accordingly, "decommodification" is meant to overcome the

radical extension of the scope and authority of the market, emancipating extensive areas of life from demands for private profit and recreating a public, not-for-profit sphere. It is about fulfilling the radical promise of genuine popular democracy by "breaking down the fences that prohibit the will of the majority from intruding upon economic property arrangements" (McNally, 2002, p. 234).

The goals of radical transformative decommodification are not to dismantle all markets, but to remove capitalist markets, extend democratic authority, and reorient society away from producing commodities for profit as dominant collective activities. Decommodification is a process that transforms activities away from production for profit for the purpose of meeting a social need, meeting a use value, or restoring nature. Decommodification pertains both to production of an economic good or service and to the removal from production of something of nature that had been used to generate profits. Decommodification is a process and a continuum.

It is not an "either/or" issue of having a society that has been wholly commodified or one that is fully decommodified. It is variable, and a matter of degree (Wright, 2005, p. 2). Thus we can speak of the degree to which labour has been decommodified into a worker with rights, or the extent to which resources have been decommodified and turned back into nature, or the extent to which services like education and health care are provided on the basis of citizenship rather than ability to pay. In reality, all current societies are hybrids in which commodification and decommodification live side by side, if not always amicably. But, the predominance of commodification or decommodification in a country or community matters a great deal and has huge implications. This book explores many of them. As we have seen, Karl Polanyi famously portrayed commodification as a negative process, from which society needed protection. But it was Gosta Esping-Andersen (1985, 1990) who first proposed decommodification as a positive goal, one that described the vision socialists and trade unionists had long tried to

achieve. As he sees it, decommodification is central to the historical practice of traditional social democracy and trade unionism, part of incremental gains by which newly-enfranchised workers used political power to overcome their vulnerabilities in labour markets and establish secure claims on the state for wide-ranging social citizenship rights. Extending the franchise created demands for governments in the global North to protect wage earners in times of unemployment, injury, sickness, and old age. Sometimes called a "social wage," such public supports gave all households some security from the dangers of total market dependency. The decommodifying effects of welfare state regimes can be assessed by the "degree to which individuals, or families, can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of market participation" (p. 37).

In pre-capitalist societies, most workers were coerced in non-economic ways, did not have citizenship or individual rights, and usually lived in precarious subsistence.

But few were treated as commodities. Workers were embedded in societies where there were mutual, if unequal, obligations, and their survival did not depend on selling their labour power. As capitalist labour markets spread, however, institutional guarantees outside labour contracts were stripped away. The livelihoods of unpropertied workers came to depend entirely on selling their labour power. Families could starve if breadwinners became sick, injured, or old. The winning of modern social rights partially reversed labour's pure commodity status. According to Esping-Andersen (1990), labour is decommodified when "citizens can freely, and without potential loss of job, income or general welfare, opt out of work when they themselves consider it necessary" (p. 23). A service is decommodified when it is rendered as a matter of right, such as during sickness, retirement, maternity leave, parental leave, educational leave, and unemployment.

These supports have political consequences. The less their labour market dependence, Esping-Andersen (1990) argues, the less that wage-earners can be frightened by the economic blackmail threats of corporations moving elsewhere if governments enact policies corporations dislike. For unions, decommodification has always been a priority. "When workers are completely market-dependent, they are difficult to mobilize for solidaristic action" (p. 22). Divisions emerge between workers who are the "ins" and those who are the "outs." Solidaristic action happens when highly paid workers support the interests of low paid workers and the unemployed. Labour market inequalities make the formation of solidaristic labour movements more difficult.

For Esping-Andersen (1985, pp. 3–38), decommodifying goes far beyond alleviating the worst excesses of capitalism. It is a strategy to replace capitalism gradually, one that grew out of the "Austro-Swedish" social democratic route to economic citizenship. This route rejected Lenin's revolutionary authoritarianism and moderate Social Democracy's co-optation by capitalism. The Austro-Swedish strategy envisaged a process of expanding citizenship in progressive stages, along lines paralleling those of T.H. Marshall (1950).[3] In stage one, newly-enfranchised, nationally-based workers used political citizenship [i.e., gaining the vote] to overcome their labour market vulnerabilities by electing left-wing governments com-

mitted to establishing universal public services and income supports for those unable to get paid work. The long process of setting up wide-ranging social citizenship rights is stage two. If completed fully, proponents argue, social citizenship emancipates workers from fears of losing work and income through corporate threats of pulling out, so they may be willing to take the risk of challenging corporate power. Wage earners are then ready to move to stage three—economic citizenship—in which they partake effectively in democratically running the economy. The latter is about socializing the economy, but not necessarily by a centralized state.

The struggle to decommodify is part of an incremental process of building wage

earners’ capacities for democratic participation in the short term, creating institutional bases for expanding non-market values and activities, and laying the ground for achieving genuine economic democracy in the long term. Esping-Andersen (1985) characterizes this radical evolutionary strategy as “salami tactics, slicing away at traditional capitalist prerogatives and replacing them with democratic forms of control” (p. 23). This process is similar to what Andre Gorz (1967) famously referred to as “non-reformist reforms,” which aim to “restrict or dislocate the power of capital” while giving radical anti-capitalist forces some practicable means of controlling and planning the development of existing society (pp. 6–8).

The problem for the three-stage strategy to economic citizenship is that neoliberal forces have rolled back some of the gains of stage two, in part to keep wage earners insecure and off balance. While insecure, they are less likely to demand as much pay and more likely to accept commodified labour conditions—such as longer hours, fewer rights—so that corporations can make higher profits. With some reverses in stage two, many workers in most Northern countries do not feel secure enough to move to the third and highest stage of citizenship, where, as voters, they not only choose governments and public services, but, as workers, also determine what is produced, how it is produced, and for what purpose.

Since Esping-Andersen’s first writings on the issue, the concept of decommodification as a positive goal has been broadened to include changes in economic life and nature. Williams and Windebank (2003) have done path-breaking work on the non-commodified activities of economic life in the household and the community. For them commodification is a process whereby “goods and services are increasingly produced for monetized exchange under profit-motivated market-orientated conditions” (p. 251). In contrast, decommodification includes “firstly, nonexchanged work, secondly, non-monetized exchange and, third and finally, monetary exchange where the profit motive is absent” (p. 251). Non-exchanged work is unpaid work like preparing meals, child rearing or repairing your house. It involves self-provisioning or production for use value. Such work never enters the market or economists’ measurements of the size of the economy. Non-monetized exchange includes barter or doing an exchange of mutual aid. I scratch your back, you scratch mine. Finally, monetary exchange where the profit motive is absent includes such things as consumers paying for municipal water through metering from a public utility that provides a service to all, but does not earn a profit. Williams and Windebank (2003, p. 252) calculate that only about 50 per

cent of the economies of the advanced countries are commodified. Moreover, their data challenge the work of those who claim that commodification is increasing continually by showing that that level has not increased in the past 30 years. They attribute the lack of increase to “strong cultures of resistance” (p. 260).

In addition, the decommodification of land or nature involves removing from

production some part of nature that had been used to make profit. Thus, in the broadest sense, progressive decommodification is a positive vision of how society could be transformed for the better in the areas of 1) citizens' security in receiving social income for non-work purposes such as retirement, sickness, periods of unemployment, or education; 2) removing exploitation and hierarchy from economic life and making work more meaningful by moving towards employee-run co-operatives, self-provisioning, bartering, and volunteering; and 3) reclaiming nature by reversing much of its commodification into for-profit resources. However, as Esping-Andersen acknowledges, decommodification can also take conservative or reactionary forms. Indeed, traditional conservatives4 historically spearheaded the most systematic attacks on the corrosive social effects of commodification.

In their own way, traditional conservatives have consistently recognized that capitalism is a revolutionary system, continually undermining traditional forms of communal life and remaking society by relentlessly pursuing profits. Where commodification holds sway and the "cash nexus" serves as the primary mediator of social relations, they erode tradition, deference, obligation, and non-contractual bonds, on which social order and cohesion depend. Thus, as Esping-Andersen (1999) suggests, a "conservative politics against the market" is one version of decommodification, struggling to reproduce pre-capitalist institutions and life-ways, defending traditional authority and hierarchy, and upholding non-marketized domains like church and patriarchal families (p. 44). As he argues, resistance to reducing human social relations to the narrow cash nexus brings conservatism into strange alliances with socialism and other radical traditions.

Claus Offe (1984) also emphasizes the politically ambivalent or "conservative" character of decommodification, arguing that certain decommodified areas of life represent not a progressive counterbalance or alternative to capitalism but a means to stabilize and preserve it. Capitalism's private economic sphere, organized through ostensibly spontaneous market processes, survives only through the "decommodifying" activities of the state and domestic spheres. Indeed, as Offe insists, capitalist states systematically enable "free markets" to thrive by providing social and physical infrastructures essential for private profit-making—building roads, educating and disciplining workers, enforcing contracts, maintaining social order and cohesion, subsidizing businesses, assuming the negative social and ecological costs of private production. The "free market" as a regulator of social life is thus not a substitute for the state. Capitalism is saved from its own anarchic selfdestruction by the state's decommodifying and market-enabling activities. If so, the decommodifying activities of the welfare state are contradictory. Some offset the worst effects of private production and foster some social equality, while others systematically preserve the power of capital. Still others may take the form of what

Andre Gorz (1967) has deemed "revolutionary reforms," such as not-for-profit medicare, which may encourage an expansion of progressive decommodification. Similarly, few could deny the importance of uncommodified activities in the

domestic sphere, largely women's unpaid and undervalued labour, in ensuring capitalist reproduction. Production in formal "economic" spheres traditionally rested on the reproductive, nurturing, and caring activities of women in families. Thus, we need to be wary of how a politics of "decommodification" could be regressive and misogynist, harkening back sentimentally to patriarchy and the soothing benefactions of women's non-commodified labour. In this vein, feminists have criticized Esping-Andersen for failing to appreciate the extent to which women have been institutionally constrained by their "decommodified" familial roles or the ways that gendered welfare states perpetuate women's dependence on men, undermine their capacity to secure the relative financial autonomy of paid work, and thus structurally confine them to the domestic sphere. Ann Shola Orloff (1993) argues that decommodification must be supplemented with women's rights for access to paid work—"the right to be commodified" (p. 318). She adds that "if decommodification is important because it frees wage earners from the compulsion of participating in the market, a parallel dimension is needed to indicate the ability of those who do most of the domestic and caring work—almost all women—to form and maintain autonomous households, that is, to survive and support their children without having to marry to gain access to breadwinners' income" (p. 319).

Esping-Andersen (1999) accepted the challenge from Orloff and others and broadened his concepts. In his later formulation, he states that although women are increasingly inserted into wage relationships, "the functional equivalent of market dependency for many women is family dependency" (p. 45). Female independence necessitates "de-familialization," he argued. De-familialization does not mean the destruction of families, but refers to state policies that lessen individuals' financial reliance on the family. In their chapter, Ray Broomhill and Rhonda Sharp also argue that a programme of decommodification needs to be complemented by a simultaneous commitment to "defamilialization." Defamilialization need not supplant decommodification; instead, a simultaneous commitment to "defamilialization" would help free women from both patriarchal domestic domination and capitalist exploitation, enabling them to participate more fully and equally in all areas of economic and political life.

Such caveats do not invalidate decommodification as a goal. Rather, they show the need to develop thoroughly egalitarian and democratic forms of it, which seriously challenge patriarchy and other forms of social domination, as well as capitalist economic power. In any case, focusing on the many preconditions of social reproduction becomes increasingly important now that capitalism is colonizing more areas of existence and straining the remaining areas of the commons—democratic political institutions, the public sector, family and kinship networks, affective communal relationships, aquifers, soil, food systems, oxygen, the biosphere—which sustain and protect human life. As Polanyi argued, efforts to implement liberal utopias engender counter-forces committed to protecting society and

nature from unbridled markets and to re-establishing collective control over economic life.

We can see that the neoliberal drive to "commodify the commons" is leading to contradictions, such as the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98, that threaten its continued legitimacy. It has created openings for transformative struggle such as World Social Forum process (Gret & Sintomer, 2005) and struggles over popular national sovereignty against the US Empire. Current conjunctural changes may be more conducive to progressive decommodification campaigns. Laxer, for instance, argues in his chapter that we may be entering a renewed cycle of the renationalization of economies.

Is the contest between commodification and decommodification just the struggle over public ownership and privatization dressed up in new clothing? No. There is much overlap, but important differences too. Privatization often leads to greater commodification, and it almost always prevents moving toward decommodification. But public ownership does not always decommodify, especially when neoliberals successfully demand that government-owned economic institutions such as crown corporations, which have not already been privatized, operate strictly along for-profit principles and drop non-market, public policy goals such as serving remote communities or protecting environments.

There can be public ownership in name only. For example, governments may own public or crown lands and charge royalties for the use of renewable resources such as forests or for depleting the public's non-renewable resources, such as oil or minerals, but stumpage or royalty rates may be so low that the commons are virtually being given away. Thus, having public or crown-owned land or bringing land back under formal public control is not sufficient to bring it into the commons or decommodify it. Further, state reclamation of land from private owners may not decommodify any aspect of its use. It is difficult to return areas despoiled for resources to a state of nature. Thus, public ownership is usually a necessary but not a sufficient condition for decommodification.

Non-profit, communal control is possible without state control. We have already mentioned the ejido and indigenous communities' systems of communal land control in Mexico and contemporary struggles to prevent their privatization and commodification. (See the chapters by Guttiérez-Haces and Otero & Jugenitz). Other examples are various forms of communal control by aboriginal peoples in other countries, and co-operatively owned enterprises. Having land and labour controlled by non-state communal bodies fits well with Marx's vision of socialism, which he called "a free association of producers." Today's Lefts are rightly suspicious of state bureaucracies and believe in bottom-up control.
If public ownership is not the same as decommodification, neither is privatization wholly coincident with commodification. Land can be privatized, but this does not necessarily lead to commodification. Families or larger communities could own land, but work it for their own use-value. Their labour may not be

commodified. To a great extent, Hutterite colonies have decommodified their labour and provided services to themselves. Much of what they produce is for

their own use value rather than for external markets. But there is a danger in such private ownership. It can be sold at any time, likely resulting in multiple, commodified effects.

In the short term, efforts to resist commodification and reclaim the commons will likely primarily be localized struggles to contest the capitalist logic on specific fronts and secure reliable collective access to shelter, food, water, education, income support, and so on. A diversity of political struggles now underway can be brought together under the broad banner of progressive decommodification. These struggles range from opposing sweat-shop labour on US university campuses, trying to recommunalize land in Latin America and India, opposing commodifying sewage and water services in Ireland, fighting for radical forms of union democracy in East Asia, and struggling against commercial logging of old-growth forests in British Columbia. They also include resisting deregulating electricity in California and Ontario, challenging biopiracy in the global South, supporting native and non-native efforts to widen title over aboriginal lands, workers taking over and running factories in Argentina in a wave of "fabrica ocupada," and privatizing water management services in Ontario. While such struggles are dispersed and lack overall coherence, their victories may be cumulative, pointing to alternative models of society where non-monetary values are reaffirmed and popular democracies are given new depth and substance, emancipating the rich possibilities of democratic life from the compulsions of capitalist markets and the US Empire.

In the long term, there will be much debate and contention over how best to advance a radical project of decommodification and create practical democratic alternatives to the neoliberal model. For some, the main path to a decommodified future is to be found in the self-emancipatory potential of popular movements from below, which can challenge bureaucratic and top-down state structures, create strategic beachheads of strong and participatory democratic life, and mount effective mass opposition to the economic and political powers sustaining the capitalist commodity economies. Such movements can slow down, stop, and, in some cases, reverse powerful pressures for commodification.

However, if governments also implacably oppose decommodification, it will be difficult to make substantial progress. For this reason, others argue that the most compelling way forward lies in creating citizen-oriented states, severing their current alliances with transnational corporations, and getting them to reclaim the social and environmental commons. History shows that the problem for such progressive governments is that, in the absence of substantial, continual mobilization from below and effective alliances of like-minded states, they tend to bow to enormous economic blackmail pressures. Such pressures come from

threats of corporate flight, withdrawal of short-term financial capital, and IMF/World Bank sanctions and corporate lawsuits alleging the loss of "future profits" under investment rights clauses in agreements such as the World Trade Organization and NAFTA.

Given the histories of most governments elected on progressive platforms backing down under such pressures, perhaps the most fruitful paths are multi-scale—

working at local, national and inter-national levels—and multi-pronged—synergistically combining the strengths of transformative governments and citizens movements. Historically, some of the greatest strides in decommodifying collective life and nature came when progressive and determined citizens' movements worked with change-oriented governments: Chile under Allende, Nicaragua under the Sandinistas, Nordic countries in the 1960s and 1970s, and the state of Kerala, India since the 1950s. The problem for all of the above cases, except the Nordic ones, is that, as peripheries, they lacked the effective sovereignty to challenge capitalist commodification substantially. The Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez's Presidency today faces similar challenges, but so far the government has fended off an attempted coup and economic blackmail techniques waged by the US government in conjunction with the small, but rich, Venezuelan elite. One way to prevent attempts to overthrow radical, democratically elected governments is to create strong bonds of solidarity with like-minded states and foreign citizens' movements. Venezuela is trying to create such a sovereign nations community, a "Bolivarian Alternative for Americas" in which Latin America would create a continental region to gain independence from the United States. It would pursue alternatives to neoliberal policies (Moncton, 2005).

There are also debates amongst advocates of decommodification and the commons about whether the long-term goal is to create a "global civil commons" ruled by global citizens, which would weaken or, in the extreme case, wipe out existing national borders, or, on the other hand, to create many sovereign commons, each with its own programme of decommodification. In the global South, and sometimes in in-between countries like Canada, critics tend to conceive of neoliberal globalism as re-colonization and its opposite as sovereignty. Indigenous peoples are unlikely to give up their land to an abstraction called the "global commons," no matter how generously conceived. Neither are peasant communities rooted in their local commons nor local communities with strong roots likely to give up claims to "their" commons. Even in a post-corporate era, sovereign control over their own commons will likely be a continuing demand of such countries and nations.

Tensions about competing conceptions of the commons can be partially, but not fully, resolved by separating levels and resources. The ozone layer and global climate need the responsibility of a global commons, while land, fresh water, sub-surface

resources, and bottom-up democracy could come under the purview of smaller, sovereign commons. Debates and tensions about the scale of democratic control in post-neoliberal settings and the tensions between global solidarity and the sovereignty of political communities such as nations are sure to remain. This is healthy.

CONCLUSION

Whatever strategy one favours, it is clear that "political" action in the narrow sense is not enough. Indeed, decommodification also necessarily implies a profound cultural and moral revolution—a reassertion of the authority of non-economic values, a rejection of consumerism, a renewed capacity to value and engage with nature, other people, and life's possibilities in a non-commodified manner. Ultimately, the goal of progressive decommodification is to liberate democratic life from enslavement to capitalist market imperatives, namely, to broaden the space for the free expression of our needs, preferences, and capacities, for those autonomous activities and engagements that are valued as ends in themselves rather than for their commercial potential.

We believe that current decommodification struggles to claim new commons and reclaim old ones are central to the ongoing contestation between deep democracy and capitalism. Progressive forms of decommodification are about enlarging the social and natural spheres over which the egalitarian and collective ethic of democracy applies and reducing the spheres under which the greed of capitalist profits applies. Indeed, as Ellen Meiksins Wood (1999b) emphasizes, achieving meaningful democracy today will require striving to decommodify broad new areas of social life:

That means not just their subjection to the political rule of formal democracy but their removal from the direct control of capital and from the impersonal control of market imperatives, which subordinate every human need and practice to the requirements of accumulation and profit maximization. (p. 25)
Such varied and ongoing struggles to emancipate our lives from capitalist market imperatives will involve action in state and extra-parliamentary arenas and will need to take place locally, nationally, and through the international coordination of both people's movements from below and their progressive governments working together. In the past, struggles in the North managed to push back the sphere of capitalist markets dramatically by pressing governments to bring into the commons some parts that had been alienated and privatized and to bring new areas into commons control. The result was that people, nature, and services such as education, health care, and national park areas were substantially decommodified.

In the mid-1900s, popular-democratic movements in the South achieved victories for decolonization and inwardly directed development, sometimes decommodifying land and deglobalizing transnational corporations. The various struggles being waged against neoliberal globalism today continue historical

efforts to reclaim the commons from private appropriation and transcend limits exerted by capital over the practice and potential of democratic life.

Notes

1. GDP measures all recorded market exchanges. These include not-for-profit transactions in the public sector, but exclude the informal, under the table economy and all unpaid work and the value of nature.

2. In addition to the state sphere, we can add a voluntary, not-for-profit sector and a parapublic sector, which is non-profit and non-state. Parapublic institutions may run state-sanctioned services, such as child protection, not-for-profit hospitals, or public universities.

3. There are differences, however. Marshall saw social citizenship as the goal, whereas the Austro-Swedish model saw it as a means to achieve the final goal—economic citizenship.

4. Traditional conservatives are not "neo-conservatives." See Nisbet (1986).