**Realising Earth Democracy: Governance From Below**

**Peter D. Burdon**

Abstract

The Project of Earth Democracy challenges us to conceive of governance in a way that fuses ecocentric ethics with participatory democracy. One key challenge to this project is that existing states are so compromised by growth fetishism and corporate interests that the changes needed to create a sustainable and just society will never be generated from the ‘top down’. Instead, I contend that they can only arise through social movements ‘from below’. Picking up from Gustav Landour’s insight that the State is a ‘certain relationship between human beings’ that we overcome by ‘contracting other relationships’ I contend that prefigurative politics and struggle are preconditions for realising Earth Democracy.

To support this contention, I conduct a forensic examination of influential prefigurative movements such as Movement for a New Society, Students for a Democratic Society (including the weather underground) and the Clam Shell Alliance. While diverse, these movements pioneered forms of consensus decision-making, communal living, direct action, and self-education now central to antiauthoritarian movements. My interest in conducting this investigation is twofold. First, I am interested in understanding why these prefigurative movements collapsed. Second, I wish to uncover lessons that have relevance for advocates of Earth Democracy as we struggle to create the foundations for an ecological society from the shell of the old.

Speaker Biography

Peter Burdon is a Senior Lecturer at the Adelaide Law School. His PhD won the Bonython Prize and a University Research Medal for best original thesis. It will be published as part of the Routledge 'Law, Justice and Ecology' series.  Since 2005 Peter has worked with Friends of the Earth Adelaide in the Clean Futures Collective. Peter also sits on the Ethics Specialist Group of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and on the management committee of the Environmental Defenders Office (SA). Peter lives in the Adelaide plains with his beautiful wife, dancing daughter and baby boy.