

Statement by Maurice Schuhmann

(Translated from the German by Marcel Suter)

Good evening.

Thank you very much for the invitation to this memorial event for Murray Bookchin—and also to all the speakers who spoke before me. I am pleased and honored to have this opportunity to say a few words about him. I don't think it would be in his spirit if we were to stop here at a mere tribute to him and his work. Bookchin held a view similar to that of Friedrich Nietzsche—he did not want fans, followers, or devotees, but rather sought comrades-in-arms on the path toward a socio-ecological society.

Accordingly, he did not view his works—including *Ecology of Freedom*—as definitive, but rather as a basis for discussion that could be built upon—and that must also be adapted to the specific situation at hand. His ideas and concepts are not set in stone; they are merely a few fixed basic principles that must be upheld.

Bookchin himself wrote in the preface to his *Ecology of Freedom*:

Moreover the reader is challenged to fill out themes that were only partly developed or hinted at in earlier works. Hence the reader is invited not only to participate with the author on various levels of analysis but in a very real sense to engage in an active authorial role, in which he or she continually raises and strives to answer new questions that continue to emerge in periods of rapid social change.

My aim is to show to what extent Bookchin's ideas have been further developed in utopian science fiction novels. Specifically, I am focusing on:

- Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*
- Herbert Callenbach's *Ecotopia*.

I believe that Bookchin would be particularly receptive to the utopian element. In his work *Ecology of Freedom*, he repeatedly refers to utopian thought and thinkers—not least Charles Fourier and William Morris. Both works—Le Guin's and Callenbach's—deal with realistic utopias; in other words, they do not present us with a land of milk and honey. In their utopias, they show us what a socio-ecological society might look like, but also what problems might arise in the process. These utopias can serve as models for us to explore this societal utopia.

Due to time constraints, I can only touch on this briefly here, but I hope it might inspire you to reread the relevant texts from the perspective of social ecological approaches.

I'd like to begin with Ernest Callenbach, whose book *Ecotopia* owes its title to Bookchin. In 1975, inspired by classics of socialist science fiction—such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000–1887*—a science fiction novel set in America. Twenty years earlier, part of the United States had seceded from the U.S. and established a new social order.

A well-developed public transit system has replaced private transportation; recycling rates are high; the economy has been restructured around a system of production cooperatives; and the political organization is based on decentralization. At the same time, this world is not perfect. For

instance, the vice of cigarette smoking still exists, and gender equality has not yet been fully achieved.

Six years after the publication of this novel in 1975—for which Callenbach founded his own publishing house—he published a guide to ecological living, *The Ecotopian Encyclopedia* (1981), in which he shared concrete tips for an ecological lifestyle, as well as a sequel to *Ecotopia* (1982).

The second novel, *The Dispossessed*, was written by Ursula K. Le Guin, who later wrote the foreword for a collection of Bookchin's essays—*The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy*. She wrote it in 1974—and it was even published in the GDR in 1987 with a foreword by the old Stalinist Arnold Schölzel. In the novel, she contrasts the two planets, Anarres (symbolizing anarchism) and Urras (capitalism), which represent different economic systems. Anarres exhibits elements of what Bookchin discusses in detail in his *Ecology of Freedom*.

As in Callenbach's case, this utopia is not perfect. Anarres is characterized, among other things, by an economy of scarcity due to a lack of resources, as well as by new problems in social organization—particularly regarding the relationship between the individual and society. In her novel, of course, it is not only Bookchin who served as a source of inspiration—in short, there are three currents that influenced her thinking: Taoism, feminism, and anarchism.

These novels can help us reflect on Bookchin's ideas, identify the blind spots, and also develop our own new ideas—based on the body of work Bookchin has left us.

I'd like to conclude with the words of Erich Mühsam from his poem "Der Tote" (The Dead Man):

If a struggle was worth the laurel wreath,
spare death the offering,
but take the dead man's sword!
Fight the battle to the end!

I believe that Bookchin's struggle was worth the laurel wreath.

Thank you very much for your attention.