

Radical Human Ecology

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“Energy, Agriculture, Patriarchy and Ecocide” by Thomas Lough is radical human ecology. It is radical in the sense that it is provocative, disquieting, and likely to raise the hackles of some readers. It is also radical in the deeper sense that it is an analysis of root causes of ecological problems and inequality. It is an important contribution because it examines both power and energy — both social forces and ecological processes. Nearly every reader will find something with which they disagree. But I submit that in understanding why you disagree with Lough, either in detail or overall, you will be prompted to think carefully about your own assumptions and the deductions you make about the character of the modern world and our history. This is the kind of thinking a Human Ecology Review Forum is intended to provoke.

Lough is a pioneer in human ecology and environmental sociology. Some of the ideas presented here he first began to explore three decades ago, when very few sociologists were thinking about the environment. In the late 1960s, Kent State University was an incubator for human ecology. Lough, along with Owen Lovejoy, Bud Shane and Gene Wenninger, worked from the perspective of sociology and anthropology. Their work was aided by engagement with an active environ-

mental movement and by colleagues in ecology who were able to cross disciplinary lines. Past-SHE president Richard Borden was completing a Ph.D. in the Psychology Department. I was an undergraduate pursuing a self-created interdisciplinary major. Many other students were doing work in what would come to be called environmental science. Unfortunately, the killings at Kent State in May 1970 and the punitive reaction of the state government crippled many intellectual endeavors at the university, and what might have been a vibrant garden of human ecological work never blossomed. But many of us continue to be inspired by those early insights and efforts at cross-disciplinary synthesis. This paper is the result of Lough’s ongoing struggle with difficult problems.

Three distinguished thinkers offer commentary on Lough’s analysis. The exchange of ideas and criticisms is enlightening and stimulating. As editor of the Forum, I have edited the contributions, hoping to preserve the character of the arguments while shortening the texts to fit within a resource constraint — the number of pages available. In particular, readers should note that Lough’s original essay offers much more detailed arguments and many examples that could not be included here.