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"Distributional Obstacles to International Environmental Policy: The Failures at Rio and Prospects after Rio"

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Martinez-Alier, J. "Distributional Obstacles to International Environmental Policy: The Failures at Rio and Prospects after Rio." *Environmental Values* 2, no. 2, (1993): 97–124. doi:10.3197/096327193776679936 .

The concept of "sustainable development" as used by the Brundtland Commission was meant to separate environmental policy from distributional conflicts. Increases in income sometimes are beneficial for the environment (for instance, they allow the use of domestic cooking fuels which in some ways are less damaging to the environment), but higher incomes have meant higher emissions of greenhouse gases, and higher rates of genetic erosion. In the aftermath of the Rio conference of June 1992, this article analyses some unavoidable links between distributional conflicts and environmental policy. Often, environmental movements have tried to keep environmental resources and services outside the market, but there are now attempts to establish property rights on, and to give money values to environmental resources and services, such as agricultural genetic resources and the CO2 absorption facility provided by the oceans and new vegetation. European 'green' proposals to impose an "eco-tax," and proposals from India to create a world market for CO2 emission permits are considered. The issue raised by the growing Third World agroecology movement, of payment of "farmers' rights" for in situ agricultural biodiversity is discussed. The article includes a short discussion of the North American free trade agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico and the USA, in so far as it involves so-called "ecological dumping," i.e. trading at values which do not include environmental costs. In the last sections, the article asks how prices in ecologically-extended markets would be formed, how much such prices will depend on distribution, and how much (or how little) such payments would change distribution of income. Environmental movements of the Poor are faced with the dilemma of keeping environmental resources and services out of the market, or else asking for property rights to be placed on them.

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