

# **Radicalizing Democracy**

Murray Bookchin

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## Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?

K.I.O. Interviews Murray Bookchin

*Murray Bookchin is the author of numerous books and pamphlets . His most famous include **Post-Scarcity Anarchism** and **The Ecology of Freedom**. His ideas have deeply influenced some members of the **Kick It Over** collective This interview was conducted at a conference on community economic development in Waterloo Ontario in early 1985. Thanks to Steve H. for his generous assistance. and to Murray B. for giving so unstintingly of his time. The interview was conducted by Ron Hayley and edited by Alexandra Devon.*

**K.I.O.:** *You've said in your writings that we are undergoing a change as far-reaching as the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture or from agriculture to industry. Could you elaborate on this and talk a bit about why this is occurring now?*

**Murray Bookchin:** The transformation I have in mind is cybernation, genetic engineering, nucleonics, and the sophistication of electronic technology in vast numbers of fields and the development of means of surveillance of a highly sophisticated form. The extent of the transformation is absolutely astonishing. What we find today is a totally immoral economy and society which has managed to unearth the secrets of matter and the secrets of life at the most fundamental level. This is a society that, in no sense, is capable of utilizing this knowledge in any way that will produce a social good. Obviously there are leavings from a banquet that fall from the table but my knowledge and my whole experience with capitalism and with hierarchical society generally is that almost every advance is as best a promise and at worst utterly devastating for the world.

So when one speaks of this combination which has occurred. only within my own lifetime, of plumbing the deepest secrets of matter, notably nuclear energy, and transforming matter into energy and bioengineering, I feel that we are confronted with a revolution of monumental importance and while this revolution is in the hands of capital and the state, its impacts upon society could very well be devastating. I cannot foresee that it will benefit human society or the ecology of our planet as much as is will be utilized for domination and hierarchy, which is what all technological innovation, to one extent or another, has always been utilized for.

The scope of the revolution can be delineated in many ways; first of all, cybernetics threatens to undermine the status of almost every kind of nonprofessional working-class, white or blue collar. I have every expectation that if cybernation is introduced, and it is only a matter of time until it

is, it will displace tens of millions of people. The industrial working class will be reduced at least in the major Euro-American centers, in all probability, to a stratum that is no larger numerically than that of the farmers today who number some four million in the U.S.

Already we are witnessing a decline of the American labor movement, the organized trade union movement from 1 out of 3 workers (and this is a diminishing labour force as well) to 1 out of 5. This also reflects the diminution of class consciousness even on the elementary level of trade unionism. I'm not speaking of syndicalism. I'm speaking of ordinary bread and butter trade unionism. I can also foresee perhaps a labour force that does not number more than say 17 million, after numbering very close to nearly 27 million, which will eventually go down to 10 million. will eventually go down to 7 million, will eventually go down to 5 million. Not to be able to foresee this is extremely myopic.

I still lived in a time when there were close to 30 million farmers and now we have only 4 million. This is a tremendous revolution, first of all in the way production occurs. It's a tremendous revolution in the class structure of this society.

Please remember very well that whether one was a Marxist or an anarchist, particularly a syndicalist, it was generally supposed that the population would become more proletarianized and that its power lay in the capacity to control the means of production. One of the primary concepts of anarcho-syndicalism, not to speak of Marxism, was the idea that the working class was the all-powerful force whose going on general strike would paralyze the system. But if so much of the working class is diminished numerically and so much of industry has become robotized, then concepts like the general strike become utterly meaningless.

That would be the first consequence—namely the diminution of labour as a powerful force. Another consequence would be the political problem this is going to raise. With so many "irrelevant" people, so to speak, what kind of political structure is going to deal with them? What are we going to do with tens of millions of people that have no place in this society? How are they going to be used? How are they going to be employed?

In the U.S. we still have a largely agrarian constitution built around republican principles that even the bourgeoisie did not want to accept. It benefitted from them but it didn't want to accept them. These were the principles formulated by Virginian aristocrats, based on land, who still had an agrarian perspective however much they were locked into capitalism. These are principles emerging from small farmers, compromises with the commercial bourgeoisie, not even the industrial bourgeoisie. This is the revered picture of American republicanism and American democracy. I could just as well include aspects of Canadian federalism. Such structures which we designate as "bourgeois revolutionary structures" are utterly incompatible with the future development of capitalism.

The checks and balances that exist in the American constitution and which we, as radicals, once regarded as very reactionary because they didn't give power to the people, are actually serving to check the executive power, and inhibiting the totalitarianization of American political life. Reagan was obliged to pull the Marines from Beirut. He cannot easily invade Nicaragua because of checks and balances that were once regarded as undemocratic but which now actually inhibit a highly authoritarian president from doing whatever he wants in the world.

By the same token, we still have a republican system with democratic features to it that make protest possible, that make a public opinion possible and which stand in the way of manipulating the population and controlling it, particularly a population that has faced a form of economic extinction. So I can see a tremendous tension building up, a crisis between the so-called "bour-

geois” past and the capitalist future. I don’t think we can overlook this enormous tension. That bourgeois past has libertarian features about it: the town meetings of New England. municipal and local control, the American mythology that the less government the better, the American belief in independence and individualism. All these things are antithetical to a cybernetic economy, a highly centralized corporative economy and a highly centralized political system that is necessary to manage that economy on a domestic and world scale, not to speak of a bureaucracy of enormous proportions which has an interest of its own in the consolidation of power. These contradictions have to be faced; they have an extremely radical potential and somehow or other we have to deal with them.

**K.I.O.:** *In some of your writings, you, and some of your colleagues talked about how each mode of production, to borrow the Marxist terminology, tends to create a certain epistemology or way of looking at the world. Are there any other ideological trends commensurate with this economic change that are worth commenting on briefly?*

**Murray Bookchin:** Well, the most important one is the invasion of the commodity as an epistemological outlook into ways of thinking. This expresses itself in expressions such as “I’ll buy that idea,” “What is the bottom line?” or “I’d like some feedback.” These expressions are not to be viewed light-mindedly. They’re not just idiomatic attempts to conform with systems theory and cybernetics. They really reflect a business mentality and a cybernetic mentality that is very significant from an epistemological point of view.

The modern corporation is a system and the way it’s diagrammed on flowcharts is in terms of feedback and it’s not accidental that systems theory has now become almost imperialistically pervasive in our thinking. We use its language: feedback, input, output. We don’t have dialogue any more from the Greek word *dialogos*, *logos* meaning mind as well as speech. We use information in terms of data, not in terms of giving form to something. We think now in terms of typologies (according to the dictionary definition, the doctrine or study of types or symbols - ed.) instead of processes. So we develop flow diagrams and we lay out patterns which are philosophically at odds with the idea of a changing society. We think more in terms of a dynamic equilibrium of a given society than the dialectical concept of a changing, self-transforming and self destructive economy in which the seeds of self destruction are built into the society.

This type of logical and cybernetic mentality reveals an accommodation with the status quo. It’s considered a given that we’re going to have corporations – how are we going to make them more efficient or effective? And where they are destructive, how to make them more destructive; where they are pernicious, how to make them more pernicious. And that has profoundly affected not only our language but inasmuch as so many thoughts are formed by language, our very ability to think. We need a real cleansing of the language or else our revolutionary thinking is bound to be perverted by this mentality. Already, we have writers like Jürgen Habermas who uses typologies and flow diagrams. This man professes to be a Marxist, but he’s totally broken in my opinion with even the dialectical mentality of Marxism which is built around the idea of an immanent development in which decay is latent in any social order. The typological approach sees no decay, sees merely layout and here information is really the form, not only the data that is supplied in laying out a social structure. You assume the social structure to be static and, from that, the main thing is to examine the internal workings as though society were an engine. And all you have to do is talk about whether the parts are working efficiently or whether you can improve the parts, technologically, so that you live within the status quo as a matter of habit without ever knowing that you are doing so.

**K.I.O.:** *What you're talking about seems connected with the whole trend towards an information-centred economy. It's something that puzzles me. It was always assumed, in the past, that the bottom line in economics is the production of real goods and services, real wealth. Now it seems that so much of what goes on economically is the purchasing, sale, and processing of information. I wonder if you could comment briefly on what this means economically, why it's happening now and how it relates to more traditional economic processes.*

**Murray Bookchin:** It's interesting to me that you said the "bottom line." I'm not being critical. I'm just showing how much we say these things without being conscious of the extent to which we operate within the "paradigms" and the typologies of capitalism.

We are going to produce commodities. What we're merely saying is that what we call "information" is also a commodity, and it's assumed exaggerated importance. But information is not merely merchandisable, it's used to produce. So, I do not see that we've entered an information age as much as I think we are learning how to accumulate information for all kinds of manipulatory purposes, be they economic, political, or psychological.

I resist the use of the word "information" as I resist the use of the word "deindustrialization". I think what they're doing is cybernating the economy and the economy will produce goods, a very substantial proportion of which will be military. In the United States, you're not deindustrializing as much as reindustrializing in a new way. The Americans are turning the economy into a war economy. Its greatest product consists of missiles, rockets, satellites, space technologies, weaponry, and everything else is being geared around that. They're ready to let the Japanese, the Asians, generally, produce the textiles and let the Mexicans and Third World peoples produce the blue collar type industrial goods of traditional capitalism. They'll always maintain enough of that in America, by the way, in order to support the arms industry or at least to meet their minimal needs.

**K.I.O.:** *There's a lot of economic polarization going on with the trend towards cybernation but, to tell you the truth, I would have thought it would have gone further, in the sense that a lot of people still have a lot of money in North America. Does that come from exploitation of the third world, as in the trend away from the pauperization of the working class towards affluent consumerism? What's going to happen now that a lot of people are becoming economically redundant? Will they be maintained artificially as consumers or will they be pauperized?*

**Murray Bookchin:** I can't foresee what they will do. It's beyond my life span, beyond my time, beyond my era. I can only offer various possibilities. They can militarize the whole society in which every stratum of society will be, essentially, whether in uniform or not, working for the military. They may have to initiate some systems of birth control. I'm not suggesting genocide, but some way of diminishing the population.

They may create a two-tiered society and economy in which there will be the very affluent and the others will fend for themselves.

There's a futurama called Blade Runner, which is the most realistic futurama I've ever seen, at least in terms of what the future may look like. You have a split-level economy in society, the privileged living in staggering high-rise buildings while down in the streets you have squalor and catch as catch can, a lumpen proletariat. Bioengineering plays a very important role. One way or another they'll have to have a highly controlled society; that much I'm convinced of. How totalitarian or authoritarian it will be is hard to foresee.

**K.I.O.:** *One of the most disturbing things for me is that, both in terms of liberatory forces as well as some of the things you've described, it has never felt it harder to predict what's happening or what the different tendencies are. The situation is so contradictory.*

**Murray Bookchin:** Yes. I know. because capitalism is restructuring its entire class base. Capitalism was never a pure system. We still don't know what mature capitalism is, assuming it will be capitalism if it becomes mature. The capitalist societies of the 19th century had a vast number of preindustrial features. Admittedly, in industry you had capitalism but once you left the immediate industrial sector you went back into the neighborhoods which were really pre-capitalist and pre-industrial. You went into family farms and extended families. You didn't have shopping malls or supermarkets but small family retail establishments.

Now, and especially since the 1950's-and remember that I regard the second World War as a tremendous turning point in the history of humanity, not just the history of capitalism-when you go back to your home you go back to immediate media control in the form of television. You're wired up to Betamaxes and VCR's. You have telephones. You have nuclear families or singles living in high rises. You have shopping malls. You have automobiles. And capitalism invades your life in the language that you use. in the relationships you establish. Capitalism has, more or less, come into its own and we're beginning to see something of what mature capitalism is like, or, at least we are seeing the beginnings of a mature form of capitalism in contradistinction to the earlier capitalist system which was still very mixed with pre-industrial, semi-feudal-type patriarchal forms.

I'm not saying that the earlier society was better, but I'm saying that at least the spirit of rebellion could be nourished by community networks, by discourse in which you were relatively free of the mass media and the educational system to an extent that many young people today cannot even imagine. The revolts against capitalism that occurred memorably, whether you look to Russia in 1917 or Spain in the 1930's - and there were other revolts all along the way - were really the work of peasants in overalls. The revolutionary workers' movement was really a peasant movement in overalls. These people were people who existed in the tension between two cultures. Even in the 1930's it was conceivable because people lived in the tension of two cultures, one pre-capitalist and pre-industrial and the other one industrial and capitalist.

So the pure working class is a fiction. The hereditary working class is a fiction. In fact wherever the working class became hereditary it fed into the system. This was most noticeable in Germany where there was never a chance for a workers' revolution anyways. Rosa Luxemburg notwithstanding. And Rosa Luxemburg understood that there wasn't a chance of a successful workers' revolution in central Europe.

And to this day when one talks of revolutions, one talks of national revolutions of peasant populations. So the revolt against capitalism usually occurred among classes that were alien to capitalism to begin with. We named them workers because they happened to be in the factories, but we forgot that they were only one step away from the village. This was the case in Russia. This was the case in Spain. This was the case, to a great extent, in France during the Paris Commune of craftsmen and artisans. It was not the industrial workers who guided the Commune but the old *sans culottes* (*literally breechless, republicans of Parisian lower classes in French revolution. according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary*) of 1789-1794.

Even the miners today in Britain still live in villages: they're not the London proletariat, which has been remarkably unsympathetic to their strike. That working class is disappearing completely. It's becoming extinct, and it's a real question of whether or not the workers - industrial

proletarians, organized in the mass production industries that Marx so admired - were ever revolutionary, if they ever were capable of being revolutionary as a class, not as working people. Working people may become radicalized. What I'm talking about is the view that the proletariat, compactly unified as a class, within the womb of capitalism, will destroy the capitalist social order through the very extension of capitalism. In fact the very extension of capitalism is destroying exactly that class which exhibits the only good promise of any kind of revolutionary, or at least insurrectionary, opposition to capital.

**K.I.O.:** *There are some interesting developments going on in science and philosophy (specifically in biology), new ways of analysing cooperation in nature. There's talk of a paradigmatic shift and new ways of analysing things in philosophy. For example, David Bohm has written a book on the theory of "implicate order". It almost seems as if all these little pieces are trying to pull together and create something new, but what are the prospects of that happening?*

**Murray Bookchin:** Well, I believe that it is essential, first of all, to develop a grounding in something more than public opinion, notably the idea that capital punishment is good on Tuesday because 51% of the people are for it or it's bad on Wednesday because 51% of the people are against it. This relativistic ethics is totally lacking in any substance or meaning. So I think ethics has to be grounded in something that's objective. The Greeks tried to do it by basing it in nature and what they thought was some concept of natural law or nature philosophy.

Ecology is beginning that project again - looking for something in which to objectively base a concept or the good, of the virtuous - some criteria of what constitutes right and wrong that is not merely subject to the vicissitudes of "What's good for me is good for me and what's good for you is good for you (a purely functional and privatistic morality)."

I have developed in my own writings an approach to ethics which is the very opposite of the Victorian conception of nature. The Victorian conception of nature was that nature is a realm of cruelty - as though nature had any morality - that nature is stingy, that nature is blind-mute and necessitarian-and that society is the realm of reason, and of freedom. The necessitarian concept of nature is that technology is the realm of emancipation, in contrast to the scarce resources or stinginess of nature. The ecological approach, on the other hand, says that nature is neither moral, nor cruel, nor any of these things. On the contrary, nature is fecund (*prolific, fertile, fertilizing* - ed.), ever innovative, a realm of chance and complexity, of ecosystems that succeed one upon the other. And you can grade, so to speak, society out of nature and you can develop an ethics that is continuous with nature.

I can go into that in very great detail, and it would require a whole separate discussion to indicate how one can overcome the dualisms that exist between mind and body between society and nature, in which the two are placed in opposition to each other. What markedly distinguishes a human society from an animal and plant community is that you don't have institutions that make it possible for Nicholas the II to become Czar of Russia, even though intellectually and psychologically he wasn't equipped to run a post office, or for Louis the XVII to become anything more than an ordinary locksmith and have control over the destinies of millions of people.

So the distinction between society and animal and plant communities must be made, but I can see how, through the mediation of a mother-child relationship (why only mother-child?-ed.), society begins to take root in the protracted infancy of the young. Here you develop sociation. This is a distinctively human attribute which leads ultimately to the consolidation of family relationships, initially around the mother, and after extending to society at large. So the origins of society



are not each against all as Hobbes would have contended or as many "rugged individualists" do. The origins of society are above all in cooperation, in participation and in sharing and caring.

So I think these dualisms can be overcome through historical perspective. Mind cannot be separated from body because mind emerges from body. In fact, there's a natural history of development of mind from simple, reactive cells to nerve networks and the development of complex nerve systems, and finally to different forms of brains and their integration.

So I don't find it necessary to deal with a chasm between mind and nature because I see mind emerging from nature. There's no need to work with a dualistic conception. My image of nature is not one of stingy, cruel, blind nature that has to be conquered but, on the contrary, a fecund nature that forever gives rise to greater complexity and, in giving rise to ever greater complexity, opens up new evolutionary pathways in which animals and plants, however germinally (and I don't want to impute anthropomorphically will and choice-but something like will and choice) participate in evolutionary development. So that you don't have merely natural selection. What you have is the participation of species in their own evolution. Evolution is an active process that comes as much from the species themselves as from genetic chance or mutations.

All of which leads us to the idea that germinal freedom emerges from nature. Not freedom as we know it, where we exercise choice, will, and conscious decision, but a germinal freedom in that opportunities are created in which animals participate in their own selection and in some sense select themselves for survival. It's not only a question of survival in nature, it's a question of development and growth and complexity. Well, from that standpoint, I can already begin to see that freedom is a theme in evolution no less significant than complexity; that the development of a nervous system is a theme in evolution; that consciousness or the movement toward consciousness is a theme in evolution, and that animal and plant evolution grades into social evolution. So it is out of that that I very strongly feel a ground is created for ethics. I'm not saying nature is ethical. We are ethical. But the grounding for an ethics can be explored: freedom is a theme in the evolution of life. It's not just an idealistic goal.

What disturbs me about many of the eco-philosophies that are emerging now is that they are structured around systems theory. I regard systems theory as very valuable, but it's largely reductionist and I've already stated some of my criticisms of systems theory - it's really a corporate theory in some respects. Which is not to say that systems theory is erroneous, provided it simply colonizes a terrain which lends itself to systems analysis. But to imperialize it and say that it is the totality of everything is as unsettling to me and disturbing as to claim that passive-receptive epistemology or Taoism is the alpha and omega of eco-philosophy.

What I'm beginning to see is many well-meaning ecologists making use of systems theory as their methodology and their paradigm, using the passive receptive mentality of: "Don't interfere - lay back. Let nature go on its own. Any type of technology is interfering with nature." I believe that human beings can self-consciously intervene in nature without trying to dominate it. They can act as products of nature, as self-conscious nature, able to facilitate the evolutionary process of complexity and spontaneous development going along with the grain, so to speak, of natural evolution.

So my eco-philosophy, if I may use that word, is somewhat different from many of the other eco-philosophies that are around. What's important is that people feel the need for an eco-philosophy, and it's not coming from the philosophers, it's coming from the scientists - oddly enough. They need it, and it's ironic that philosophy, which denigrates nature and regards it as archaic, is now confronting a scientific community that is increasingly turning to philosophy or

making up its own philosophy. And if we can't make up a radical philosophy, then you might get very reactionary ones, including fantastic ones - like "blood and soil" and the "selfish gene", and like the views expressed in E O. Wilson's *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*.

**K.I.O:** *One of the interesting things that a friend was telling me is that many of the "new age" and feminist spiritual communities of the 20's in Germany went along with the Nazi's mysticism.*

**MURRAY BOOKCHIN:** That troubles me immensely since I have a great deal to do with Germany and I've done a lot of reading into their past. The attempt has been also to impute that tendency to the Greens in Germany and I regard that as grotesque simplification of what happened in Germany. For one thing the *Vandervogel* divided completely. Some elements went to the fascists and others went to the socialists. Some became reactionaries and some became revolutionaries.

**KIO:** *What was the Vandervogel?*

**MB:** The *Vandervogel* was "wandering birds". It was a youth movement that developed earlier on in the 20th century which was suffused with the romantic love of nature, collective living, living close to the natural world, trying to discover within oneself intuitive sentiments and an aversion to capitalism. It's very one-sided to see in these movements nothing more than a drift towards an organicism - a people's community mentality that must lead to fascism with its blood and soil mythos. By no means did such a movement have to go in that direction and by no means did the movement consistently go in that direction. Many people in the *Vandervogel* movement were later to feed into the nature philosophies of Marxists like Ernst Bloch or into essentially anarchists like Gustave Landauer. They didn't all become Nazis.

In fact, Nazism grew out more of the 1st World War French comradeship of soldiers in battle. That's what Hitler really regarded as community, a community of warriors in the trenches. Most tried to avail themselves of the organic drift in German thought and in German poetry and in the German romantic tradition, even going back as far as Holderlin and Hegel and Schelling, but Hitler himself was a brute and he used anything he could find including, and may I say this very markedly, socialist ideas. The Nazi flag was a red flag with a swastika on it, just as Mussolini adopted the black shirt because of the popularity of anarchism in Italy. They were called "blackshirts" The choice of the black shirt was an attempt to identify with the syndicalist tendencies of Italian workers and anarchist sentiments, so what does that mean, that anarchism leads to fascism? I can give a better case of the fact that socialism and social democracy leads to fascism than the fact that the German romantic tradition led into fascism.

Hitler called his party the National Socialist German Workers Party. They used the expression of the social democracy, 'un camerade'. They used the mass mobilization techniques of social democracy. In fact Hitler was boggled when he first came to Vienna by the great serried ranks of workers marching with red flags in Vienna and was inspired by that to finally create the whole theatre for the Nuremburg rallies. His program was anti-capitalist. He adopted the language of the socialist movement. Shall I now say that Marxism and fascism are equivalent?

**KIO:** *One could.*

**MB:** I don't believe that Marx was a fascist. I don't think he was trying to lay the groundwork for fascism. By the same token I don't believe that Schelling was a fascist or that the *Vandervogel* movement was laying the groundwork for fascism. This is utter nonsense. Besides Hitler was cynical about all of this. He used every idea he could find and patched it together into an eclectic hodge-podge and within the Nazi Party, this produced a split led by Gregor Strasser. He split the Nazi Party and attacked it for accommodating itself to Prussian Junkers and the capitalists,

and demanded that the party follow through on a social program. Of course Hitler purged the stormtroopers because the bourgeoisie and the Junkers were afraid of this strong trip or movement which was committed more to the socialism than the racism and blood and soil mythology of fascism.

So this is pure rubbish. Why don't they remember the extent to which you can suck Hitler out of socialism and even Mussolini out or anarchism? Mussolini regarded Proudhon as a teacher. I'm not saying that anarchism or socialism led into Nazism. But I also insist where do people get off claiming that the German romantic movement or the German *Vandervogel* movement and the love of nature movements in Germany fed into Nazism? Why are they so selective? Why don't they look at their own ideologies and find the extent to which these feed into fascism, and how much more compelling a case can be made for that? It infuriates me because the German Greens are being guilting all over the place because of their ecological perspective. And I think that this is the crudest kind of, not only reductionism, but vulgarization of the extremely complex history of Germany and of the extremely complex role that communitarian and ecological outlooks have played in the politics of the 20th century.

**KIO:** *In North America the Green movement seems to be a mixed bag. I know that in Canada, and this is true elsewhere, there are a hell of a lot of careerists who get attracted to Green politics like flies to a corpse. And there are a lot of technocratic drifts within it too. What do you see emerging in North American - or more broadly in the world - around the Green movement? What accounts for its complexity and its divergencies?*

**MB:** Let me first of all explain what I mean by Green politics because I don't mean parliamentary politics and I don't believe in capitulating to the state or trying to operate within it. That is a great mistake. I believe in a libertarian politics. What I'm saying basically is that anarcho-syndicalism can no longer suffice to explain and to mobilize the forces today that will change capitalism and in my opinion hopefully rid us of this system entirely.

What do I mean by politics? I go back first of all to the Greek meaning of politics. I'm not talking of statecraft; statecraft is operating as a party within the state with the view toward having control of the state. When I use the word politics, I go back to the original Hellenic meaning of the word polis, the Athenian polis.

I beg people not to remind me of what I already know; it was patriarchal; it was militaristic; it included a slave society and it was also often very parochial. When I talk of politics in the Athenian sense, I talk of the best features, the fact that citizens participated in a face to face democracy in Athens, made decisions, had a militia system, insofar as they were involved in anything military, brought their own arms and had a system of rotation. These are all libertarian notions. So when I talk of politics, I talk of politics in the sense of polis and community, decentralized, confederal, built around rotation, built around sortition and hopefully approximating consensus as much as possible - in which you have an active citizen body managing its own affairs. That is what politics means to me. When I talk of a libertarian politics, I mean literally that, a politics that is not only democratic but libertarian and structured around a decentralized society without private ownership, in which you have the collectivization and, above all, the municipalization of the economy.

I also believe that there has been a very marked failure to separate politics from statecraft and that, unfortunately, many very well meaning comrades have gotten the two confused; I think it is very important for us to separate the two. I would never have entered into the Peoples Front government as the CNT did in 1936. But, by the same token, I believe that on a local level, one

should try and create again, restore and recover community structures, neighborhood structures - citizens' councils and citizens' assemblies-and try to form a real underpinnings for managing the community. So, I would vote on the local but not on the national level.

I have a disagreement with the German Greens in that they take their activities in the German Bundestag seriously. I find that when they perform theatre out there it's amusing; I can be delighted by it but, if they are out to take over the German Bundestag I think that it is naive and I think at the same time it leads to the politics of collaboration with the social democrats and the liberals. That's not my politics at all. There are tendencies in the Greens that are very aware of that danger and really oppose it. Many of them are the more radical and libertarian tendencies among the fundamentalists in the Greens: I have great respect for them.

Today we cannot form a syndicalist movement in the factories for the fact the factories are disappearing, if not entirely, at least diminishing to a great extent and the workforce is being replaced enormously by machines; this is the locus classicus of socialist and anarchist revolutions. I have to ask myself what is the other sphere in which libertarians participate, and it has always been the communal sphere. Long before syndicalism emerged in the anarchist tradition, there was a communalist tradition which dates back to Proudhon and which appears in Kropotkin and I don't know why that's been so completely neglected. So if I'm to take that seriously and update it up into our own time and explore its logic completely, then I have to ask myself: what can I do to recover the neighborhood and the community'? How can I empower the citizens to take control of their community at the base grassroots level, not enter into the houses of Parliament, the Bundestag or the American Congress (as though you have a fat chance of doing it anyway and thank God we don't) [and] not to develop the bad habits of parliamentarism, but to try to create neighborhood assemblies such as we have in Burlington - town meeting type forms - councils in neighborhoods-confederate them, and confederate the communities into a dual power against the centralized state on the basis of libertarian tradition?

The democratic revolutions have been misnamed bourgeois revolutions. The French Revolution was not fought to establish capitalism, capitalism fed on the French Revolution; it used it; it opposed the French Revolution like sin. It was for a constitutional monarchy. Their model was England, not America. In the U. S., there was a tremendous conflict between the farmers on the one side and the commercial interests and aristocrats on the Atlantic seaboard, on the other side. Dan Shay's rebellion in 1787 clinched the new constitution and enabled the Articles or Confederation but the new constitution still retained its libertarian features.

I'm for democratizing the republic and radicalizing the democracy, and doing that on the grass roots level: that will involve establishing libertarian institutions which are totally consistent with the American tradition. We can't go back to the Russian Revolution or the Spanish revolution any more. Those revolutions are alien to people in North America. You can't translate Committees of Correspondence into Bolshevik Parties. You can't translate town meetings into Soviets. You can't translate a republican or democratic system or a republican system permeated by democracy into a centralized state or a constitutional monarchy or a proletarian dictatorship. You can't translate this republican system into a proletarian dictatorship, if you're a Marxist, on the one side, or into a syndicalist society, if you're on the other, especially at a time when the trade unions in America are dying out on just the bread and butter issues. I believe we have to start speaking in the vocabulary of the democratic revolutions. We have to unearth and enlarge their libertarian content. I see no other answer- strategically, tactically, politically, economically to the problems that we face today. We can't live in the past and simply repeat the traditional slogans of the great

workers' movements that are gone, and will not reappear again, in spite of Poland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia. They're not products of the enlightenment in the way the socialist and anarchist movements were in the 19th century. The latter came out of the French Revolution and out of the American Revolution.

Now we live under the shadow of the Bolshevik Revolution. The 20th century is simply living in the darkness of that Bolshevik success which was our greatest failure. It's given us the cold wars, paralyzed all radical movements. You take sides: one side of the cold war or the other. We have to spring that trap and we have to break out of it. Looking largely at where we were wrong, I might venture the opinion that capitalism is not a system that follows the old dialectical cyclical forms of emergence, then growth and then decay. Capitalism is a cancer. It has always been a cancer. It's the greatest disease society ever suffered.

The Luddites were really right, that doesn't mean that I want to go back to the stone age, but they were right all the time when they tried to stop modern machinery because modern machinery, in the hands of capitalism, meant the enslavement of society in the long run. In their day the [Luddites] showed more insight than we have ever given them credit for. The attempts on the part of the English squirearchy to keep the British farmers on the land and to keep them out of the hands of the capitalists – however self-serving they were – was at least something to put a brake on capitalism.

Capitalism has been permitted to run rampant; it was originally designated as progressive and, in its progressive phase, it was going to build up technology. It was going to create the proletariat which would make the revolution. In contrast to that, a rebellious peasantry is really staging all the revolutions we have today in the third world. Irony of ironies! Bakunin should be alive today to mock the Marxist paradigm.

Capitalism is a social cancer. It has always been a social cancer. It is the disease of society. It is the malignancy of society. And I do not hesitate to say that anything that could have stopped its development – short of something even worse than capitalism – would have been a desideratum. I have reflected upon many positions I have held in the past as a Marxist, and to some extent even as an anarchist, and I have recognized that two centuries of radicals have been misreading the history of the modern world. Just as the women's movement has had to go back thousands of years to recover where we went wrong with the emergence of patriarchy, so I realize where we went wrong with the emergence of capitalism. We went wrong hundreds of years ago. But we have been working with Victorian ideologies about the progressive role of capitalism, about the progressive role of technology, and the progressive role of the proletariat. All of these notions have been wrong, which is not to say, again, that I want to go back to the stone age. It is not to say that I am opposed to technology. What I am opposed to is the capitalist market society which I believe is vicious - a cancer in society from the very word go - that has always broken through where other societies, traditional societies which always cried to stop it, have decayed. It's a saprophytic organism - like a fungus which has only been able to grow and break through where traditional forms have been decaying, which has lived off the root of traditional societies. It has never been a wholesome illuminating light in the world today. This has caused me to reflect upon a hundred and fifty years of revolutionary thinking and to ask myself some very far-reaching questions.

[Now] I regard capitalism as destructive only in the sense that it will tear everything down (which is not what we [Marxists] mean by self-destructing; we thought that it would create forces in opposition to it and would hold back technological growth). On the contrary, capitalism has

gone mad technologically and it is promoting a technological growth that the world has never seen before; it's going out into outer space. But in addition, I see that the so-called *bourgeois* revolutions were not bourgeois revolutions. The French Revolution was sin to the bourgeoisie; it was a constitutional monarchist bourgeoisie which opposed the *sans coulottes*. In America the American Revolution horrified Hamilton, who cried to establish (and he was the dissenting voice of the American bourgeoisie) a monarchy and warned Washington to become the first King George. Washington refused, being the Virginian aristocrat he was, and insisted upon a republican system of virtue, and thus attested this development towards royalism in America. The constitution that was framed was framed, not by a rapacious bourgeoisie, but in great part by agrarian classes. Even if many of them were involved with capitalism, they were still agrarian classes, a yeomanry, as well as Virginia aristocrats who had non-capitalist values, however much they cried to contain the lower classes.

So now I realize that we have to elicit the libertarian dimension out of these revolutions, because I do not believe that the bourgeoisie existing now could ever make a Spanish revolution possible again. It wouldn't last six hours. Forget about four days. They'll come out with bazookas and missiles; they'll come out with their Green Berets, their radar and their bombers and wipe out everything in just a matter of days, just as they did in Chile, with not even that sophisticated an army. They could have settled the Vietnam war with hydrogen bombs if they had wanted to, if they were not concerned with public opinion or domestic opinion. But what are we saying when we say that? We say that their own republican institutions paralyze their operations, and their own democracy and republican institutions inhibit them from acting freely. Then they'll have to get rid of these republican institutions and democratic institutions; our job is to stop that, and to enlarge them and bring out their libertarian dimension on a municipal level and finally create a counter-force of an empowered citizenry on a local level and a confederal system of relationships. I'm not talking of parochial isolated cities, but of a confederal dual power that will oppose the centralized power in the name of the highest ideals of the revolutionary era, which spans from the English Revolution up to the Spanish Revolution. Are people prepared to think that far ahead and to re-evaluate this whole experience? Or am I going to be ten years behind or ten years ahead so that nobody can accept that? That is a dilemma I'm personally faced with when I voice these opinions.

The Greens in Germany represent a promising development not in terms of their intent to take power or function as a party. What is amazing about the German Greens is the factionalization going on over the various issues I'm discussing implicitly. They're not as conscious, I suspect, of these issues as I am. Rather they're not as conscious of these issues as I think they should be. But they intuitively feel that these are the issues they are debating, and the various factions inside the Greens have turned the Greens into the most radical movement imaginable; I mean, that I have seen in Europe or any place. When one talks of Greens in Canada or the U.S., remember that the Greens in Germany came out of an extraparliamentary movement and had probably reached its limits. How far can an extraparliamentary movement go? It either has to go into some kind of syndicalist movement and stabilize itself as the CNT did in Spain; or it has to go into insurrection and imagine a Germany in insurrection! So, they have to move somewhere, or else their extraparliamentary movement would dissolve back into social democracy or become demoralized, as so many extraparliamentary movements have in North America. So, if it has to move towards a political sphere, the question is what kind of political sphere will it move toward? Was it going to be authoritarian, liberal or libertarian? They chose a libertarian direction, by and large, and

now they're finding out whether or not that libertarian direction is going to be preserved with its rotation of representatives, and with its very close ties to the extraparliamentary movement. Or are they going to move into a strict statecraft parliamentary form? Those are the fights that are being fought out there.

In the U.S. and Canada, all this is coming from the top down. Six people get together and say, "Look, the German Greens are so successful." They don't know why. They don't understand that hundreds and thousands of people were brought into motion fighting nuclear reactors, fighting missiles, fighting citizens' initiative movements, involving many people who are closer to the Christian Democrats than the Social Democrats, and that the Greens came out of that movement. Here, without any social movement, they organize a party and they make it as authoritarian as possible, and they start dictating to the people what kind of parliamentary movement they're going to create. I think it's terribly important that libertarians initiate such developments on the local level or else this whole thrust will be taken over by authoritarians, or by Marxists who shrewdly take over quite frequently what we often initially start. So, I think it's very important for us to think these things out, and to talk them out, and to weigh them carefully, or else we'll be dreaming the old daydreams of Spain, and the Paris commune of 1848, or Bakunin on the barricades, or Kropotkin in Petrograd and, in the meantime, history will just pass us by.

**KIO:** *I was just wondering briefly what kinds of libertarian trends you have seen in Germany?*

**MB:** Well the most amazing things that I have seen in Germany are some of the people in the Greens and the people that I've encountered or spoken to, and the kinds of discussions that have taken place regarding the attempt to develop a libertarian political movement. I've seen this most notably among the Remer Greens and the city council of Frankfurt. They are fundis (as the more radical Greens are called) with a very strong libertarian proclivity who want to remain independent of the Social Democrats, and who are eager to develop their own libertarian form of organization with close connections with the extraparliamentary movement. A wonderful development has been the transformation of a Leninist/Maoist like Ebermann of the Communist League in Northern Germany and his colleagues who have undergone great transformations. And I've had discussions with them. One of them told me, "Two years ago, what you said would have been anathema, but now I agree with 90% of what you say," and they've largely abandoned all their Leninist principles, and have moved in a highly libertarian direction. These are, by the way, hardline Maoists who were in the workers' movement in Hamburg where you have shipyard workers, you know, real heavy proletarian Red Hamburg – which Hitler only visited once and said, "Damn Hamburg, if I could only get it out of Deutschland, I would be delighted." He would have wanted to surgically excise it. These were strongholds of the socialist and communist parties of the 1930's.

That has been terribly encouraging. There has been an elaborate network established in Germany through this extraparliamentary movement which is very encouraging, which I hope will act as a correction of the Greens. Let me emphasize that if the Greens go with the Social Democrats, they will follow a logic that is very tragic. They will lose their identity. A very important thing that I also learned is that politics is an education; it's not just power. The attempt to develop a libertarian politics means to educate people not to take power but to educate people to empower themselves. That's why I emphasize the local level not the national level. My concern is with the communalist, community oriented feel and I'm simply trying to follow out the logic of that as it applies to the 1980's.

**KIO:** *Hasn't city government become really stratified in the last ten years.*

**MB:** Yes, the state has appeared everywhere. The question now is to try to disengage cities and towns from the state by mutually confederating with each other and developing some sort of network where resources can be moved back and forth. I'm not looking for a stable situation where you have municipal government co-existing with the state government. I'm concerned with developing local institutions - neighborhood assemblies, neighborhood councils that will be thrown into dynamic opposition to the centralized state. My most important concern is to stop the centralization of economic and political power, just like the Luddites tried to stop industrialization, not because they were against machines, but because they were against wage labour and the factory system, and realized that it was threatening their way of life. By the same token, my concern is not to establish a municipal confederation which exists side by side with the powerful state. My concern is to see that the municipal level act as a brake upon the centralization of the state and ultimately lead to the abolition of the centralized state in a free municipal confederation of towns and cities and villages structured in a libertarian form.

You know this is an ideal that is ages old. It belonged to the early Swiss confederacy, not the present one. It was an ideal that existed in New England. Farmers in New Hampshire and Vermont and the upper valley tried to establish a republic of towns and cities during the American Revolution, and in the aftermath of the American Revolution against the federal centralized state. These are notions that Americans can understand and that have meaning in contrast with the old socialist notions of nationalizing the economy. Remember too that there is an economic program of municipalization, not just collectivization. The township should have control over the land; it should have control over the industries. Collectivization itself can lead many different directions. So, in Spain, the coordinating role of the trade unions was not without its centralistic features. Please let's not kid ourselves about the Spanish industrial collectives during the revolution in Spain. You can also have competition between collectivized industries in a market economy. Municipalization means the municipality controls it through neighborhood organizations or through town meetings.

So remember that I'm not only talking about a certain kind of libertarian politics. I'm also talking about municipalist economics. Many people think these ideas are new to me, but they're not. In the last issue of *Anarchos*, published in 1971, I wrote a piece called Spring Offensives and Summer Vacations. Those were the days in the 60's when you had spring offensives. And I mocked the idea that they went on offensives in the spring, then vacated for the summer and everything died. But what I advanced in that editorial - and I'm talking of ideas advanced almost 15 years ago - was the commune of communes based upon the American libertarian tradition that emerged out of the revolution. There I wrote that it's necessary for anarchists to intervene in local politics and create new kinds of local Structures - municipal structures such as neighborhood assemblies, town meetings, neighborhood councils - to take control of municipal governments and confederate them nationally and counterpose them to the centralized state. That all appeared in 1971 and someone wrote a reply to me stating that anarchists should never participate in any elections of any kind and criticized me for holding that view.

**KIO:** *So, Murray, are you saying that anarchists should run for city government?*

**MB:** No. I'm saying that city government as you call it, has to be restructured at the grassroots level. These governments will not really be governments in the traditional statist form. Therefore what anarchists should be doing is not hesitating to get involved in local politics to create forms of organization in which they may run once they've established these forms or, alternatively, running on a platform to establish these forms. There are two ways in which you can partici-



pate in the electoral process on a grassroots municipalist level. One way is to help create these forms, as we've tried to do in Burlington. We were the ones in Burlington who established the neighborhood planning assemblies and proposed the idea that led to the enabling legislation to establish them in the five wards in Burlington. We now have five neighborhood assemblies. It was not the socialists who proposed them. They took the credit for it, but they didn't propose them. So I'm saying there are two ways in which you can function. One is to work to create these assemblies; the other is to run, or have people run, or support people who will run with a view towards establishing these forms or organizations on a municipal level. But we have to libertarianize our communities to create and institutionalize grassroots democracy that can counteract the centralization of power, cooperatively and politically.

\* Writings by Murray Bookchin

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