Free Cities

Communalism and the Left

Murray Bookchin

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Creating Free Cities

What would a free municipality look like? What would its basic institutions be? What material, political, and cultural preconditions must be met before we can arrive at them, and who will be the agents for social change? What kinds of movements and political efforts are required to create them? These questions strike to the core of Murray Bookchin's political project, particularly as he refined it during the 1980s and 1990s. The immediate and ultimate aim of the political approach he advanced is to create free cities or municipalities, and as such it is meant to provide both a clear social ideal as well as a concrete political praxis.

By advancing libertarian municipalism, Bookchin hoped to see new civic movements emerge and claim control over their communities. Political involvement at the local level is necessary, he insisted, to guide and inspire a process of municipal *empowerment*. This process and the institutions it entails, he hoped, may provide a focal point for rallying progressive social movements to the common cause of political freedom in its most expansive sense. To a very large extent, creating free cities is about developing free citizens, in whose hands *power* over society should be squarely placed: it must reside in popular assemblies and not in bureaucracies, parliaments, or corporate boards. Libertarian municipalism is an attempt to create the political structures necessary for this shift in power. Democratized and radicalized, municipal confederations would emerge, it is hoped, as a dual power to challenge and ultimately replace the nation state and the market.

A lifelong radical and a fertile thinker, Murray Bookchin had been politically active since the 1930s; first in Communist parties, trade unions, and Trotskyist groups, then during the 1960s in the civil rights movement, urban ecology projects, anarchist groups, the radical student movement, and community groups; and later in the 1970s and 1980s in anti-nuclear movements and the early Green movement. Only in the early 1990s did his health preclude further involvement in practical political affairs, but he continued to write until the last years of his life. Bookchin's works spanned a broad range of issues, including ecology, anthropology, technology, history, politics, and philosophy. He started to write about ecology and urban issues in the 1950s, and in 1964 wrote his seminal "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought," the first definitive essay on radical social ecology. Later he was to refine his theories – through a corpus of more than 20 books – into a coherent body of ideas. Murray Bookchin died at the age of 85, on July 30, 2006. With his passing we lost one of the most challenging and innovative radical thinkers of the twentieth century.

Bookchin expressed his ideas on libertarian municipalism in a number of essays and articles, and advocated it in his lectures and talks. But no book has yet appeared that collects his essays on the subject. This collection of his late political essays, I am proud to say, helps fill that gap.[1] It should be seen, however, in relation to Bookchin's full-length book on civic development, citi-

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[1] The most comprehensive and accessible overview of these ideas is Janet Biehl's book *The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1998), a work that Bookchin himself often recommended as the best introduction to his political ideas.

zenship, and politics; *From Urbanization to Cities*.[2] When he republished this monumental work in 1992 he added the essay "The Meaning of Confederalism," and in a later edition, in 1995, further added "Confederal Municipalism: An Overview" as well as a new prologue. Bookchin was no academic, and he did not write for purely scholarly purposes; his aim with this work "was to formulate a new politics" and by appending these essays he showed how he meant to inspire a movement to give his ideas concrete reality.

In light of this, I initially intended this book to be an expanded appendix to *From Urbanization to Cities*, so that both together would constitute an overview of his political thinking. In my view his late essays, collected here, make his earlier works on urbanization, ecology, and revolutionary history even more relevant and tangible. Bookchin's essays from the 1980s and 1990s had tried to advance libertarian municipalism as an anarchist alternative, an effort that turned out to be problematical. Although for many years Bookchin called himself an anarchist, pioneering its concerns with ecology and with hierarchy, he had long had a troubled relationship with the anarchist tradition. After a bitter polemical struggle to defend what he considered to be its highest social ideals against individualists, workerists, mystics, primitivists, and autonomists, he got tired of "defending anarchism against anarchists," as he put it, and publicly disassociated himself from anarchism as such. He had spent much time and effort formulating and presenting libertarian municipalism as an anarchist politics, but anarchists, it turned out, were not interested in these ideas, and in fact the political idea of democracy is actually alien to anarchism. Several notions in anarchism inspired Bookchin, but his ideas about municipal government, direct democracy, and confederation could not be contained within an anarchist framework. Breaking with anarchism, he urged left libertarian radicals to embrace a new set of ideas, indeed a new ideology – he called it *communalism* – that could transcend all classical radical theories, both Marxist and anarchist. As an attempt to revive Enlightenment radicalism, Bookchin intended communalism to be a coherent ideological platform upon which we might develop libertarian ideas today and provide the Left with a politics.

For these reasons, I realized very soon that these essays expanded the purpose of the anthology; they gave a remarkably consistent overview of Bookchin's perspectives on communalism and its relationship to the Left in general. Taken together these essays not only provide an overview of Bookchin's political ideas but explain how his political ideas stem from his broader historical, philosophical, and theoretical perspectives. Although the subject matter may be libertarian municipalism and practical politics, their foundational analyses are profoundly social ecological, and their ideological perspective is basically communalist.

I chose the title *Free Cities* for this anthology because I think it stimulates our understanding of the historical impetus behind Bookchin's political project. In order to achieve its ideal of a rational and ecological society, libertarian municipalism is an effort to create free cities, with an emphasis on both these words. Bookchin would have insisted that we interpret *free* not simply as "independent," or "autonomous." Rather, we should understand *freedom* in its expansive political sense, as the collective expression of human self-recognition and consciousness. Similarly, cities should not be interpreted merely as spatial centers of population or trade. For Bookchin,

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[2] The book was originally published by Sierra Club Books (San Francisco) as *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* in 1987; republished by Black Rose Books (Montréal) in 1992 as *Urbanization Without Cities: The Rise and Decline of Citizenship*; and finally republished in a revised version as *From Urbanization to Cities: Toward a Politics of Citizenship*, by Cassell (London) in 1995. Despite the fairly dry titles, the book gives a vivid account of the emergence and meaning of politics, citizenship, and civic development.

the historic rise of *cities* brought humanity the kind of social framework needed to break out of the rigid tribal world and develop into truly social beings; such citification is a historical precondition for our notion of citizenship. The ideal of the free cities was a subject not only of great historical interest but one that gave meaning to the project for social and political emancipation. The question that occupied Bookchin was to what extent municipalities *could* become genuine arenas for political creativity, universalism, and freedom and thus give human society its most rational expression.

I also hope that the title *Free Cities* stimulates the reader to conceptualize the political ideas of social ecology in a tangible manner. How can we empower our communities and recreate them along libertarian lines? How can we democratically transform the political, cultural, and material conditions of our own towns, villages, and cities? Social ecology proposes a politics of remaking daily life not only by creating nonhierarchical social relationships but also by institutionally restructuring neighborhoods and cities. The solemn theoretical adherence of these essays to "civilizatory advances" and a "rational society" should not frighten the reader; libertarian municipalism is a concrete political practice. It is my genuine hope that this book encourages readers to consider how to revitalize their own communities, how we may remake our municipalities as great places to live – for all their citizens – and render them politically and socially free.

My choice of subtitle, *Communalism and the Left*, expresses Bookchin's wish to frame his theories in a communalist framework and to define their relationship to the Left. Bookchin explains in these essays the major achievements as well as the serious deficiencies of various traditional radical Left ideologies, such as Marxism, anarchism, and syndicalism. For one thing, both socialism and anarchism have ignored the need to develop a *political* approach in the classical sense of the term, a politics distinct from the State on the one hand and from the social sphere on the other. Communalism was for Bookchin an attempt to provide the ideological framework to resuscitate the greatest Left traditions and to formulate a libertarian politics.

The idea for this book germinated when I last saw Murray, a few months before his death. At the end of November 2005 Sveinung Legard and I visited Murray and Janet Biehl, his long-time partner and collaborator, in Burlington. During our stay we had lengthy political discussions and undertook a substantial interview with Murray, which turned out to be the last one he ever gave. At one point in our discussions, Bookchin mentioned that he hoped to see his writings on libertarian municipalism collected and published. I had already given this possibility some serious thought and had specific ideas about how to put together anthologies of his writings. For some time I had been translating his works into Norwegian, and had edited, anthologized, and published his political writings here in Scandinavia. But I had hesitated to suggest an English-language anthology, since English is my second language – an obvious shortcoming. Moreover, Murray had long benefited from the support of Janet's superior editing skills; for many years, she had carefully helped prepare his manuscripts for publication. Hence I was reluctant to offer my assistance. But at that time Janet was exhausted from the intense work of editing *The Third Revolution* and was in no position to undertake any new obligation of the sort proposed. I fervently wanted to see the anthologies materialize, and, emboldened by Murray's expressed wish, I offered to assist.

My specific suggestions were twofold. First, I would put together a small book consisting of some four essays that gave a rounded yet accessible presentation of social ecology, to be called *Social Ecology and Communalism*.[3] Then I would collect the more directly political essays in a second book that would comprise a comprehensive overview. Murray and I discussed these book projects in detail, and he gave me some manuscripts and notes for my work.[4] I assured him that I would do my very best to see that these books were edited according to his wishes, and he expressed his confidence by putting me in charge of their publication. As soon as I returned to Norway, I began to work on the books.

My own qualifications for preparing these books may not be obvious to the reader, as I not only live on the other side of the Atlantic from Murray but am not a native English speaker. But I have been involved with the ideas of social ecology and libertarian municipalism since the early 1990s. I first met Murray in 1996 and visited him many times thereafter, staying in Burlington for weeks and months, experiencing both his generosity and that of his family. Murray and I regularly had long telephone conversations throughout our ten years of friendship and cooperation. Whenever I made a decision to translate his works into Norwegian for publication, I always informed him of my choices, and I consulted him when I encountered problems. He thus became familiar with my editorial approach and abilities. When I started writing my own essays, he always read them carefully and gave me his comments. He was sometimes a stern critic, sometimes encouraging, but always his perspectives were challenging. Over the years we grew ever closer. After the Second International Conference on Libertarian Municipalism (held in Plainfield, Vermont, in 1999), I suggested the creation of an international journal to express a consistent communalist perspective. Murray eagerly joined the journal's editorial board, the last political group to which he belonged.[5] For its launch I wrote "Communalism as Alternative," a manifesto-like essay presenting the basic ideological views Murray had developed.

Editing the two anthologies was a way for me to continue our cooperation, as well as a way to show my gratitude for his intellectual generosity. Unfortunately Murray died only seven months after our meeting on the books, and he never had the chance to see either of them published. I nonetheless feel confident that *Free Cities: Communalism and the Left* has become what he wanted it to be. The essays gathered here are among Bookchin's last, and they give a good overview of his ideas at the end of his life. I genuinely hope that the reader will get as much intellectual stimulation and political inspiration from reading these essays as I have done from preparing them for publication.

Some of the essays in this anthology may already be familiar to readers who have followed Bookchin's work closely, but most of them are previously unpublished; they have been collected

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[3] This small book was published by AK Press in 2007.

[4] We also discussed his manuscript on philosophy, *The Politics of Cosmology*, which he wanted me to work on; he gave me a copy with instructions on how to edit it, and I gave him my promise that I would see to its publication.

[5] *Communalism* was first launched in October 2002 on the Internet. Apart from Murray Bookchin and myself, the other members of the editorial board were Janet Biehl, Peter Zegers, Gary Sisco, and Sveinung Legard. (At our first meeting, in August 1999, I was elected general editor.) Bookchin suggested the subtitle on its masthead – *International Journal for a Rational Society* – and took a great interest in the workings of the journal, although his declining health impeded him from playing a more active role. (The journal continues to appear, at www.communalism.net; now available in print.)

from letters, lectures, unfinished drafts, and manuscripts. I have tried to order them in a flowing presentation to give an overview of Bookchin's late political outlook. Since he died before witnessing the completion of this project, I think it is only decent to explain as fully as possible my editorial choices in creating *Free Cities*.

Generally speaking, in addition to doing regular editorial work, such as adding titles and subheadings, or doublechecking references, dates and names, I have tried to create a common style of presentation by making the notes, letters and unfinished manuscripts into proper essays. The book consists both of independent essays on specific political issues and of more general essays in which Bookchin often gives brief synopses of his basic political ideas. As a consequence, there is inevitably some overlap between the chapters, though I have tried to keep this to a minimum. In these essays Murray made recurring references to his basic works, *From Urbanization to Cities*, *The Ecology of Freedom*, and *Remaking Society*, and though I have trimmed down the number of references here, I would strongly advise the reader unfamiliar with these works to consult them. Sometimes Bookchin would discuss the same idea in several places, such as the distinction between *politics* and *statecraft*, or his tripartite distinction between the political sphere, the social sphere, and the State. Suffice to say, again, readers will deepen their understanding of these ideas by exploring them further in Bookchin's larger works.

I have also cut out some of the conceptual discussions Bookchin repeated over several of these essays: in particular his often-mentioned explanation that he is using the term *politics* in its classical Greek meaning, as the self-management of the *polis*, and his frequently repeated caveat that he is well aware of the historical shortcomings of ancient Athenian democracy in regard to slavery, xenophobia, and patriarchy. When Bookchin raises similar themes in different essays – say, on the issues of consensus, confederation, or government – I have tried to limit the repetition, either by removing sections or consolidating the discussion in one place, particularly in the previously unpublished writings. Generally I have omitted repetitions of similar arguments in different essays, but have left them intact when they approach an issue from a distinctive angle and thus serve to nuance his views. Here Bookchin was well aware of my general intention.

Whenever possible I have accommodated Bookchin's wish to update his essays according to the communalist perspective. This issue is of course most significantly related to his break with anarchism, a matter he explains in some detail in several of the essays.[6] To the extent that was appropriate, I have also updated some of the older essays. Similarly, when he appeals to a specific group (say, the Greens, with whom he worked with for a while) in a way that seemed outdated, I have tried to make the appeal more general (changing it to, say, "radical ecologists"). I thoroughly discussed all these changes with Bookchin and am making them here at his explicit request.

Whenever linking one paragraph to another required the addition of a transitional sentence, I have tried to make use of concrete expressions that Bookchin used elsewhere. To the best of my abilities, whenever I have had to revise paragraphs or move phrases, I have tried to preserve Bookchin's tone. If readers sometimes miss the characteristic musicality of his writings, it is not for lack of trying on my part.

The hardest part of putting together such an anthology, however, lies in deciding which essays to include and how to organize them. I can only hope that more of Bookchin's essays, lectures and

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[6] For Janet Biehl's account of this ideological break, see "Bookchin Breaks with Anarchism," in L. Gambone and P. Murtagh, eds., *Anarchism for the 21st Century* (Edinburgh and Oakland: AK Press, forthcoming). This essay was also published in *Communalism*, no. 12 (October 2007).

interviews will be made available in the years to come, to shed further light on his intellectual development, particularly during the last decades. Still, based as it is on my understanding of what Bookchin wanted to see published from the last years of his life, this book presents that work as honestly as possible.

The "Introduction" is cobbled together from notes that Bookchin gave me November 2005. When we were discussing this project, I told him that I would love to have him write an introduction to this book, as his earlier essays on libertarian municipalism needed contextualization in light of his recent break with anarchism. He then revealed that he had already started drafting such an introduction, and passed along to me his draft, along with a draft for a separate essay he had recently started writing. Both these drafts were in a woefully unfinished state, almost notes, and we agreed that they had to be focused to fit this specific anthology. To ease my work, I suggested we use the drafts in combination with a short piece Bookchin had written to introduce a recent Swedish anthology of his writings – a suggestion he approved.[7] I have thus extracted the core message of his drafts and spun them around the existing Swedish introduction. By further distinguishing his communalist approach from Marxism and anarchism, and by emphasizing the profound historicism of these ideas, I think this piece constitutes an appropriate introduction to the present anthology.

The next essay, "The Ecological Crisis and the Need to Remake Society," brings us directly to some social ecological conclusions on political radicalism, and situates the remaining essays in the context of social ecology. I chose this essay because I find it to be an accessible leadin to libertarian municipalism as a social ecological politics, in relation to the impending ecological crisis that besets us. I also like the fact that it briefly touches on Bookchin's criticisms of other radical tendencies in the ecology movement, criticisms that have made for defining debates. This essay was originally published as "The Ecological Crisis, Socialism, and the Need to Remake Society," in *Society and Nature* 2, no. 3 (1994), and has been edited only slightly to fit this anthology.

"Nationalism and the 'National Question,'" written in March 1993, was first published in *Society and Nature* 2, no. 2 (1994). It has long been one of my personal favorites among Bookchin's essays, and I am happy to include it here as it gives a solid historical argument not only against statism but also against nationalism. In this essay Bookchin explores the Left's historically ambivalent relationship to the "national question," and contrasts his ideas of municipalism and confederation to those of nations and states, precisely by the universal principles of democracy and human solidarity. The succinct "Nationalism and the Great Revolutions" was originally published as an addendum to the preceding essay, highlighting the universalistic spirit of the Enlightenme Bookchin's arguments against nationalism and statism are taken further in the next piece, which I have called "The Historical Importance of the City," and which consists of excerpts from a longer polemical essay "Comments on the International Social Ecology Network Gathering and the 'Deep Social Ecology' of John Clark," written in September 1995 and published in *Democracy and Nature* 3, no. 3 (1997). Here we are given forceful arguments for the *civilizatory* and *humanizing* aspects of the emergence of the cities – the tendencies that libertarian municipalism

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[7] This introduction was written on December 14, 2002, and has been known only to Scandinavian audiences. See Murray Bookchin, *Perspektiv för en ny vänster: Essäer om direct demokrati, moralisk ekonomi, socialekologi och kommunalism*, translated by Jonathan Korsár and Mats Runvall (Malmö: Frihetlig Press, 2003).

ultimately wants to recover and expand. I told Bookchin that I had long wanted to highlight some of the main issues in his polemics with John Clark, and I specifically suggested these excerpts. Frustratingly, many of his political adversaries have tended to deflect attention from the real ideological questions at stake; by including these excerpts, I hope to offer the basic yet crucial arguments. I suggested to Bookchin that I include this abridged version, but would not want to suggest that this version is better than the original, only that it better serves our purpose here. Neither would I want readers to ignore the fact that every sentence in this essay is meant as a direct or indirect criticism of Clark's position. Readers are strongly encouraged to read the polemic in full, which relates more directly to the actual points of contention and contains other important discussions as well.[8] Other essays from Bookchin's 1990s debates with anarchists are certainly also of interest, as they often give different emphases and nuances to his political ideas.

The 1990s debates over the nature of anarchism alienated Bookchin from the contemporary anarchist movement. Unfortunately he wrote no fundamental essays that explained his conclusions in great detail, although in retrospect we can see how *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* initiated his break with this ideology.[9] Many of the features of "lifestyle anarchism" that he criticized were ones that he later concluded were symptomatic of anarchism as such. Murray explained his reasoning in a letter to Peter Zegers and the editorial board of *Communalism* (in November 2001), in which he considers even the more social forms of anarchism to be basically egoist. He also developed some of these ideas in a letter to Hamish Alcorn, written on July 30, 1999, just before his public break with anarchism. With Bookchin's permission I have structured the essay "Anarchism as Individualism" around these two letters, incorporating as well some unpublished material from "Toward a Communalist Approach" and an early version of "The Communalist Project." Despite its brevity, I think this essay may shed light on Bookchin's reasons for breaking with anarchism – the political ideology with which he had been associated, and of which he had been a major representative, for four decades.

The next essay, "Anarchism, Power, and Government," is based on the appendix Murray wrote to "The Communalist Project," which he called "Anarchism and Power in the Spanish Revolution," published in *Communalism*, no. 2 (November 2002). I have expanded it with excerpts on the same subject originally from "The Future of the Left" and "Toward a Communalist Approach." As these essays were written around the same time and brought up very similar issues, I have knitted similar passages together. As such, I think this short essay contains one of his weightiest arguments against anarchism, focusing particularly on its inability to deal with real-life problems in periods of social change and revolution.

The two preceding essays make an interesting contrast with "The Revolutionary Politics of Libertarian Municipalism." Written as a video-transmitted speech that Bookchin presented to the First International Conference on Libertarian Municipalism, held in Lisbon in 1998, it was one of his last attempts to present his political ideas as a direct extension of the anarchist-communist tra-

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[8] In fact, the original essay should be read together with Bookchin's "The Role of Social Ecology in a Period of Reaction," in *Social Ecology and Communalism* (Edinburgh and Oakland: AK Press, 2007), pp. 68–76; "Whither Anarchism? A Reply to Recent Anarchist Critics," in *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left: Interviews and Essays 1993–1998* (Edinburgh and Oakland: AK Press, 1998), particularly pp. 216–46; and "Turning Up the Stones: A Reply to John Clark's October 13 Message," sent to the RA-list and available online at dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bookchin/turning.html.

[9] Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm?* (Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press, 1994).

dition. Here he tries to uphold the classical anarchist preference for communes, revolutionism, and federations, in order to rework and refine these ideals for changed social conditions: The speech was titled "A Politics for the 21st Century." I have removed dated references and some parts that overlap with the other essays included herein. I have also tried to update the essay according to Bookchin's expressed wishes, making minor changes concerning his ideological drift from anarchism to communalism, without changing any of its basic content. After this speech Bookchin gave up on his attempts to influence the anarchist movement from within, and, at the Second International Conference in Vermont the following year, he broke openly with anarchism as a theory and a movement. This essay contains his last important evaluation of the anarchist tradition from within, trying to emphasize its revolutionary, democratic, and socialist character. He later considered his efforts to have been an utter failure. Where he had earlier attempted to expand the federalist, cooperative, and municipalist trends within the anarchist tradition, he now tried to bring those valuable contributions into a new theoretical framework unburdened by the anti-social, anti-intellectual, and antiorganizational tendencies with which anarchism has always struggled.

The next essay, "The Future of the Left," is in my view the jewel of this collection, tying all the other pieces together and giving this anthology its necessary coherence and breadth. Here Bookchin assesses of the state of radicalism at the turn of the twenty-first century – not only the radicalism of the contemporary resistance against "globalization," but radicalism going back to the interwar period and twentieth-century revolutionary experiences. He takes a remarkably detached, yet engaged, look at traditional radicalism and its basic premises, specifically analyzing trends in Marxism and anarchism. Bookchin often spoke of this essay and finally showed it to me at our November 2005 meeting. The manuscript he handed over to me to edit had been written in December 2002. It was still unfinished (it actually ended mid-sentence) but was remarkably consistent in its reasoning. Although I have edited the essay, nothing of substance has been omitted, and though it broadens the focus of this anthology far beyond the collection of "strictly political" writings I had intended, it is this piece that contains Bookchin's most mature ideas. It is fully communalist, posing a set of challenging questions for our generation of radicals to consider, and even as a stand-alone essay it gives this book a scope that stretches far into the future.

We close with an essay that Bookchin wrote for *Communalism*. Originally written in July 2000 as "Communalism: An Overview," it was supposed to be revised for publication, but instead Bookchin wrote a completely new essay that ended up as the masterfully composed and theoretically challenging "The Communalist Project."[10] Even though the "Overview" essay was thus superseded, it contained so many interesting aspects that I always felt it deserved to be published in its own right. As a matter of fact, Bookchin himself returned to it in June 2003 and made some significant updates, and I have since taken out all the parts that overlap with "The Communalist Project." I think it is of great interest, not because it is a definitive exposition of communalism – it is not – but rather because it is so suggestive of such an exposition. In this essay we see Bookchin still struggling with his ideological break with anarchism, framing his presentation almost entirely as a polemic against prevalent anarchist notions – unlike "The Com-

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[10] This essay was originally published in *Communalism*, no. 2 (November 2002), and later included in *Social Ecology and Communalism*.

munalist Project" and "The Future of the Left," which stand out independently as a challenging ideological testament.

Taken together, the essays in *Free Cities* represent Bookchin's most recent ideas, particularly on political and ideological issues. In my view this anthology offers both a good introduction to his political ideas as well as solid overview of his communalist approach. Not only does it contain much previously unpublished material, it helps explain ideological issues that remained unresolved at his death, particularly concerning his ideological break with anarchism. It will be easy for readers familiar with Bookchin's writings to see how his distinct political ideas are educed from his broader theory of social ecology. For Bookchin, to advance libertarian municipalism meant to defend and build upon the ideals of the Enlightenment, which he considered the greatest tradition of social development. Based on communalism and social ecology, libertarian municipalism is a fundamental attempt to define a *political humanism* and to formulate and create a *rational* society.

I confess that preparing this manuscript for publication has not been easy, particularly since Bookchin passed away before seeing its completion. Despite the arduous task, I have nevertheless found it a pleasure to work with these wonderful ideas.

I would particularly like to thank Janet Biehl, who meticulously edited all of Murray's work in his last two decades before it saw publication. I would also like to express my gratitude to my close comrades Yngvild Hasvik and Sveinung Legard, since their support, patience, and advice have been indispensable in finishing this project.

At the end of this preface I would also like to properly thank Murray Bookchin for allowing me to work on these ideas, and for our ten years of cooperation and friendship. It has been a privilege to be associated with him; his intellectual vigor was always a source of great inspiration, and I have gained much from his genuinely sharing personality. However much I have enjoyed his warmth and generosity on a personal level, my gratitude above all is for his achievement in providing a future movement with such challenging ideas.

If this collection of essays contributes to contemporary discussions on what kind of political institutions and radical organizations we need today, it will have served its purpose. It is my genuine hope that readers will seek to familiarize themselves with Bookchin's ideas, here and in his other works, not as an academic exercise but as a way of preparing to change the world.

Eirik Eiglad

March 30, 2008

Introduction

These essays are my final assessment of some 80 years of social reflections on the twentieth century. In a very real sense, they are the product of a lifetime of study and political work, distilled from a remarkable era of revolutionary history that spanned decades of social upheaval, from the 1917 Russian Revolution to the closing years of the twentieth century.

I make no pretense to claiming that these essays resolve any of the crises that beset the people who lived out the century. It would be remarkable indeed to know even how to properly *define* these crises, still less to be capable of *solving* them. I do not claim to be able to answer all of the questions we face, but they must be considered – hopefully as a basis for future and creative discourse. The questions we ask and the answers we give are socially and politically defining. Taken together, they actually form the battleground for the future of social life, and our responses are the basis for how we constitute ourselves as social beings.

I would like to suggest that these essays be seen as the political conclusions I have drawn from my historical and philosophical work in *The Ecology of Freedom*, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, *Re-Enchanting Humanity*, *From Urbanization to Cities* and last but not in the least *The Third Revolution*. Throughout these works I have tried to meld together the most challenging historical ideals into a body of theory that generally went by the name "social ecology". These ideas combine as strands in a common thread: a search to understand the place of humanity in the natural world and the social factors that must be present if we are to actualize our ability (as yet incomplete) to bring to bear, in all the affairs of "raw" or first nature, a "sophisticated" or second nature informed by reason. By combining the words "ecology" and "freedom" I tried to show that neither nature nor reason could be properly conceptualized independently of the other; that the natural world could not be given any meaning without the social world or the human mind, that is, without the ability to abstract experience and generalize facts into far-reaching insights.

For most of human history, society, in effect, was familial, not civic; it was organized around blood ties (real or fictive), not legal tenets. Allocation of the means of life fulfilled necessities – especially rights and duties – among literal and figurative relatives in a nexus of shared, unquestioned responsibilities. Things were brought together in an indisputably "natural" manner, such that the "people" were unified – even more compellingly than by custom – by an inborn scheme of reality. They could not act otherwise, and their life-ways allowed for no discretion to follow any path other than what was given by the "eternal" nature of things.

The rise of organized communities – ultimately cities, civilization, and citizenship, as distinguished from habitats, customs, and folk – radically changed this state of affairs. Indeed, it marked the great rupture of Homo sapiens from merely a creative kind of animal into *humans as such*. The most powerful medium for achieving this radical new dispensation was a process of alienation called *trade*, a process that drastically remade the apprehension of reality from imagery into objectivity. The traditional world of imagination and analogical thinking gave way

to a new world of systematic analysis and disciplined thought, engendered by *commerce*, *efficient production*, and *careful calculation*. Trade rewarded predictability based on objectivity, and knowledge based on reality, with power and wealth. To know meant to live in palpable touch with reality.

Knowledge ceased to be an end in itself; it became a tool, an instrument of control and manipulation. Yet ultimately it created a new world of thoughts and things, a new universe that redefined what it meant to be alive – generating an appetite for wealth, for competition, for growth for its own sake, for private ownership, and for power over men. What humans could imagine, they brought into existence. Even the transformation of human beings from earth-bound to flying creatures constituted a remarkable advance in the conversion of image into object – and no less significantly, it reduced a frightening mystery to a prosaic problem of engineering. Nuclear physics transformed vast, ineffable legends into problems of ordinary mathematics, no less unsolvable than the questions posed by Euclidean geometry.

But how was this even possible? The people who now grappled with the fantastic problems that had occupied human beings even several millennia earlier were, in fact, no longer the same people. Their outlook was no longer animistic, and they no longer lived in organic societies. Owing to their habitation in villages and cities, to their written literature and systematic modes of thought, to their careful retrospection and introspection, to their substitution of mythopoeic fantasy with rational thought, they were becoming *humanized*, *rationalized*, and *civilized* – veritably a new species.

Social theory could not ignore the extent to which mythopoesis, fantasy, and unbridled subjectivity yielded to humanization, rationalization and civilization, and it did not do so. This new world, particularly its emergence, was most brilliantly elucidated in the economic works of Karl Marx and his disciples. Despite their historical limitations, they still stand as a monument to the power of thought to rise above fantasy.

Bolstered by three massive volumes of closely reasoned economic analysis, considerable mathematical formulations, and highly persuasive historical data, Marxism emerged after World War One as the dominant ideology of the Western European radical intelligentsia and affected the thinking of great masses of literate working people. Despite many variations in Marxist tenets, Marx was seen as the man who provided the labor movement of the West with the basic ideas of socialism.

Treated like a new gospel, this "scientific" socialism was regarded as evidence, not of dogmatism, but of learning and of modern intellectual certainty. Marxist doctrine, in effect, was regarded as objective truth, which qualified its expositors to speak authoritatively on any subject as the peers of informed scientists, not only in economics but also in the life sciences and mathematics, not to speak of literature and ethics. In history, social development, and, needless to emphasize, with regard to current events, its acolytes persuasively claimed to enjoy a special knowledge of the course of events and their meaning. Owing to their adoption of Hegel's notion of the "cunning of reason," Marxists professed to understand the "hidden hand" of social development, as it were, looking beyond cultural, political, religious, mystical, and even artistic claims to the "underlying" class interests.

In the hands of Marxian acolytes like Georg Plekhanov and Karl Kautsky, who essentially substituted dialectics for mechanics, social theory became the deadening scientism of a new "social physics." The interwar generation, the product of the mechanics of the class struggle, the dogma of social reductionism, and the hard-nosed idea of social dynamics rather than social dialectics, emerged as true class beings – *Homo economicus.* Marxism's greatest claim to superiority over the so-called "utopian" socialists was its contention that it had prospectively established the hegemonic role of the proletariat over all other classes in achieving a socialist society. Of all classes, the proletariat, Marx expressly maintained, had nothing to sell but its abstract "labor power" (that is, its biological *capacity* to produce commodities in quantities beyond what was necessary for the satisfaction of its needs), and for that reason its historical destiny was to be *driven* to overthrow the capitalist system and replace it with a planned, nationalized economy. This seminal, forcibly driven act made Marx's work distinctive among theories of socialism.

But the greatest shortcoming of Marxism was its celebrated claim to finality. *Capital* asserted that capitalism appears as the dissection of the bourgeois economy in all its "wholeness," encapsulated as a "science," a notion that presupposes (like Quesnay's *Tableau Economique*) a social stability that would have credibility only in the finitude or static perfection of Aristotle's stars. Of course, nowhere in Being is such immobility possible, and no concept could be more nonsensical. Indeed, as the ancient Greeks emphasized, all that exists is development, elaboration, and increasing (but always *incomplete*) "fullness." Thought and life are unending innovation. In a Being that is necessarily paradoxical, we strive not only for a "whole," not only for a "totality" that is complete, but for one whose "final" contours always elude us.

These essays, then, do not work from the notion that there can be an "end to history." Defining history as having an ultimate end would dissolve it into a meaningless conundrum, bereft of experience and development. Yet the word history is one of the few that alternately denotes both *completeness* and *dynamism.* Within a given "stage" history has a completeness to itself, but in history as a "process" a given period "flows" into the next with no terminus, so to speak. We thus find ourselves faced with a conundrum, more like a Kantian syllogism that has to be accepted as a given, or what Hegel would call a contradiction.

Not only do the grand works of philosophy have intrinsic dual meanings, they also reflect significant institutional changes that societies have undergone with the passage of time, from eras of obeisance to kings and nobles to our own. Sweeping social changes in a surprisingly brief period of time have created a need for profoundly new social terms, indeed for a dictionary more inclusionary than we have today. Such a compilation of terms, or expansions in meaning of words in common use today, amounts to the formulation of a new system of ideas. As we educe one idea from the others, we can derive from every one the potentialities of less inclusive but profoundly meaningful offspring, with a variety of divergent developments.

From this perspective, history becomes an open prospect that suggests the potentiality for a multitude of radically new forms. I presented one of a number of courses that this approach to a social dialectic might take in my book *The Ecology of Freedom*; alternative courses were put forward by non-European societies, particularly in the pre-Columbian Americas. It is not an idle endeavor to try to imagine what a *handicraft* society, whose economy was deliberately mixed and small-scale in character, might have looked like – as a "rational" society – in contrast to

the medieval world that *actually* preceded urban society in Western Europe. It is not accidental that William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, which describes such a society, has attracted so many admirers in our own time as a "model" utopia, especially among libertarian socialists and syndicalists.

What concerns us here, however, is the ossification of these libertarian and organic traditions during the period that spanned the two world wars. The "Great War" was fought largely by means of brutal trench warfare; backing out of that slaughter, the world entered the "Roaring Twenties," then the "Great Depression" and the tumultuous 1930s, with socialist insurrections, the fascist coups of Mussolini and Hitler, the Spanish Civil War, and Stalin's massive purges. The period that thus closed with the genocidal World War Two cannot be mechanically locked into a historical box. The years from 1914 to 1950 constitute one of the most eventful periods of *true* history, wherein people's *actions* surmount the quantitative stuff from which mere calendars are made.

The Euro-American generation of young radicals that emerged after World War One and that tried to resolve the revolutionary era of the interwar era was perhaps the most perplexing in modern history. It was certainly the most embattled and, ideologically, the most insurrectionary toward the deeply entrenched exploitative social order, notably capitalism.

After World War Two astonishing technological changes, soaring production figures, major advances in the living standards of Western workers, and broadly rightward shifts in popular political sentiments all made it evident that capitalism had more life remaining to it than the Bolsheviks and the anarcho-syndicalists had foreseen decades earlier. After the short-lived New Left of the 1960s, revolutionary movements waned steadily in numbers and purpose, while erstwhile radical social theorists immersed themselves in academic esoterica such as the peregrinations of the various Frankfurt School theorists, of Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci, and finally in postmodernism, the expression par excellence of the "virtues" of ideological disorder and social nihilism.

As someone who lived out this era, I was variously regarded – or regarded myself – as a communist (including one who adhered to successive views held by Trotsky), a libertarian socialist, and in a rather spotty fashion, an anarchist. In the 1970s and 1980s I expressed my ideas forcefully in a rather romantic anarchist framework. Later, however, I found it increasingly difficult to reconcile anarchism with my basic views. In the 1990s it was gradually becoming clear to me that an ideology that does little more than hail the "autonomy of the ego," and that conceives of "liberty" in extremely individualistic terms, can never produce basic social change. A lifestyle rather than an ideology, anarchism, I came to realize, is concerned more with individual behavior than with political change and allows little room for a creative political practice.

My own experiences in the labor movement (as a foundryman and later as an autoworker) in the 1930s and 1940s had long ago convinced me that making basic and lasting change requires *organization* (as the IWW martyr Joe Hill voiced just before his execution). But most of the anarchists I encountered resisted organization, sometimes vehemently. And when I tried to properly

define politics (as the directly democratic organization of the free municipality by popular assemblies) as the very *opposite* of statecraft (rule by professional bureaucrats, ultimately through a monopoly of the means of violence), my once-close anarchist associates assailed me as "statist." Democracy, they asserted, is *itself* a form of "rule," by the majority over the minority. A preposterous rejection of majority voting in favor of consensus decision-making played a major role in ruining the huge American anti-nuclear movement in the 1980s and potentially makes *any* movement organization and institution (beyond a small group) dysfunctional. In the end I found that I had either to close my eyes to the compelling need for organization in praxis, and for democratic institutions in public affairs in a future libertarian society, or else completely recast my views. I chose to do the latter.

Reflecting as they do my most recent and, having passed the age of 80, my most mature ideas, these essays try to explain why social ecology can no longer be seen as a mere extension of traditional radical ideologies, either Marxist or anarchist. It is now my conviction that the ensemble of views that I call social ecology, libertarian municipalism, and dialectical naturalism should properly form the basis for a new libertarian ideology and politics – *communalism* – that takes full account of the sweeping changes that have occurred in capitalism since the failure of proletarian socialism in the second half of the twentieth century and that suggests the new methods that are needed to transform a market-based society into a truly libertarian socialist one.

The reader alone will decide whether these essays are correct or erroneous and whether my expectations for communalism are sound or fanciful, but their most essential purpose is to create a new departure from ideologies that were inspired by the problems of the Industrial Revolution of two centuries ago, a departure that takes full account of changing class relations and hierarchical forms, of demographical transformations and ecological dislocations, and of urbanization, to cite the most important factors. Few of these issues had an important place in the writings of Marx, Bakunin, and their successors. Without ignoring the vital contributions that the ablest Marxists and left libertarians have made to social theory, I would ask the reader to recognize the centrality of these more recent issues in the essays that follow.

Only time will tell how capitalism will undermine itself, as Marx long ago expected it would, and to what degree the public – middle class and working class alike – will acquire those mutualistic impulses that the followers of Kropotkin impute to human nature. It will not be my privilege to see in my lifetime the achievement of a rational, ecological, and humanistic society in which people will finally be natural and social evolution rendered self-conscious – the great hope of Western philosophy and social progress for two thousand years. What I hold to, and what I try to impart through these essays, is my belief that the noblest role conscious human beings can play today is not only to seek the emancipation of people from the irrationalities of capitalist and hierarchical society but also to defend the Enlightenment and its message of reason in public affairs against the dark forces of irrationality, nihilism, and ultimately barbarism that stand at the gates of civilization. My own generation fought off Nazism and superstition with some success. The present and coming generations must have as their task to oppose the "dumbing down" of the human mind, its growing trivialization and juvenilization, and its appalling ignorance even of the recent past. They must oppose the new gospel of self-absorption at the expense of public affairs.

They may have once again to deal with ghosts of the past – fascism and Stalinism – as well. In the meantime, we still have time to build a coherent theoretical framework for our practice and to prepare for the "final conflict" that may yet come at some point in the present century.

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The Ecological Crisis and the Need to Remake Society

In addressing the sources of our present ecological and social problems, perhaps the most fundamental message that social ecology advances is that the very *idea* of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human. The primary implication of this most basic message is a call for a politics and even an economics that offer a democratic alternative to the nation-state and the market society. I would like to offer a broad sketch of these issues to lay the groundwork for the changes necessary in moving toward a free and ecological society.

The Social Roots of the Ecological Crisis

First, the most fundamental route to a resolution of our ecological problems is *social* in character. That is to say, if we are faced with the prospect of outright ecological catastrophe, toward which so many knowledgeable people and institutions claim we are headed today, it is because the historical domination of human by human has been extended outward from society into the natural world. Until domination as such is removed from social life and replaced by a truly egalitarian and sharing society, powerful ideological, technological, and systemic forces will be used by the existing society to degrade the environment, indeed the entire biosphere. Hence, more than ever today, it is imperative that we develop the consciousness and the movement to remove domination from society, indeed from our everyday lives – in relationships between the young and the elderly, between women and men, in educational institutions and workplaces, and in our attitude toward the natural world. To permit the poison of domination – and a domineering sensibility – to persist is, at this time, to ignore the most basic roots of our ecological as well as social problems – problems whose sources can be traced back to the very roots of our civilization.

Second, and more specifically, the modern market society that we call capitalism, and its alter ego, "state socialism," have brought all the historic problems of domination to a head. The consequences of this "grow or die" market economy must inexorably lead to the destruction of the natural basis for complex life-forms, including humanity. It is, however, all too common these days to single out either population growth or technology – or both – to blame for the ecological dislocations that beset us. But we cannot single out either of these as "causes" of problems whose most deep-seated roots actually lie in the market economy. Attempts to focus on these alleged "causes" are scandalously deceptive and shift our focus from the social issues we must resolve.

In the American experience, people only a generation or two removed from my own generation slashed their way through the vast forests of the West, nearly exterminated millions of bison, plowed fertile grasslands, and laid waste to a large part of the continent – all using only hand axes, simple plows, horse-drawn vehicles, and simple hand tools. It required no technological revolution to create the present devastation of what had once been a vast and fecund region capable, with rational management, of sustaining both human and non-human life. What brought

so much ruin to the land was not the technological implements that those earlier generations of Americans used but the insane drive of entrepreneurs to succeed in the bitter struggle of the marketplace, to expand and devour the riches of their competitors lest they be devoured in turn by their rivals. In my own lifetime, millions of small American farmers were driven from their homes not only by natural disasters but by giant agricultural corporations that turned so much of the landscape into a huge industrial system for cultivating food.

Not only has a society based on endless wasteful growth devastated entire regions, indeed a continent, with only simple technology; the ecological crisis it has produced is *systemic* – and not a matter of misinformation, spiritual insensitivity, or lack of moral integrity. The present social illness lies not only in the outlook that pervades the present society; it lies above all in the very *structure* and *law of life* in the system itself, in its imperative, which no entrepreneur or corporation can ignore without facing destruction: growth, more growth, and still more growth. Blaming technology for the ecological crisis serves, however unintentionally, to blind us to the ways technology could in fact play a creative role in a rational, ecological society. In such a society, the intelligent use of sophisticated technology would be direly needed to restore the vast ecological damage that has already been inflicted on the biosphere, much of which will not repair itself without creative human intervention.

Along with technology, population is commonly singled out for blame as an alleged "cause" of the ecological crisis. But population is by no means the overwhelming threat that some disciples of Malthus in today's ecology movements would have us believe. People do not reproduce like the fruit flies that are so often cited as examples of mindless reproductive growth. They are products of culture as well as of biological nature. Given decent living standards, reasonably educated families often have fewer children in order to improve the quality of their lives. Given education, moreover, and a consciousness of gender oppression, women no longer allow themselves to be reduced to mere reproductive factories. Instead, they stake out claims as humans with all the rights to meaningful and creative lives. Ironically, technology has played a major role in eliminating the domestic drudgery that for centuries culturally stupefied women and reduced them to mere servants of men and men's desire to have children – preferably sons, to be sure. In any case, even if population were to decline for some unspecified reason, the large corporations would try to make people buy more and still more in order to render economic expansion possible. Failing to attain a large enough domestic consumers' market in which to expand, corporate minds would turn to international markets – or to that the most lucrative of markets, the military.

Finally, well-meaning people who regard New Age moralism, psychotherapeutic approaches, or personal lifestyle changes as the key to resolving the present ecological crisis are destined to be tragically disappointed. No matter how much this society paints itself green or orates the need for an ecological outlook, the way society literally breathes cannot be undone unless it undergoes profound structural changes: namely by replacing competition with cooperation, and profit seeking with relationships based on sharing and mutual concern. Given the present market economy, a corporation or entrepreneur who tried to produce goods in accordance with even a minimally decent ecological outlook would rapidly be devoured by a rival in a marketplace whose selective process of competition rewards the most villainous at the expense of the most virtuous. After all, "business is business," as the maxim has it. And business allows no room for people who are restrained by conscience or moral qualms, as the many scandals in the "business community" attest. Attempting to win over the "business community" to an ecological sensibility, let alone

to ecologically beneficial practices, would be like asking predatory sharks to live on grass or "persuading" lions to lovingly lie down beside lambs.

The fact is that we are confronted by a thoroughly irrational social system, not simply by predatory individuals who can be won over to ecological ideas by moral arguments, psychotherapy, or even the challenges of a troubled public to their products and behavior. It is less that these entrepreneurs control the present system of savage competition and endless growth than that the system of savage competition and growth controls them. The stagnation of New Age ideology today in the United States attests to its tragic failure to "improve" a social system that must be completely replaced if we are to resolve the ecological crisis. One can only commend the individuals who by virtue of their consumption habits, recycling activities, and appeals for a new sensibility undertake public activities to stop ecological degradation. Each surely does his or her part. But it will require a much greater effort – an organized, clearly conscious, and forward-looking political *movement* – to meet the basic challenges posed by our aggressively *anti*-ecological society.

Class, Hierarchies, and Politics

Yes, we as individuals should change our lifestyles as much as possible, but it is the utmost shortsightedness to believe that that is all or even primarily what we have to do. We need to restructure the entire society, even as we engage in lifestyle changes and single-issue struggles against pollution, nuclear power plants, the excessive use of fossil fuels, the destruction of soil, and so forth. We must have a coherent analysis of the deep-seated hierarchical relationships and systems of domination, as well as of class relationships and economic exploitation, that degrade people as well as the environment. Here, we must move beyond the insights provided by the Marxists, syndicalists, and even many liberal economists, who for years reduced most social antagonisms and problems to class analysis. Class struggle and economic exploitation still exist, and the classical – and still perceptive – class analysis reveals iniquities about the present social order that are intolerable.

But the Marxian and liberal belief that capitalism has played a "revolutionary" role in destroying traditional communities, and that technological advances seeking to "conquer" nature are a precondition for freedom, rings terribly hollow today, when many of these very advances are being used to make the most formidable weapons and means of surveillance the world has ever seen. Nor could the Marxian socialists of my day, 60 years ago, have anticipated how successfully capitalism would use its technological prowess to co-opt the working class and even diminish its numbers in relation to the rest of the population.

Yes, class *struggles* still exist – but they occur further and further below the threshold of class war. Workers, as I can attest from my own experience as a foundryman and autoworker for General Motors, do not regard themselves as mindless adjuncts to machines, or as factory dwellers, or as "instruments of history," as Marxists might put it. They regard themselves as *living human beings*: as fathers and mothers, as sons and daughters, as people with dreams and visions, as members of communities – not only of trade unions. Living in towns and cities, their eminently human aspirations go well beyond their "historic role" as class agents of "history." They suffer from the pollution of their communities as well as from their factories, and they are

as concerned about the welfare of their children, companions, neighbors, and communities, as they are about their jobs and wage scales.

The overly economistic focus of traditional socialism and syndicalism has in recent years caused these movements to lag behind emerging ecological issues and visions – as they lagged, I may add, behind feminist concerns, cultural issues, and urban issues, all of which often cut across class lines to include middle-class people, intellectuals, small proprietors, and even some bourgeois. Their failure to confront hierarchy – not only class and domination, not only economic exploitation – has often alienated women from socialism and syndicalism to the extent that they awakened to the age-old reality that they have been oppressed irrespective of their class status. Similarly, broad community concerns like pollution afflict people *as such*, whatever the class to which they belong. Disasters like the meltdown of the Chernobyl reactor in the Ukraine justly panicked everyone who was exposed to radiation from the plant, not simply workers and peasants.

Indeed, even if we were to achieve a classless society free of economic exploitation, would we readily achieve a rational society? Would women, young people, the infirm, the elderly, people of color, various oppressed ethnic groups – the list is, in fact, enormous – be free of domination? The answer is a categorical no – a fact to which women can certainly attest, even within the socialist and syndicalist movements themselves. Without eliminating the ancient hierarchical and domineering structures from which classes and the state actually emerged, we would have made only a part of the changes needed to achieve a rational society. There would still be a historical intoxicant in a socialist or syndicalist society – hierarchy – that would continually erode its highest ideals, namely the achievement of a truly free and ecological society.

The Myth of a "Minimal State"

Perhaps the most disquieting feature of many radical groups today, particularly socialists who may accept the foregoing observation, is their commitment to at least a minimal *state* that would coordinate and administer a classless and egalitarian society – a non-hierarchical one, no less! One hears this argument from André Gorz and many others, who, presumably because of the many "complexities" of modern society, cannot conceive of the administration of economic affairs without some kind of coercive mechanism, albeit one with a "human face."

This logistical and in some cases frankly authoritarian view of the human condition (as expressed in the writings of Arne Næss, the father of "deep ecology") reminds one of a dog chasing its tail. Simply because the "tail" is there – a metaphor for economic "complexity" or market systems of distribution – does not mean that the metaphorical dog must chase it in circles that lead nowhere. The "tail" we have to worry about can be rationally simplified by reducing or eliminating commercial bureaucracies and the needless reliance on goods from abroad that can be produced by recycling at home, and by increasing the use of local resources that are now ignored because they are not "competitively" priced: in short, reducing the vast paraphernalia of goods and services that may be indispensable to profit making and competition, but not to the rational distribution of goods in a cooperative society. The painful reality is that most excuses in radical theory for preserving a "minimal state" stem from the myopic visions of eco-socialists like Gorz, who can accept the present system of production and distribution as it is to one degree or another – not as it should be in a moral economy. So conceived, production and distribution seem

more formidable – together with their bureaucratic machinery, irrational division of labor, and "global" nature – than they actually need to be. It would take no great wisdom or array of computers to show with even a grain of imagination how the present "global" system of production can be simplified and still provide a decent standard of living for everyone. Indeed, it took only some five years or so to rebuild a ruined Germany after World War Two, far longer than it will require thinking people today to remove the statist and bureaucratic apparatus for administering the global distribution of goods and resources.

What is even more disquieting is the naive belief that a "minimal state" could indeed remain "minimal." If history – in fact, the events of the past few years – has shown anything, it is that the state, far from being only an instrument of a ruling elite, becomes an organism in its own right that grows as unrelentingly as a cancer. Anarchism, in this respect, has exhibited a prescience that discloses the terrible weakness of the traditional socialist commitment to a state – proletarian, social democratic, or "minimal." To create a state is to institutionalize power in the form of a machine that exists *apart* from the people. It is to professionalize rule and policymaking, to create a distinct interest (be it of bureaucrats, deputies, commissars, legislators, the military, the police, ad nauseam) that, however weak, or however well-intentioned it may be at first, eventually takes on a corruptive power of its own. When over the course of history have states – however "minimal" – *ever* dissolved themselves or constrained their growth into massive malignancies? When have they *ever* remained "minimal"?

The recent deterioration of the German Greens – the so-called "non-party party" that, after its acquisition of a place in the Bundestag, has now become a crude political machine – is dramatic evidence that parliamentary power corrupts with a vengeance. The idealists who helped found the organization and sought to use the Bundestag merely as a "platform" for their radical message have by now either left in disgust or have themselves become rather unsavory examples of wanton political careerism. One would have to be either utterly naive or simply blind to the lessons of history to ignore the fact that the state, "minimal" or not, absorbs and ultimately digests even the most well-meaning critics once they enter it. It is not that statists use the state to abolish it or "minimalize" its effects; it is, rather, the state that corrupts even the most idealistic anti-statists who flirt with it.

Finally, the most disturbing feature of statism – even "minimal statism" – is that it completely undermines a politics based on confederalism. One of the most unfortunate features of traditional socialist history, Marxian and otherwise, is that it emerged in an era of nation-state building. The Jacobin model of a centralized revolutionary state was accepted almost uncritically by nineteenth-century socialists and became an integral part of the revolutionary tradition – a tradition, I may add, that mistakenly associated itself with the nationalistic emphasis of the French Revolution, as seen in the "Marseillaise" and its adulation of *la patrie*. Marx's view that the French Revolution was basically to be a model for formulating a revolutionary strategy – he mistakenly claimed that in its Jacobin form it was the most "classical" of the "bourgeois" revolutions – had disastrous effects upon the revolutionary tradition. Lenin adopted this vision so completely that the Bolsheviks were rightly considered the "Jacobins" of the Russian socialist movement, and, of course, Stalin used techniques such as purges, show trials, and brute force with lethal effects for the socialist project as a whole.

Beyond Statism and Privatism

The notion that human freedom can be achieved, much less perpetuated, through a state of *any* kind is monstrously oxymoronic – a contradiction in terms. Attempts to justify the existence of a cancerous phenomenon like the state, and the use of statist measures or "statecraft," exclude a radically different form of social management, namely confederalism. For centuries, in fact, democratic forms of confederalism – in which municipalities were coordinated by mandated and recallable deputies who were always under public scrutiny – have competed with statist forms and constituted a challenging alternative to centralization, bureaucratization, and the professionalization of power in the hands of elite bodies. Let me emphasize that confederalism should not be confused with federalism, which is simply the coordination of nation-states in a network of agreements that preserve the prerogatives of policy-making with little if any citizen involvement. Federalism is simply the state writ large, indeed the further centralization of already centralized states, as in the United States' federal republic, the European Community, or the recently formed Commonwealth of Independent States – all collections of huge continental superstates that remove even further whatever control the people have over nation-states.

A confederalist alternative would be based on a network of policy-making popular assemblies with recallable deputies to local and regional confederal councils – councils whose sole function, I must emphasize, would be to adjudicate differences and undertake strictly administrative tasks. One could scarcely advance such a prospect by making use of a state formation of *any kind*, however "minimal." Indeed, to juggle statist and confederal perspectives in a verbal game by distinguishing "minimal" from "maximal" is to utterly confuse the basis for a new politics structured around a participatory democracy. Among Greens in the United States there have already been tendencies that absurdly call for "decentralization" and "grassroots democracy" while seeking to run candidates for state and national offices – that is, for statist institutions, *one of whose essential functions is to confine, restrict, and essentially suppress local democratic institutions and initiatives*. Indeed, as I have repeatedly emphasized, when radical ecologists and libertarian socialists of all kinds engage in libertarian municipalist politics and run for municipal public office, they are not merely seeking to remake cities, towns, and villages on the basis of fully democratic confederal networks; they are running *against* the state and parliamentary offices. Hence, to call for a "minimal state," even as a coordinative institution, as André Gorz and others have done, is to obscure and countervail any effort to replace the nation-state with a confederation of municipalities.

It is to the credit of anarchism that it firmly rejects the traditional socialist orientation toward state power and recognizes the corruptive role of participating in parliamentary elections. What is regrettable is that this rejection, so clearly corroborated by the corruption of statist socialists, Greens, and members of other professed radical movements, was not sufficiently nuanced to distinguish activity on the *municipal* level as the basis of *politics* in the Hellenic sense: that is to say, to distinguish electoral activity on the local level from electoral activity on the provincial and national levels, which I have argued really constitutes *statecraft*. The libertarian politics of social ecology, by contrast, consistently seeks to revive or recreate the political sphere, in flat opposition to the state; it attempts to create a dual power to challenge the nationstate and replace it with a confederation of democratized municipalities. Libertarian municipalism may indeed begin in a limited way in civic wards, here and there, as well as in small cities and towns, but its aim is nothing less than the total remaking of society along rational, nonhierarchical and ecological lines.

It would not be presumptuous to claim that social ecology, whatever its other values or failings, represents a coherent interpretation of the enormous ecological and social problems we face today. Its philosophy, social theory, and political practice form a vital alternative to the ideological stagnation and tragic failure of the present socialist, syndicalist, and radical projects that were so much in vogue even as recently as the 1960s. As to "alternatives" that offer us New Age or mystical ecological solutions, what could be more naive than to believe that a society whose very metabolism is based on growth, production for its own sake, hierarchy, classes, domination, and exploitation could be changed simply by moral suasion, individual action, and a childish primitivism that essentially views technology as a curse and focuses variously on demographic growth and personal modes of consumption as primary issues? We must get to the heart of the crisis we face and develop a popular politics that will eschew statism at one extreme and New Age privatism at the other. If this goal is dismissed as "merely" utopian, I am obliged to question what many radicals today would call "realism."

Nationalism and the "National Question"

One of the most vexing questions that the Left faces (however one may define the Left) is the role played by nationalism in social development and by popular demands for cultural identity and political sovereignty. For the Left of the nineteenth century, nationalism was seen primarily as a European issue, involving the consolidation of nation-states in the heartland of capitalism. Only secondarily, if at all, was it seen as the anti-imperialist and presumably anti-capitalist struggle that it was to become in the twentieth century.

This did not mean that the nineteenth-century Left favored imperialist depredations in the colonial world. At the turn of this century, hardly any serious radical thinker, to my knowledge, regarded the imperialist powers' attempts to quell movements for self-determination in colonial areas as a blessing. The Left scoffed at and usually denounced the arrogant claims of European powers to bring "progress" to the "barbarous" areas of the world. Marx's views of imperialism may have been equivocal, but he never lacked a genuine aversion for the afflictions that native peoples suffered at the hands of imperialists. Anarchists, in turn, were almost invariably hostile to the European claim to be the beacon of civilization for the world.

Yet if the Left universally scorned the civilizatory claims of imperialists at the end of the nineteenth century, it generally regarded nationalism as an arguable issue. The "national *question*," to use the traditional phrase in which such discussions were cast, was subject to serious disputes, certainly as far as tactics were involved. But by general agreement, leftists did not regard nationalism, culminating in the creation of nation-states, as the ultimate dispensation of humanity's future in a collectivist or communist society. Indeed, the single principle on which the Left of the pre- World War One and the interwar periods agreed was a belief in the shared humanity of people regardless of their membership in different cultural, ethnic, and gender groups, and their complementary affinities in a free society as rational human beings with the capacity for cooperation, a willingness to share material resources, and a fervent sense of empathy. The "Internationale," the shared anthem of social democrats, socialists, and anarchists alike up to and even after the Bolshevik revolution, ended with the stirring cry, "The 'Internationale' shall *be* the human race." The Left singled out the international proletariat as the historic agent for modern social change not by virtue of its specificity as a class, or its particularity as one component in a developing capitalist society, but by virtue of its *need* to achieve universality in order to abolish class society – that is, as the class driven by necessity to remove wage slavery by abolishing enslavement as such. Capitalism had brought the historic "social question" of human exploitation to its final and most advanced form. "Tis the final conflict!" rang out the "Internationale," with a sense of universalistic commitment – one that no revolutionary movement could ignore any longer without subverting the possibilities for passing from a "prehistory" of barbarous class interest to a "true history" of a totally emancipated humanity.

Minimally, this was the shared outlook of the prewar and interwar Left, particularly of its various socialistic tendencies. The primacy the anarchists and libertarian socialists have historically given to the abolition of the state, the agency par excellence of hierarchical coercion, led directly

to their denigration of the nation-state and of nationalism generally, not only because nationalism divides human beings territorially, culturally, and economically, but because it follows in the wake of the modern state and ideologically justifies it.

Of concern here is the internationalist tradition that played so pronounced a role in the Left of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth, and its mutation into a highly problematical "question," particularly in Rosa Luxemburg's and Lenin's writings. This is a "question" of no small importance. We have only to consider the utter confusion that surrounds it today – when a savagely bigoted nationalism is subverting the internationalist tradition of the Left – to recognize its importance. The rise of nationalisms that exploit racial, religious, and traditional cultural differences between human beings, including even the most trivial linguistic and quasi-tribalistic differences, not to speak of differences in gender identity and sexual preference, marks a *de*civilization of humanity, a retreat to an age when the number of fingers with which people made the sign of the cross determined whether they and their neighbors would disembowel each other in bloody conflicts, as Nikos Kazantzakis pointed out in *Zorba the Greek*.

What is particularly disturbing is that the Left has not always seen nationalism as a regressive demand. The modern Left, such as it is today, all too often uncritically embraces the slogan "national liberation" – a slogan that has echoed through its ranks without regard for the basic ideal voiced in the "Internationale." Calls for tribal "identity" shrilly accentuate a group's particular characteristics to garner constituencies, an effort that negates the spirit of the "Internationale" and the traditional internationalism of the Left. The very meaning of nationalism and the nature of its relationship to statism are raising issues, especially today, for which the Left is bereft of ideas apart from appeals for "national liberation."

If present-day leftists lose all viable memory of an earlier internationalist Left – not to speak of humanity's historical emergence out of its animalistic background, its millennia-long development away from such biological facts as ethnicity, gender, and age differences toward truly social affinities based on citizenship, equality, and a universalistic sense of a common humanity – the great role assigned to reason by the Enlightenment may well be in grave doubt. Without a form of human association that can resist and hopefully go beyond nationalism in all its popular variants – whether it takes the form of a reconstituted Left, a new politics, a social libertarianism, a reawakened humanism, an ethics of complementarity – anything that we can legitimately call civilization, indeed, the human spirit itself, may well be extinguished long before nuclear war, the growing ecological crises, or, more generally, a cultural barbarism comparable only to the most destructive periods in history overwhelms us. In view of today's growing nationalism, then, few endeavors could be more important than to examine the nature of nationalism and understand the so-called "national question" as the Left in its various forms has interpreted it over the years.

A Historical Overview

The level of human development can be gauged in great part by the extent to which people recognize their shared unity. Indeed, personal freedom consists in great part of our ability to choose friends, partners, associates, and affines without regard to their biological differences. What makes us *human*, apart from our ability to reason on a high plane of generalization, consociate into mutable social institutions, work cooperatively, and develop a highly symbolic system of communication, is a shared knowledge of our *humanitas*. Goethe's memorable words, so char-

acteristic of the Enlightenment mind, still haunt as a criterion of our humanity: "There is a degree of culture where national hatred vanishes, and where one stands to a certain extent above nations and feels the weal and woe of a neighboring people as if it happened to one's own."[1]

If Goethe established a standard of authentic humanity here – and surely one can demand more of human beings than empathy for their "own people" – early humanity was less than human by that standard. Although a lunatic element in today's ecology movement calls for a "return to a Pleistocene spirituality," they would in all probability have found that "spirituality" very dispiriting in reality. In prehistoric eras, probably marked by band and tribal social organization, human beings were, "spiritually" or otherwise, first and foremost members of an immediate family, second, members of a band, and ultimately, members of a tribe. What determined membership in anything beyond one's given family group was an extension of the kinship tie: the people of a given tribe were socially linked to one another by real or fictive blood relationships. This "blood oath," as well as other "biological facts" like gender and age, defined one's rights, obligations, and indeed one's identity in the tribal society.

Moreover, many – perhaps most – band or tribal groups regarded only those who shared the "blood oath" with themselves as human. Indeed, a tribe often referred to itself as "*the* People," a name that expressed its exclusive claim to humanity. Other people, who were outside the magic circle of the real or mythic blood linkages of a tribe, were "strangers" and hence in some sense were not human beings. The "blood oath" and the use of the name "the People" to designate themselves often pitted a tribe against others who made the same exclusive claim to be human and to be "the People," even among peoples who shared common linguistic and cultural traits.

Tribal society, in fact, was extremely wary of anyone who was not one of its own members. In many areas, before a stranger could cross a territorial boundary, he had to submissively and patiently await an invitation from an elder or shaman of the tribe that claimed the territory before proceeding. Without hospitality, which was generally conceived as a quasi-religious virtue, any stranger risked life and limb in a tribe's territory, so that lodgings and food were usually preceded by ritual acts of trust or goodwill. The modern handshake may itself have originated as a symbolic expression that one's right hand was free of weapons.

Warfare was endemic among our prehistoric ancestors and in later native communities, notwithstanding the high, almost cultic status enjoyed by ostensibly peaceful "ecological aborigines" among white middle-class Euro- Americans today. When foraging groups overhunted the game in their accustomed territory, as often happened, they were usually more than willing to invade the area of a neighboring group and claim its resources for their own. Commonly, after the rise of warrior sodalities, warfare acquired cultural as well as economic attributes, so victors no longer merely defeated their real or chosen "enemies" but virtually exterminated them, as witness the near-genocidal destruction of the Huron Indians by their linguistically and culturally related Iroquois cousins.

If the major empires of the ancient Middle East and Orient conquered, pacified, and subjugated many different ethnic and cultural groups, thereby making alien peoples into the abject subjects of despotic monarchies, the most important single factor to erode aboriginal parochialism was the emergence of the city. The rise of the ancient city, whether democratic as at Athens or republican as in Rome, marked a radically new social dispensation. In contrast to the family-

[1] Goethe quoted in Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution: A Biographical History*, 3rd edn. (New York: The Dial Press, 1961), p. 578.

oriented and parochial folk who had constituted the tribal and village world, Western cities were now structured increasingly around residential propinquity and shared economic interests. A "second nature," as Cicero called it, of humanistic social and cultural ties began to replace the older form of social organization based on the "first nature" of biological and blood ties, in which individuals' social roles and obligations had been anchored in their family, clan, gender, and the like, rather than in associations of their own choice.

Etymologically, "politics" derives from the Greek *politika*, which connotes an actively involved citizenry that formulates the policies of a community or *polis* and, more often than not, routinely executes them in the course of public service. Although formal citizenship was required for participation in such politics, *poleis* like democratic Athens celebrated their openness to visitors, particularly to skilled craftsmen and knowledgeable merchants of other ethnic communities. In his famous funeral oration, Pericles declared:

> We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing, although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality, trusting less in system and policy than to the native spirit of our citizens; where in education, [our rivals in Sparta] from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at Athens we live exactly as we please and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger.[2]

In Periclean times, Athenian liberality, to be sure, was still limited by a largely fictitious notion of the shared ancestry of its citizens – although less than it had been previously. But it is hard to ignore the fact that Plato's dialectical masterpiece, *The Republic*, occurs as a dialogue in the home of Cephalos, whose family were resident aliens in the Piraeus, the port area of Athens where most foreigners lived. Yet in the dialogue itself the interchange between citizen and alien is uninhibited by any status considerations.

The Roman emperor Caracalla, in time, made all freemen in the Empire "citizens" of Rome with equal juridical rights, thereby universalizing human relationships despite differences in language, ethnicity, tradition, and place of residence. Christianity, for all its failings, nonetheless celebrated the equality of all people's souls in the eyes of the deity, a heavenly "egalitarianism" that, in combination with open medieval cities, theoretically eliminated the last attributes of ancestry, ethnicity, and tradition that divided human beings from each other.

In practice, it goes without saying, these attributes still persisted, and various peoples retained parochial allegiances to their villages, localities, and even cities, countervailing the tenuous Roman and particularly Christian ideals of a universal *humanitas*. The unified medieval world was fragmented juridically into countless baronial and aristocratic sovereignties that parochialized local popular commitments to a given lord or place, often pitting culturally and ethnically related peoples against each other in other areas. The Catholic Church opposed these parochial sovereignties, not only for doctrinal reasons but in order to be able to expand papal authority over Christendom as a whole. As for secular power, wayward but strong monarchs like Henry II of England tried to impose the "king's peace" over large territorial areas, subduing warring nobles with varying degrees of success. Thus did pope and king work in tandem to diminish parochialism, even as they dueled with each other for control over ever-larger areas of the feudal world.

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[2] Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, Book 2, Chapter 4 (New York: Modern Library, 1944), pp. 121–2.

Yet authentic citizens were deeply involved in classical political activity in many places in Europe during the Middle Ages. The burghers of medieval town democracies were essentially master craftsmen. The tasks of their guilds, or richly articulated vocational fraternities, were no less moral than economic – indeed, they formed the structural basis for a genuine moral economy. Guilds not only "policed" local markets, fixing "fair prices" and assuring that the quality of their members' goods would be high; they participated in civic and religious festivals as distinct entities with their own banners, helped finance and construct public buildings, saw to the welfare of the families of deceased members, collected money for charity, and participated as militiamen in the defense of the community of which they were a part. Their cities, in the best of cases, conferred freedom on runaway serfs, saw to the safety of travelers, and adamantly defended their civic liberties. The eventual differentiation of the town populations into wealthy and poor, powerful and powerless, and "nationalists" who supported the monarchy against a predatory nobility, makes up a complex drama that cannot be discussed here.

At various times and places some cities created forms of association that were neither nations nor parochial baronies. These were intercity confederations that lasted for centuries, such as the Hanseatic League, cantonal confederations like that of Switzerland, and more briefly, attempts to achieve free city confederations like the Spanish *comuñero* movement in the early sixteenth century. It was not until the seventeenth century – particularly under Cromwell in England and Louis XIV in France – that centralizers of one form or another finally began to carve out lasting nations in Europe.

Nation-states, let me emphasize, are *states* – not only nations. Establishing them means vesting power in a centralized, professional, bureaucratic apparatus that exercises a social monopoly of organized violence, notably in the form of its armies and police. The state preempts the autonomy of localities and provinces by means of its all-powerful executive and, in republican states, its legislature, whose members are elected or appointed to represent a fixed number of "constituents." The citizen in a self-managed locality vanishes into an anonymous aggregation of individuals who pay a suitable amount of taxes and receive the state's "services." "Politics" in the nation-state devolves into a body of exchange relationships in which constituents generally try to get what they pay for in a "political" marketplace of goods and services. Nationalism as a form of tribalism writ large reinforces the state by providing it with the loyalty of a people of shared linguistic, ethnic, and cultural affinities, indeed legitimizing the state by giving it a basis of seemingly all-embracing biological and traditional commonalities among the people. It was not the English people who created an England but the English monarchs and centralizing rulers, just as it was the French kings and their bureaucracies who forged the French nation.

Indeed, until state-building began to acquire new vigor in the fifteenth century, nation-states in Europe remained a novelty. Even when centralized authority based minimally on a linguistic commonality began to foster nationalism throughout Western Europe and the United States, nationalism faced a very dubious destiny. Confederalism remained a viable alternative to the nation-state well into the latter half of the nineteenth century. As late as 1871, the Paris Commune called upon all the communes of France to form a confederal dual power in opposition to the newly created Third Republic. Eventually the nation-state won out in this complex conflict, and statism, in fact, was firmly linked to nationalism. The two were virtually indistinguishable from each other by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Nationalism and the Left

Radical theorists and activists on the Left dealt in very different ways with the host of historical and ethical problems that nationalism raised with respect to efforts to build a communistic, cooperative society. Historically, the earliest leftist attempts to explore nationalism *as a problem* obstructing the advent of a free and just society came from various anarchist theorists. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon seems never to have questioned the ideal of human solidarity, although he never denied the right of a people to cultural uniqueness and even to secede from any kind of "social contract," provided, to be sure, that no one else's rights were infringed upon. Although Proudhon detested slavery – he sarcastically observed that the American South "with Bible in hand, cultivates slavery," while the American North "is already creating a proletariat"[3] – he formally conceded the right of the Confederacy to withdraw from the Union during the Civil War of 1861–65.

More generally, Proudhon's federalist and mutualistic views led him to oppose nationalist movements in Poland, Hungary, and Italy. His anti-nationalist notions were somewhat diluted by his own Francophilism, as the French socialist Jean Jaurès later noted. Proudhon feared the formation of strong nation-states on or near France's borders. But he was also a product in his own way of the Enlightenment. Writing in 1862, he declared: "I will never put devotion to my country before the rights of Man. If the French Government behaves unjustly to any people, I am deeply grieved and protest in every way that I can. If France is punished for the misdeeds of her leaders, I bow my head and say from the depths of my soul, '*Merito haec patimur*' – 'We have deserved these ills.'"[4]

Despite his Gallic chauvinism, the "rights of Man" remained foremost in Proudhon's mind; nor was he oblivious to the fact that India and China were, in his words, "at the mercy of barbarians."[5] "Do you think that it is French egoism, hatred of liberty, scorn for the Poles and Italians that cause me to mock at and mistrust this commonplace word *nationality*," he wrote to Herzen, "which is being so widely used and makes so many scoundrels and so many honest citizens talk so much nonsense? For pity's sake … do not take offense so easily. If you do, I shall have to say to you what I have been saying for six months about your friend Garibaldi: 'Of great heart but no brain.'"[6]

Michael Bakunin's internationalism was as emphatic as Proudhon's, although his views were also marked by a certain ambiguity. "Only that can be called a *human* principle which is universal and common to all men," he wrote in his internationalist vein; "and nationality separates men, therefore it is not a principle." Indeed, "There is nothing more absurd and at the same time more harmful, more deadly, for the people than to uphold the fictitious principle of nationality as the ideal of all the people's aspirations." What counted finally for Bakunin was that "Nationality is *not a universal human principle*." Still further: "We should place *human, universal justice above all national interests*. And we should once and for all time abandon the false principle of nationality, invented of late by the despots of France, Russia, and Prussia for the purpose of crushing the sovereign principle of liberty."

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[3] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, letter to Dulieu, December 30, 1860, in *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, ed. Stewart Edwards, trans. Elizabeth Frazer (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 184.

[4] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *La Fédération et l'unité en Italie* (1862), in *Selected Writings*, pp. 188–9.

[5] Proudhon, letter to Dulieu, December 30, 1860, in *Selected Writings*, p. 185.

[6] Proudhon, letter to Alexander Herzen, April 21, 1861, in *Selected Writings*, p. 191.

Yet Bakunin also declared that nationality "is a historic, local fact, which like all real and harmless facts, has the right to claim general acceptance." Not only that, but this is a "natural fact" that deserves "respect." It may have been his rhetorical proclivities that led him to declare himself "always sincerely the patriot of all oppressed fatherlands." But he argued that the right of every nationality "to live according to its own nature" must be respected, since this "right" is "simply the corollary of the general principle of freedom."[7]

The subtlety of Bakunin's observations should not be overlooked in the midst of this seeming self-contradiction. He defined a general principle that is human, one that is abridged or partially violated by asocial or "biological" facts that for better or worse must be taken for granted. To be a nationalist is to be less than human, but it is also inevitable insofar as individuals are products of distinctive cultural traditions, environments, and states of mind. Overshadowing the mere fact of "nationality" is the *higher* universal principle in which people recognize themselves as members of the same species and seek to foster their commonalities rather than their "national" distinctiveness.

Such humanistic principles were to be taken very seriously by left libertarians generally and strikingly so by the largest anarchist movement of modern times, the Spanish anarchists. From the early 1880s up to the bloody civil war of 1936–39, the anarchist movement of Spain opposed not only statism and nationalism but even regionalism in all its forms. Despite their enormous Catalan following, the Spanish anarchists consistently raised the higher human principle of social liberation over national liberation and opposed the nationalist tendencies within Spain that so often divided Basques, Catalans, Andalusians, and Galicians from one another and particularly from the Castilians, who enjoyed cultural supremacy over the country's minorities. Indeed, the word "Iberian" rather than "Spanish" that appears in the name Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) served to express not only a commitment to *peninsular* solidarity but an indifference to regional and national distinctions between Spain and Portugal. The Spanish anarchists cultivated Esperanto as a "universal" human language more enthusiastically than any major radical tendency, and "universal brotherhood" remained a lasting ideal of their movement – as it historically did in most libertarian socialist movements up to the present day.

Prior to 1914, Marxists and the Second International generally held similar convictions, despite the burgeoning of nineteenth-century nationalism. In Marx and Engels's view, the proletariat of the world had no country; authentically unified as a class, it was destined to abolish all forms of class society. *The Communist Manifesto* ends with the ringing appeal: "Working Men of All Countries, Unite!" In the body of the work (which Bakunin translated into Russian), the authors declared: "In the national struggles of the proletarians of different countries, [Communists] point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality."[8] And further: "The working men have no country. We cannot take away from them what they have not got."[9]

The support that Marx and Engels did lend to "national liberation" struggles was essentially strategic, stemming primarily from their geopolitical and economic concerns rather than from broad social principle. They vigorously championed Polish independence from Russia, for exam-

[7] All Bakunin quotations are from P. Maximoff, ed., *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe; London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1953), pp. 324–35; emphasis added.

[8] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), p. 120.

[9] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto," p. 124.

ple, because they wanted to weaken the Russian empire, which in their day was the supreme counter-revolutionary power on the European continent. And they wanted to see a united Germany because a centralized, powerful nation-state would provide it with what Engels, in a letter to Karl Kautsky in 1882, called "the normal political constitution of the European bourgeoisie."

Yet the manifest similarities between the internationalist rhetoric of Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* and the internationalism of the anarchist theorists and movements should not be permitted to conceal the important differences between these two forms of socialism – differences that were to play a major role in the debates that separated them. The anarchists were in every sense *ethical* socialists who upheld universal principles of the "brotherhood of man" and "fraternity,"[10] principles that Marx's "scientific socialism" disdained as mere "abstractions." In later years, even when speaking broadly of freedom and the oppressed, Marx and Engels considered the use of seemingly "inexact" words like "workers" and "toilers" to be an implicit rejection of socialism as a "science"; instead, they preferred what they considered the more scientifically rigorous word *proletariat*, which specifically referred to those who generate surplus value.

Indeed, in contrast to anarchist theorists like Proudhon, who considered the spread of capitalism and the proletarianization of preindustrial peasantry and craftspeople to be a disaster, Marx and Engels enthusiastically welcomed these developments, as well as the formation of large, centralized nation-states in which market economies could flourish. They saw them not only as desiderata in fostering economic development but, by promoting capitalism, as indispensable in creating the preconditions for socialism. Despite their support for proletarian internationalism, they derogated what they saw as "abstract" denunciations of nationalism *as such* or scorned them as merely "moralistic." Although internationalism in the interests of class solidarity remained a desideratum for Marx and Engels, their view implicitly stood at odds with their commitment to capitalist economic expansion with its need in the nineteenth century for centralized nation-states. They held the nation-state to be good or bad insofar as it advanced or inhibited the expansion of capital, the advance of the "productive forces," and the proletarianization of preindustrial peoples. In principle, they looked askance at the nationalist sentiments of Indians, Chinese, Africans, and the rest of the noncapitalist world, whose precapitalist social forms might impede capitalist expansion. Ireland, ironically, seems to have been an exception to this approach. Marx, Engels, and the Marxist movement as a whole acknowledged the right of the Irish to national liberation largely for sentimental reasons and because it would produce problems for English imperialism, which commanded a world market. In the main, until such time as a socialist society could be achieved, Marxists considered the formation of large, ever more centralized nation-states in Europe to be "historically progressive."

Given their instrumental geopolitics, it should not be surprising that as the years went by, Marx and Engels essentially supported Bismarck's attempts to unify Germany. Their express distaste for Bismarck's methods and for the landed gentry in whose interests he spoke should not be taken too seriously, in my view. They would have welcomed Germany's annexation of Denmark, and they called for the incorporation of smaller European nationalities like the Czechs and Slavs generally into a centralized Austria-Hungary, as well as the unification of Italy into a nation-state, in order to broaden the terrain of the market and the sovereignty of capitalism on the European continent.

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[10] Despite the genderedness of these words – a product of the era in which Bakunin lived – they obviously may be interpreted as signifying humanity generally.

Nor is it surprising that Marx and Engels supported Bismarck's armies in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 – despite the opposition of their closest adherents in the German Social Democratic party, Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel – at least up to the point when those armies crossed the French frontier and surrounded Paris in 1871. Ironically, Marx and Engels's own arguments were to be invoked by the European Marxists who diverged from their anti-war comrades to support their respective national military efforts at the outbreak of World War One. Pro-war German Social Democrats supported the Kaiser as a bulwark against Russian "Asiatic" barbarism – seemingly in accordance with Marx and Engels's own views – while the French Socialists (as well as Kropotkin in Britain and later in Russia) invoked the tradition of their country's Great Revolution in opposition to "Prussian militarism."

Despite many widespread claims that Rosa Luxemburg was more anarchistic than a committed Marxist, she actually vigorously opposed the motivations of anarchic forms of socialism and was more of a doctrinaire Marxist than is generally realized. Her opposition to Polish nationalism and Pilsudski's Polish Socialist Party (which demanded Polish national independence) as well as her hostility toward nationalism generally, admirable and courageous as it was, rested principally not on an anarchistic belief in the "brotherhood of man" but on traditional Marxist arguments – namely, an extension of Marx and Engels's desire for unified markets and centralized states at the expense of Eastern European nationalities, albeit with a new twist.

By the turn of the century, new considerations had come to the foreground that induced Luxemburg to modify her views. Like many social democratic theorists at the time, Luxemburg shared the conviction that capitalism had passed from a progressive into a largely reactionary phase. No longer a historically progressive economic order, capitalism was now reactionary because it had fulfilled its "historical" function in advancing technology and presumably in producing a class-conscious or even revolutionary proletariat. Lenin systematized this conclusion in his famous work, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism.*

Thus both Lenin and Luxemburg logically denounced World War One as imperialist and broke with all socialists who supported the Entente and the Central Powers, deriding them as "social patriots." Where Lenin markedly differed from Luxemburg (aside from the famous issue of his support for a centralized party organization) was on how, from a strictly "realistic" standpoint, the "national question" could be used against capitalism in an era of imperialism. To Lenin, the national struggles of economically undeveloped colonized countries for liberation from the colonial powers, including Tsarist Russia, were now inherently progressive insofar as they served to *undermine* the power of capital. That is to say, Lenin's support for national liberation struggles was essentially no less pragmatic than that of other Marxists, including Luxemburg herself. For imperialist Russia, appropriately characterized as a "prison of nations," Lenin advocated the unconditional right of non-Russian peoples to secede under any conditions and to form nation-states of their own. On the other hand, he maintained, non-Russian Social Democrats in Russia's colonized countries would be obliged to advocate some kind of federal union with the "mother country" if Russian Social Democrats succeeded in achieving a proletarian revolution.

Hence, although Lenin's and Luxemburg's premises were very similar, the two Marxists came to radically different conclusions about the "national question" and the correct manner of resolving it. Lenin demanded the right of Poland to establish a nation-state of its own, while Luxemburg opposed it as economically unviable and regressive. Lenin shared Marx's and Engels's support for Polish independence, albeit for very different yet equally pragmatic reasons. He did not honor his own position on the right to secession during the Russian Civil War, most flagrantly in his

manner of dealing with Georgia, a very distinct nation that had supported the Mensheviks until the Soviet regime forced it to accept a domestic variant of Bolshevism. Only in the last years of his life, after a Georgian Communist Party took command of the state, did Lenin oppose Stalin's attempt to subordinate the Georgian *party* to the Russian – a preponderantly intra-party conflict that was of little concern to the pro-Menshevik Georgian population. Lenin did not live long enough to engage Stalin on this – and other – policies and organizational practices.

Two Approaches to the National Question

The Marxist and Marxist-Leninist discussions on the "national question" after World War One thus produced a highly convoluted legacy that affected the policies not only of the Old Left of the 1920s and 1930s but those of the New Left of the 1960s as well. What is important to clarify here are the radically different premises from which left libertarians and Marxists viewed nationalism generally. Libertarian socialism and anarchism in the main, aside from some of its variants, advanced *humanistic*, basically *ethical* reasons for opposing the nation-states that fostered nationalism. Left libertarians did so, to be more specific, because national distinctions tended to lead to state formation and to subvert the unity of humanity, to parochialize society, and to foster cultural particularities rather than the universality of the human condition. Marxism, as a "socialist science," eschewed such ethical "abstractions."

In contrast to the anarchist opposition to the state and to centralization, not only did Marxists support a centralized state, they insisted on the "historically progressive" nature of capitalism and a market economy, which required centralized nation-states as domestic markets and as means for removing all internal barriers to commerce that local and regional sovereignties had created. Marxists generally regarded the national aspirations of oppressed peoples as matters of political strategy that should be supported or opposed for strictly pragmatic considerations, irrespective of any broader ethical ones.

Thus two distinct approaches to nationalism emerged within the Left. The ethical anti-nationalism of anarchists and libertarian socialists championed the unity of humanity, with due allowance for cultural distinctions but in flat opposition to the formation of nation-states; while the Marxists supported or opposed the nationalistic demands of largely precapitalist cultures for a variety of pragmatic and geopolitical reasons. This distinction is not intended to be hard and fast; socialists in pre-World War One Austria-Hungary were strongly multinational as a result of the many different peoples who made up the prewar empire. They called for a confederal relationship between the German-speaking rulers of the empire and its largely Slavonic members, which approximated an anarchist view. Whether they would have honored their own ideals in practice any better than Lenin adhered to his own prescriptions once a "proletarian revolution" actually succeeded we will never know. The original empire had disappeared by 1918, and the ostensible libertarianism of "Austro-Hungarian Marxism," as it was called, became moot during the interwar period. To its honor, I may add, in February 1934 in Vienna, Austrian socialists, unlike any other movement apart from the Spaniards, resisted protofascist developments in bloody street fighting; the movement never regained its revolutionary *élan* after it was restored in 1945.

Nationalism and World War Two

The Left of the interwar period, the so-called Old Left, viewed the fast-approaching war against Nazi Germany as a continuation of the "Great War" of 1914–18. Anti- Stalinist Marxists predicted a short-lived conflict that would terminate in proletarian revolutions even more sweeping than those of the 1917–21 period. Significantly, Trotsky staked his adherence to orthodox Marxism itself on this calculation: if the war did not end in this outcome, he proposed, nearly all the premises of orthodox Marxism would have to be examined and perhaps drastically revised. His death in 1940 precluded such a reevaluation on his own part. When the war did not conclude in international proletarian revolutions, Trotsky's supporters were hardly willing to make the sweeping reexamination that he had suggested.

Yet this reexamination was very much needed. Not only did World War Two fail to end in proletarian revolutions in Europe; it brought an end to the whole era of revolutionary proletarian socialism and the class-oriented internationalism that had emerged in June 1848, when the Parisian working class raised barricades and red flags in support of a "social republic." Far from achieving any successful proletarian revolutions after World War Two, the European working class failed to exhibit a semblance of internationalism during the conflict. Unlike their fathers a generation earlier, no warring troops engaged in fraternization; nor did the civilian populations exhibit any overt hostility to their political and military leaders for their conduct of the war, despite the massive destruction of cities by aerial bombers and artillery. The German army fought desperately against the Allies in the West and its soldiers were prepared to defend Hitler's bunker to the end.

Above all, an elevated awareness of class distinctions and conflicts in Europe gave way to nationalism – partly in reaction to Germany's occupations of home territories, but partly also, and significantly, as a result of the resurgence of a crude xenophobia that verged on outright racism. What limited class-oriented movements did emerge for a while after the war, notably in France, Italy, and Greece, were easily manipulated by the Stalinists to serve Soviet interests in the Cold War. Hence although World War Two lasted much longer than the first, its outcome never rose to the political and social level of the 1917–21 period. In fact, world capitalism emerged from World War Two stronger than it had been at any time in its history, owing principally to the state's massive intervention in economic and social affairs.

Struggles for "National Liberation"

The failure of serious radical theorists to reexamine Marxist theory in the light of these developments, as Trotsky had proposed, was followed by the precipitate decline of the Old Left, the general recognition that the proletariat was no longer a "hegemonic" class in overthrowing capitalism, the absence of a "general crisis" of capitalism, and the failure of the Soviet Union to play an internationalist role in postwar events.

What came to foreground instead were national liberation struggles in "Third World" countries and sporadic anti- Soviet eruptions in Eastern European countries, which were largely smothered by Stalinist totalitarianism. The Left, in these instances, has often taken nationalist struggles as general "anti-imperialist" attempts to achieve "autonomy" from imperialism, and

state formation as a legitimation of this "autonomy," even at the expense of a popular democracy in the colonized world.

If Marx and Engels often supported national struggles for strategic reasons, the Left in the twentieth century, both New and Old, often elevated such support for such struggles into a mindless article of faith. The strategic "nationalisms" of Marxist-type movements largely foreclosed inquiry into *what kind of society* a given "national liberation" movement would likely *produce*, in a way that ethical socialisms like anarchism in the nineteenth century did not. It was – or if not, it *should* have been – a matter of the gravest concern for the Old Left in the 1920s and 1930s to inquire into what *type* of society Mao Tse-tung, to take a striking case in point, would establish in China if he defeated the Kuomintang, while the New Left of the 1960s should have inquired into what type of society Castro, to cite another important case, would establish in Cuba after the expulsion of Batista.

But throughout the twentieth century, when "Third World" national liberation movements in colonial countries made conventional avowals of socialism and then proceeded to establish highly centralized, often brutally authoritarian states, the Left often greeted them as effective struggles against imperialist enemies. Advanced as "national liberation," nationalism has often stopped short of advancing major social changes and has even ignored the need to do so. Avowals of authoritarian forms of socialism have been used by "national liberation" movements very much the way Stalin used socialist ideologies to brutally consolidate his own dictatorship. Indeed, Marxism- Leninism has proved a remarkably effective doctrine for mobilizing "national liberation" struggles against imperialist powers and gaining the support of leftist radicals abroad, who saw "national liberation" movements as largely anti-imperialist struggles rather than observing their true social content.

Thus, despite the populist and often even anarchistic tendencies that gave rise to the European and American New Left, its essentially international focus was directed increasingly toward an uncritical support for "national liberation" struggles outside the Euro-American sphere, without regard for where these struggles were leading and the authoritarian nature of their leadership. As the 1960s progressed, this incredibly confused movement in fact steadily shed the libertarian and universalistic ambience with which it had begun. After Mao's practices were elevated to an "ism" in the New Left, many young radicals adopted "Maoism" unreservedly, with grim results for the New Left as a whole. By 1969, the New Left had largely been taken over by Maoists and admirers of Fidel Castro. An utterly misleading book like William Hinton's *Fanshen*, which uncritically applauded Maoist activities in the Chinese countryside, was revered in the late 1960s, and many radical groups adopted what they took to be Maoist organizational practices. So heavily focused was the New Left's attention on "national liberation" struggles in the Third World that the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1969 hardly produced serious protest from young leftists, at least in the United States, as I can personally attest.

The 1960s also saw the emergence of yet another form of nationalism on the Left: increasingly ethnically chauvinistic groups began to appear that ultimately inverted Euro-American claims of the alleged superiority of the white race into an equally reactionary claim to the superiority of non-whites. Embracing the particularism into which racial politics had degenerated instead of the potential universalism of a *humanitas*, the New Left placed blacks, colonial peoples, and even totalitarian colonial nations on the top of its theoretical pyramid, endowing them with a commanding or "hegemonic" position in relation to whites, Euro-Americans, and bourgeois-democratic nations. In the 1970s, this particularistic strategy was adopted by certain feminists, who began to

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extol the "superiority" of women over men, indeed to affirm an allegedly female mystical "power" and an allegedly female irrationalism over the secular rationality and scientific inquiry that were presumably the domain of all males. The term "white male" became a patently derogatory expression that was applied ecumenically to all Euro-American men, irrespective of whether they themselves were exploited and dominated by ruling classes and hierarchies.

A highly parochial "identity politics" began to emerge, even to dominate many New Leftists as new "micronationalisms," if I may coin a word. Not only do certain tendencies in such "identity" movements closely resemble those of very traditional forms of oppression like patriarchy, but "identity politics" also constitutes a regression from the libertarian and even general Marxian message of the "Internationale" and a transcendence of all "micronationalist" differentia in a truly humanistic communist society. What passes for "radical consciousness" today is shifting increasingly toward a biologically oriented emphasis on human differentiation like gender and ethnicity – not an emphasis on the need to foster human universality that was so pronounced among the anarchist and libertarian socialist writers of the nineteenth century and even in *The Communist Manifesto.*

Toward a New Internationalism

How to assess this devolution in leftist thought and the problems it raises today? I have tried to place nationalism in the larger historical context of humanity's social evolution from the internal solidarity of the tribe to the increasing expansiveness of urban life and the universalism advanced by the great monotheistic religions in the Middle Ages and finally to ideals of human affinity based on reason, secularism, cooperation, and democracy in the nineteenth century. We can say with certainty that any movement that aspires to something less than these anarchist and libertarian socialist notions of the "brotherhood of man," certainly as expressed in the "Internationale," is less than human. Indeed, from the perspective of the beginning of the twenty-first century, we are obliged to ask for even more than what nineteenth-century internationalism demanded. We are obliged to formulate an ethics of *complementarity* in which cultural differentia mutualistically serve to enhance human unity itself, in short, that constitute a new mosaic of vigorous cultures that *enrich* the human condition and that foster its *advance* rather than fragment and decompose it into new "nationalities" and an increasing number of nation-states.

No less significant is the need for a radical social outlook that conjoins cultural variety and the ideal of a unified humanity with an ethical concept of what a new society *should be* like – one that is universalistic in its view of humanity, cooperative in its view of human relationships on all levels of life, and egalitarian in its idea of social relations. While internationalist in their *class* outlook, nearly all Marxist attitudes toward the "national question" were instrumental: they were guided by expediency and opportunism, and worse, they often denigrated ideas of democracy, citizenship, and freedom as "abstract" and, presumably, "unscientific" notions. Outstanding Marxists accepted the nation-state with all its coercive power and centralistic traits, be they Marx or Engels, Luxemburg or Lenin. Nor did these Marxists view confederalism as a desideratum. Luxemburg's writings, for example, simply take confederalism *as it existed in her own time* (particularly the vicissitudes of Swiss cantonalism) as exhausting all the possibilities of this political idea, without due regard for the left libertarian emphasis on the need for profound social, political, and economic changes in the municipalities that are to confederate with

each other. With few exceptions, Marxists advanced no serious critique of the nation-state and state centralization as such, an omission that, all "collectivistic" achievements aside, would have foredoomed their attempts to achieve a rational society if nothing else had.

Cultural freedom and variety, let me emphasize, should not be confused with nationalism. That specific peoples should be free to fully develop their own cultural capacities is not merely a right but a desideratum. The world will be a drab place indeed if a magnificent mosaic of different cultures do not replace the largely deculturated and homogenized world created by modern capitalism. But by the same token, the world will be completely divided and peoples will be chronically at odds with one another if their cultural differences are *parochialized* and if seeming "cultural differences" are rooted in *biologistic* notions of gender, racial, and physical superiority. Historically, there is a sense in which the national consolidation of peoples along territorial lines did produce a social sphere that was broader than the narrow kinship basis for kinship societies because it such consolidation obviously is more open to strangers, just as cities tend to foster broader human affinities than tribes. But neither tribal affinities nor territorial boundaries constitute a realization of humanity's *potentiality* to achieve a full sense of commonality with rich but harmonious cultural variations. Frontiers have no place on the map of the planet, any more than they have a place on the landscape of the mind.

A socialism that is informed by this kind of ethical outlook, with a due respect for cultural variety, cannot ignore the potential *outcome* of a national liberation struggle as the Old and New Lefts alike so often did. Nor can it support national liberation struggles for instrumental purposes, merely as a means of "weakening" imperialism. Certainly, such a socialism cannot, in my view, promote the proliferation of nation-states, much less increase the number of divisive national entities. Ironically, the success of many "national liberation" struggles has had the effect of creating politically independent statist regimes that are nonetheless as *manipulable* by the forces of international capitalism as were the old, generally obtuse imperialist ones. More often than not, "Third World" nations have not cast off their colonial shackles since the end of World War Two: they have merely become domesticated and rendered highly vulnerable to the forces of international capitalism, with little more than a facade of self-determination. Moreover, they have often used their myths of "national sovereignty" to nourish xenophobic ambitions to grab adjacent territories and oppress their neighbors as brutally as imperialists in their own right, such as Ghana's oppression under Nkrumah of the Togo peoples in West Africa or Milošević's attempt to "cleanse" Muslims from Bosnia. What is no less regressive, such nationalisms evoke what is most sinister in a people's past – religious fundamentalism in all its forms, traditional hatreds of "foreigners," a "national unity" that overrides terrible internal social and economic inequities, and most commonly, a total disregard for human rights. The "nation" as a cultural entity is superseded by an overpowering and oppressive state apparatus. Racism commonly goes hand in hand with "national liberation" struggles, such as "ethnic cleansing" and wars for territorial gain, as we see most poignantly today in the Middle East, India, the Caucasus, and Eastern Europe. Nationalisms that only a generation ago might have been regarded as "national liberation" struggles are more clearly seen today, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet empire, as little more than social nightmares and decivilizing blights.

Put bluntly, nationalisms are the kind of regressive atavisms that the Enlightenment tried to overcome long ago. They introject the worst features of the very empires from which oppressed peoples have tried to shake loose. Not only do they typically reproduce state-machines that are as oppressive as those the colonial powers imposed on them, but they reinforce those machines

with cultural, religious, ethnic, and xenophobic traits that are often used to foster regional and even domestic hatreds and sub-imperialisms. No less important, in the absence of genuine popular democracies the sequelae of understandably *anti-imperialist* struggles too often include the strengthening of imperialism itself, such that the powers that have been seemingly dispossessed of their colonies can now play off the state of one former colony against that of another, as witness the conflicts that ravage Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent. These are the areas, I may add, where nuclear wars will be more likely to occur as the years go by than elsewhere in the world. The development of an Islamic nuclear bomb to countervail an Israeli one, or of a Pakistani bomb to countervail an Indian one, portend no good for the South and its conflict with the North. Indeed, the tendency for former colonies to actively seek alliances with their erstwhile imperialist rulers is now a more typical feature of North–South diplomacy than is any unity within the South against the North.

Nationalism has *always* been a disease that divided human from human – "abstract" as traditional Marxists may consider this notion to be – and it can never be viewed as anything more than a regression toward tribal parochialism and the fuel for intercommunal warfare. Nor have the "national liberation" struggles that have produced new states throughout the "Third World" and in Eastern Europe impaired the expansion of imperialism or eventuated in fully democratic states. That the "liberated" peoples of the Stalinist empire are less oppressed today than they were under communist rule should not mislead us into believing that they are also free from the xenophobia that nearly all nation-states cultivate or from the cultural homogenization that capitalism and its media produce.

No left libertarian, to be sure, can oppose the *right* of a subjugated people to establish itself as an autonomous entity – be it in a confederation based on libertarian municipalism or as a nation-state based on hierarchical and class inequities. But to oppose an oppressor is not equivalent to calling for *support* for everything formerly colonized nation-states do. Ethically speaking, one cannot oppose a wrong when one party commits it, then support another party who commits the same wrong. The trite but pithy maxim – "My enemy's enemy is not my friend" – is particularly applicable to oppressed people who may be manipulated by totalitarians, religious zealots, and "ethnic cleansers." Just as an authentic ethics must be reasoned out and premised on genuine humanistic potentialities, so a libertarian socialism or anarchism must retain its ethical integrity if the voice of reason is to be heard in social affairs. In the 1960s, those who opposed American imperialism in Southeast Asia and at the same time rejected giving any support to the communist regime in Hanoi, and those who opposed American intervention in Cuba without supporting Castroist totalitarianism, stood on a higher moral ground than the New Leftists who exercised their rebelliousness against the United States predominantly by supporting "national liberation" struggles without regard to the authoritarian and statist goals of those struggles. Indeed, identified with the authoritarians whom they actively supported, these New Leftists eventually grew demoralized by the absence of an ethical basis in their liberatory ideas. Today, in fact, liberatory struggles based on nationalism and statism have borne the terrifying harvest of internecine bloodletting throughout the world. Even in recently "liberated" states like East Germany, nationalism has found brutal expression in the rise of fascist movements, German nationalism, plans to restrict the immigration of asylum-seekers, violence against "foreigners" including victims of Nazism like gypsies, and the like. Thus the instrumental view of nationalism that Marxists originally cultivated has left many "leftist" tendencies like Social Democracy in a condition of moral bankruptcy.

Ethically, let me add, there are some social issues on which *one must take a stand* – such as white and black racism, patriarchy and matriarchy, and imperialism and "Third World" totalitarianism. An unswerving opposition to racism, gender oppression, and domination *as such* must always be paramount if an ethical socialism is to emerge from the ruins of socialism itself. But we also live in a world in which issues sometimes arise on which leftists cannot take *any* position at all – issues in which to take a position is to operate within the alternatives advanced by a basically irrational society and to choose the lesser of several irrationalities or evils over other irrationalities or evils. It is not a sign of political ineffectuality to reject such a choice altogether and declare that to oppose one evil with a lesser one must eventually lead to the support of the worst evil that emerges. German Social Democracy, by abetting one "lesser evil" after another during the 1920s, went from supporting liberals to conservatives to reactionaries – who finally brought Hitler to power. In an irrational society, conventional wisdom and instrumentalism can produce only ever-greater irrationality, using virtue as a patina to conceal basic contradictions both in its own position and in society.

"[L]ike the processes of life, digestion and breathing," observed Bakunin, nationality "has no right to be concerned with itself until that right is denied." This was a perceptive enough statement in its day. With the explosions of barbarous nationalism in our own day and the snarling appetites of nationalists to create more and more nation-states, I am obliged to add that "nationality" is a form of *indigestion* and that its causes must be vomited up if society is not to further deteriorate because of this malady.

Seeking an Alternative

If nationalism is regressive, what rational and humanistic alternative to it can an ethical socialism offer? There is no place in a free society for nation-states – either as nations or as states. However strong may be the impulse of specific peoples for a collective identity, reason and a concern for ethical behavior oblige us to recover the universality of the city or town and a directly democratic political culture, albeit on a higher plane than even the *polis* of Periclean Athens. Identity should properly be replaced by community – by a shared affinity that is humanly scaled, non-hierarchical, libertarian, and open to all, irrespective of an individual's gender, ethnic traits, sexual identity, talents, or personal proclivities. Such community life can only be recovered by the new politics that I have called libertarian municipalism: the democratization of municipalities so that they are self-managed by the people who inhabit them, and the formation of a confederation of these municipalities to constitute a counter-power to the nation-state.

The danger that democratized municipalities in a decentralized society would result in economic and cultural parochialism is very real, and it can only be precluded by a vigorous confederation of municipalities based on their material interdependence. The "self-sufficiency" of community life – even if it were possible today – would by no means guarantee a genuine grass-roots democracy. The confederation of municipalities, as a medium for interaction, collaboration, and mutual aid among its municipal components, provides the sole alternative to the powerful nation-state on the one hand and the parochial town or city on the other. Fully democratic, in which the municipal deputies to confederal institutions would be subject to recall, rotation, and unrelenting public purview, the confederation would constitute an extension of local liberties to the regional level, allowing for a sensitive equilibrium between locality and region in which the

cultural variety of towns could flourish without turning inward toward local exclusivity. Indeed, beneficial cultural traits would also be "trafficked," so to speak, within and between various confederations, along with the interchange of goods and services that make up the material means of life.

By the same token, "property" would be municipalized, rather than nationalized (which merely reinforces state power with economic power), collectivized (which simply recasts private entrepreneurial rights in a "collective" form), or privatized (which facilitates the reemergence of a competitive market economy). A municipalized economy would approximate a system of usufruct based entirely on one's needs and citizenship in a community rather than one's proprietary, vocational, or professional interests. Where a municipal citizens' assembly controls economic policy, no *one* individual controls, much less "owns," the means of production and of life. Where confederal means of administering a region's resources coordinate the economic behavior of the whole, parochial interests would tend to give way to larger human interests and economic considerations to more democratic ones. The issues that municipalities and their confederations address would cease to range around economic self-interest; they would focus on democratic procedures and simple equity in meeting human needs.

Let there be no doubt that the technological resources that make it possible for people to *choose* their own lifestyles and have the free time to participate fully in a democratic politics are absolutely necessary for the libertarian, confederally organized society that I have sketched here. Even the best of ethical intentions are likely to yield to some form of oligarchy, in which differential access to the means of life will lead to elites who have more of the good things in life than do other citizens. On this score, the asceticism that ecomystics and deep ecologists promote is insidiously reactionary: not only does it ignore the freedom of people to choose their own lifestyle – the only alternative in the existing society to becoming a mindless consumer – but it subordinates human freedom *as such* to an almost mystical notion of the dictates of "Nature" – prescribing a "return to the Pleistocene," to the Neolithic, or to food gathering, to cite the most extreme examples. A free ecological society – as distinguished from one regulated by an authoritarian ecological elite or by the "free market" – can only be cast in terms of an ecologically confederal form of libertarian municipalism. When at length free communes replace the nation and confederal forms of organization replace the state, humanity will have rid itself of nationalism.

Nationalism and the Great Revolution

During and after the great revolutions in the eighteenth century – particularly the American and the French – expressions redolent with nationalism did not have the meaning they often have today. The word "patriot" was not used to express a special loyalty to a "Fatherland" two centuries ago; the word normally was used in both the American and French revolutions to delegitimate the claim of the monarchy to literally own the countries and colonies it ruled as the personal patrimony of the King and establish the ordinary citizen's status as a "shareholder" in what had previously been regarded as a royal estate. Accordingly, the American revolutionaries who declared their independence from the British monarchy in 1776 fundamentally altered their ties to the "mother country" by replacing royal rule with a republican system structured politically around citizenship rather than subjecthood. The French, a decade and a half later, deliberately changed the title of Louis XVI from "King of France" to "King of the French," a shift that was not a mere semantic one. Just as King George III could no longer claim to possess the American colonies, a claim the colonists never really regarded as existentially valid, so Louis XVI no longer "owned" France once the National Assembly was formed.

The word "patriot," so widely used in both revolutions, and la "Nation" in the French revolution legally restored a national patrimony to the people. Indeed, terms like "Nation" essentially referred to the citizen body as a whole in contrast to the "Court," which referred to the proprietary authority of the royal family. Indeed, the distinction between "Court" and "Country" had already been made in the English revolution of the 1640s, and was to find expression later in distinctions between "royalist" and "patriot" during the late 1700s.

Characteristically, the historic documents that proclaimed a fundamental alteration of of the ties between a "Nation" and its former rulers were addressed to humanity as a whole, not merely to a given people. Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence opens with the challenging remarks that "a decent *respect* for the opinions of *mankind* require that [the Americans] should declare what impels them" to sever their bonds with the British monarchy. Like the French revolutionary documents that were to follow, it based this claim on the belief "that *all* men are created equal" and that "Government is instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed [emphasis added]."

The American Declaration of July 4, 1776, was to become the theoretical template for similar declarations by the French revolutionaries. Far from being nationalistic statements, they were fervently cosmopolitan and addressed to the world at large. Thomas Paine's famous personal maxim, "My country is the world," was not idiosyncratic to the American revolutionary leaders. George Washington did not hesitate to declare that he was "a citizen of the great republic of humanity," and Benjamin Rush allowed that the revolution opened "no breach in the republic of letters." In a statement that fervently expressed the spirit of the Enlightenment, John Adams was to state that, the war in the colonies notwithstanding, "Science and literature are of no party nor nation." The phrase "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" is reported to have been given to the French

by Benjamin Franklin, whose freedom from nationalism and parochialism earned widespread admiration. "Where liberty is at stake," he declared in 1783, "there is my country."

The thinkers and propagators in the French Enlightenment were no different in spirit and conveyed it fully to the revolutions of 1789. Montesquieu, whose *Persian Letters* (1721) has been called the "first major work of the French Enlightenment," by Norman Hampson, was to jot in his notebooks: "When I act, I am a citizen; but when I write, I am a man and regard all the peoples of Europe with as much impartiality as those of Madagaskar." This universalism was characteristic of essentially all the Encyclopedists with the possible exception of Rousseau, whose mystification of his Swiss origins involved a democratic but often sentimental passion for a fictitious ruralism of which he was never part of in his real life. That French became the language of educated Europe was not accidental: the worldly outlook of the Enlightenment intellectuals, in fact, created a secular republic of letters that was to be eroded over time by romanticism, mysticism, and ultimately an identification of nationhood with race or ethnic superiority.

Nationalism existed outside the orbit of the Enlightenment and the great revolutions of the eighteenth century, which were explicitly universalistic in their social and cultural spirit. Never ceasing to be captivated by cultural variety and its more humanistic features, the revolutionaries of the time, like the Enlighteners who prepared the intellectual bases of their social activities, saw themselves above all as "citizens" of a secular human community that knew no intellectual, political, or territorial frontiers.

The Historical Importance of the City

I have long argued that libertarian municipalism constitutes the politics of social ecology, notably a revolutionary effort in which freedom is given institutional form in public assemblies that become decision-making bodies. It depends upon libertarian leftists running candidates at the local municipal level, calling for the division of municipalities into wards, where popular assemblies can be created that bring people into full and direct participation in political life. Having democratized themselves, municipalities would confederate into a dual power to oppose the nation-state and ultimately dispense with it and with the economic forces that underpin statism as such.

Libertarian municipalism is above all a *politics* that seeks to create a vital democratic public sphere. In my *From Urbanization to Cities* as well as other works, I have made careful but crucial distinctions between three societal realms: the social, the political, and the state. What people do in their homes, what friendships they form, the communal lifestyles they practice, the way they make their living, their sexual behavior, and the cultural artifacts they consume – all these personal as well as materially necessary activities belong to what I call the *social* sphere of life. Families, friends, and communal living arrangements are part of the social realm.

However much all aspects of life interact with one another, none of these *social* aspects of human life properly belongs to the *public* sphere, which I explicitly identify with *politics* in the Hellenic sense of the term. In creating a new politics based on social ecology, we are concerned with what people do in this *public or political sphere*, not with what people do in their bedrooms, living rooms, or basements.

Let me state from the outset that I have never declared that libertarian municipalism is a *substitute* for the manifold dimensions of cultural or even private life. Yet even a modicum of a historical perspective shows that it is precisely the *municipality* that most individuals must deal with directly, once they leave the social realm and enter the public sphere. Doubtless the municipality is usually the place where even a great deal of *social* life is existentially lived, which does not efface its distinctiveness as a unique sphere of life.

As a project for entering into the public sphere, libertarian municipalism calls for a radical presence in a community that addresses the question of *who shall exercise power* in a lived sense; indeed, it is truly a *political* culture that seeks to re-empower the individual and sharpen his or her sensibility as a living *citizen*.

The Erosion of Citizenship

Today, the concept of citizenship has already undergone serious erosion through the reduction of citizens to "constituents" of statist jurisdictions or to "taxpayers" who sustain statist institutions. To further reduce citizenship to "personhood" – or to etherealize the concept by speaking of an airy "earth citizenship" – is nothing short of reactionary. It took long millennia for History to create the concept of the citizen as a self-managing and competent agent in democratically

shaping a polity. During the French Revolution the term *citoyen* was used precisely to efface the status-generated relegation of individuals to mere "subjects" of the Bourbon kings. Moreover, revolutionaries of the last century – from Marx to Bakunin – referred to themselves as "citizens" long before the appellation "comrade" replaced it.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the citizen, as he or she should be, culminates the transformation of ethnic tribal folk, whose societies were structured around biological facts like kinship, gender differences, and age groups, and should be part of a secular, rational, and humane community. Indeed, much of the National Socialist war against "Jewish cosmopolitanism" was in fact an ethnically (*völkisch*) nationalistic war against the Enlightenment ideal of the *citoyen*. For it was precisely the depoliticized, indeed, animalized "loyal subject" rather than the citizen that the Nazis incorporated into their racial image of the German *Volk*, the abject, status-defined creature of Hitler's hierarchical *Führerprinzip*. Once citizenship becomes contentless as a result of the deflation of its existential political reality or, equally treacherously, by the expansion of its historic development into a "planetary" metaphor, we have come a long way toward accepting the barbarism that the capitalist system is now fostering with Heideggerian versions of ecology.

Today, we cannot allow flippant diminutions of the *uniqueness* of citizenship, so pregnant with political meaning, nor can we ignore the factors that can help us develop a general civic interest today. The tendency of physiography among ecomystics and spiritualists to overtake and devour vast socio-cultural differences is nothing less than dazzling. Put the prefix *bio* before a word, and you come up with the most inane, often asocial body of "ideas" possible, such as bioregionalism, which overrides the very fundamental cultural differences that demarcate one community or group of communities from another by virtue of a common watershed, lake, or mountain range. Bioregionalism, as expressed by John Clark and others, is not only a mystification of first (biological) nature at the expense of second (social and cultural) nature; its irrelevance to improving the human condition is truly incredible. One has only to view the terrible conflict in the former Yugoslavia, which raged in areas that are almost identical bioregionally but are grossly dissimilar culturally, to recognize how meaningless and mystifying are Clark's expectations of his bioregional "politics."

The extent to which contemporary mystical ecologists absorb second nature into first nature, the social into the biological, ignores the extent to which the sociosphere today encompasses the biosphere, to which first nature has been absorbed into second nature, and reveals a stunning neglect of the decisive importance of society in determining the future of the natural world. We can no longer afford a naive nature romanticism, which may be very alluring to juveniles but has been contributing a great deal to the strident nationalism and growing ecofascism that is emerging in the Western world.

Oppression and Liberation

libertarian municipalism is that the "Greek *polis*," which "advocates of direct democracy have always appealed to," was marred by "the exclusion of women, slaves, and foreigners." This is certainly true, and we must always remember that libertarian municipalists are also libertarian communists, who obviously oppose hierarchy, including patriarchy and chattel slavery.

As it turns out, in fact, the "Greek *polis*" is neither an ideal nor a model for anything – except perhaps for Rousseau, who greatly admired Sparta. It is the *Athenian polis* whose democratic

institutions I often describe and that has the greatest significance for the democratic tradition. In the context of libertarian municipalism, its significance is to provide us with evidence that a people, for a time, could quite self-consciously establish and maintain a direct democracy, *despite the existence of slavery, patriarchy, economic and class inequalities, agonistic behavior, and even imperialism*, which existed throughout the ancient Mediterranean world.

The fact is that we must look for what is new and innovative in a historical period, even as we acknowledge continuities with social structures that prevailed in the past. Ancient Athens and other parts of Greece, it is worth noting in this postmodern era, was the arena for the emergence not only of direct democracy but of Western philosophy, drama, political theory, mathematics, science, and analytical and dialectical logic. On the other hand, I could hardly derive democratic ideas from the Chinese Taoist tradition, rooted as it is in quietism and a credo of resignation and submission to noble and royal power (not to speak of the exclusion of women from socially important roles).[1]

In fact, short of the hazy Neolithic village traditions that Marija Gimbutas, Riane Eisler, and William Irwin Thompson hypostatize, we will have a hard time finding *any* tradition that was not patriarchal to one degree or another. Rejecting all patriarchal societies as sources of institutional study would mean that we must abandon not only the Athenian *polis* but the free medieval communes and their confederations, the *comuñero* movement of sixteenth-century Spain, the revolutionary Parisian sections of 1793, the Paris Commune of 1871 – and even the Spanish anarchist collectives of 1936–37. All of these institutional developments, be it noted, were marred to one degree or another by patriarchal values.

No, libertarian municipalists are not ignorant of these very real historical limitations; nor is libertarian municipalism based on any historical "models." Neither does anyone who seriously accepts a libertarian municipalist approach believe that society *as it exists* and cities *as they are structured today* can *suddenly* be transformed into a directly democratic and rational society. The revolutionary transformation we seek is one that requires education, the formation of a movement, and the patience to cope with defeats. As I have emphasized again and again, a libertarian municipalist practice begins, minimally, with an attempt to enlarge local freedom at the expense of state power. And it does this by example, by education, and by entering the public sphere (that is, into local elections or extralegal assemblies), where ideas can be raised among ordinary people that open the possibility of a lived practice. In short, libertarian municipalism involves a vibrant politics in the real world to change society and public consciousness *alike*, not a program directed at navel-gazing, psychotherapy, and "surregionalist manifestoes." It tries to forge a movement that will enter into *open* confrontation with the state and the bourgeoisie, not cravenly sneak around them murmuring Taoist paradoxes.

I should perhaps point out that my appeal to a new politics of citizenship is not in any way meant to put a rug over very real social conflicts, nor is it an appeal to class neutrality. The fact is that "the People" I invoke does not include Chase Manhattan Bank, General Motors, or any class exploiters and economic bandits; let me emphasize that I am addressing an *oppressed* humanity, all of whom must – if they are to eliminate their oppressions – try to remove the shared roots of oppression as such.

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[1] Elites who studied the *Tao Te Ching*, for their part, could easily find it a useful handbook for ruling and manipulating a servile peasantry. Depending upon which translation the English reader uses, several interpretations are valid, but what is clear to everyone but the blind is that quietism underlies the entire work.

I have never argued that we can or should ignore class interests by completely absorbing them into trans-class ones. But in our time particularization is being overemphasized, to the point where any shared struggle must now overcome not only differences in class, gender, ethnicity, "and other issues," but nationalism, religious zealotry, and identity based on even minor distinctions in status. The role of the revolutionary movement for over two centuries has been to emphasize our *shared* humanity precisely against *ruling* status groups and *ruling* classes – which Marx, even in singling out the proletariat as hegemonic, viewed as a "universal class." Nor are all "images" that people have of themselves as classes, genders, races, nationalities, and cultural groups rational or humane, or evidence of consciousness, or desirable from a radical viewpoint. In principle, there is no reason why *différance* as such should not entangle us and paralyze us completely in our multifarious and self-enclosed "particularity," in postmodernist, indeed Derridean fashion. Indeed, today, when parochial differences among the oppressed have been reduced to microscopic divisions, it is all the more important for a revolutionary movement to resolutely point out the common sources of oppression as such and the extent to which commodification has universalized them – particularly global capitalism.

The deformations of the past were created largely by the famous "social question," notably by class exploitation, which in great measure could have been remedied by technological advances. In short, they were scarcity societies – albeit not that alone. Of course a new social-ecological sensibility has to be created, as do new values and relationships, and it will be done partly by overcoming economic need, however economic need is construed. Little doubt should exist that a call for an end to economic exploitation must be a central feature in any social ecology program and movement, which are part of the Enlightenment tradition and its revolutionary outcome.

The essence of dialectic is to always search out what is *new* in any development: specifically, for the purposes of this discussion, the emergence of a trans-class People, such as oppressed women, people of color, even the middle classes, as well as subcultures defined by sexual preferences and lifestyles. To particularize distinctions (largely created by the existing social order) to the point of reducing oppressed people to seemingly "diverse *persons*" – indeed, to mere "personhood" – is to feed into the current privatistic fads of our time and to remove all possibility for collective social action and revolutionary change.

Reason and History

To examine what is really at issue in the questions of municipalism, confederalism, and citizenship, as well as the distinction between the social and the political, we must ground these notions in a historical background where we can locate the meaning of the city (properly conceived in distinction to the megalopolis), the citizen, and the political sphere in the human condition.

Historical experience began to advance beyond a conception of mere cyclical time, trapped in the stasis of eternal recurrence, into a creative *history* insofar as intelligence and wisdom – more properly, *reason* – began to inform human affairs. Over the course of a hundred thousand years or so, as we now know, *Homo sapiens sapiens* slowly overcame the sluggishness of their more animalistic cousins, the Neanderthals, and, amidst ups and downs, entered as an increasingly active agent into the surrounding world – both to meet their more complex needs (material as well as ideological), and to alter that environment by means of tools and, yes, instrumental rationality. Life became longer, more acculturated aesthetically, and more secure, and, potentially at least,

human communities tried to define and resolve the problems of freedom and consciousness at various levels of their development.

The necessary conditions for freedom and consciousness – or preconditions, as socialists of all kinds recognized in the last century and a half – involved technological advances that, in a rational society, *could* emancipate people from the immediate, animalistic concerns of self-maintenance, increase the realm of freedom from constrictions imposed upon it by preoccupations with material necessity, and place knowledge on a rational, systematic, and coherent basis to the extent that this was possible. These conditions at least involved humanity's self-emancipation from the overpowering theistic creations of its own imagination (creations largely formulated by shamans and priests for their own self-serving ends, as well as by apologists for hierarchy) – notably, mythopoesis, mysticism, anti-rationalism, and fears of demons and deities, calculated to produce subservience and quietism in the face of the social powers that be.

That the necessary and sufficient conditions for this emancipation have never existed in a "one-to-one" relationship with each other – and it would have been miraculous if they had – has provided the fuel for Cornelius Castoriadis's rather disordered essays on the omnipotence of "social imaginaries," for Theodor Adorno's basic nihilism, and for frivolous anarcho-chaotics who, in one way or another, have debased the Enlightenment's ideals and the classical forms of socialism and anarchism. True – the discovery of the spear did not produce an automatic shift from "matriarchy" to "patriarchy," nor did the discovery of the plow produce an automatic shift from "primitive communism" to private property, as evolutionary anthropologists of the nineteenth century supposed. Indeed, it cheapens any discussion of history and social change to create "one-to-one" relations between technological and cultural developments, a tragic feature of Friedrich Engels's simplification of his mentor's ideas.

In fact, social evolution is very uneven and combined, which one would hope Castoriadis learned from his Trotskyist past. No less significantly, social evolution, like natural evolution, is profligate in producing a vast *diversity* of social forms and cultures, which are often incommensurable in their *details*. If our goal is to emphasize the vast differences that separate one society from another – rather than identify the important thread of similarities that bring humanity to the point of a highly creative development – "the Aztecs, Incas, Chinese, Japanese, Mongols, Hindus, Persians, Arabs, Byzantines, and Western Europeans, *plus* everything that could be enumerated from other cultures" do not resemble each other, to cite the naive obligations that Castoriadis places on what he calls "a 'rational dialectic' of history" and, implicitly, on reason itself.[2] Indeed, it is unpardonable nonsense to carelessly fling these civilizations together without regard for their place in time, their social pedigrees, the extent to which they can be educed dialectically from one another, or without an explanation of *why* as well as descriptions of how they differ from each other. By focusing entirely on the peculiarity of individual cultures, one reduces the development of civilizations in an eductive sequence to the narrow nominalism that Stephen Jay Gould applied to organic evolution – even to the point where the "autonomy" so prized by Castoriadis can be dismissed as a purely subjective "norm," of no greater value in this postmodernist world of interchangeable equivalences than authoritarian "norms" of hierarchy.

But if we explore very existential *developments* toward freedom from toil and freedom from oppression in all its forms, we find that there *is* a History to be told of rational advances – with-

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[2] Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 63.

out presupposing teleologies that predetermine that History and its tendencies. If we can give material factors their due emphasis without reducing cultural changes to strictly automatic responses to technological changes and without locating *all* highly variegated societies in a nearly mystical sequence of "stages of development," then we can speak intelligibly of definite advances made by humanity out of animality, out of the timeless "eternal recurrence" of relatively stagnant cultures, out of blood, gender, and age relationships as the basis for social organization, and out of the image of the "stranger," who was not kin to other members of a community, indeed, who was "inorganic," to use Marx's term, and hence subject to arbitrary treatment beyond the reach of customary rights and duties, defined as they were by tradition rather than reason.

Cities in History

Important as the development of agriculture, technology, and village life were in moving toward this moment in human emancipation, the emergence of the city was of the greatest importance in freeing people from mere ethnic ties of solidarity, in bringing reason and secularity, however rudimentarily, into human affairs. For it was only by this evolution that segments of humanity could replace the tyranny of mindless custom with a definable and rationally conditioned *nomos*, in which the idea of justice could begin to replace tribalistic "blood vengeance" – until later, when it was replaced by the idea of freedom. I speak of the *emergence* of the city, because although the development of the city has yet to be completed, its moments in History constitute a discernable dialectic that opened an emancipatory realm within which "strangers" and the "folk" *could* be reconstituted as *citizens*, notably, secular and fully rational beings who approximate, in varying degrees, humanity's *potentiality* to become free, rational, fully individuated, and rounded.

Moreover, the city has been the originating and authentic sphere of *politics* in the Hellenic democratic sense of the term, and of civilization – not, as I have emphasized again and again, of the state. Which is not to say that city-states have not existed. But democracy, conceived as a face-to-face realm of policy-making, entails a commitment to the Enlightenment belief that all "ordinary" human beings are potentially *competent* to collectively manage their political affairs – a crucial concept in the thinking, all its limitations aside, of the Athenian democratic tradition, and, more radically, of those Parisian sections of 1793 that gave an equal voice to women as well as all men. At such high points of political development, in which subsequent advances often self-consciously built on and expanded more limited earlier ones, the city became more than a unique arena for human life and politics, and municipalism – *civicism*, which the French revolutionaries later identified with "patriotism" – became more than an expression of love of country. Even when Jacobin demagogues gave it chauvinistic connotations, "patriotism" in 1793 meant that the "national patrimony" was not the "property of the King of France" but that France, in effect, now belonged to *all* the people.

Over the long run, the city was conceived as the socio-cultural *destiny* of humanity, a place where, by late Roman times, there were no "strangers" or ethnic "folk," and by the French Revolution, no custom or demonic irrationalities, but rather *citoyens* who lived in a *free* terrain, organized themselves into discursive assemblies, and advanced canons of secularity and *fraternité*, or more broadly, solidarity and *philia*, hopefully guided by reason. Moreover, the French revolutionary tradition was strongly confederalist until the dictatorial Jacobin Republic came into being –

wiping out the Parisian sections as well as the ideal of a *fête de la fédération.* One must read Jules Michelet's account of the Great Revolution to learn the extent to which *civism* was identified with municipal liberty and *fraternité* with local confederations, indeed a "republic" of confederations, between 1790 and 1793. One must explore the endeavors of Jean Varlet and the Evêché militants of May 30–31, 1793, to understand how close the Revolution came in the insurrection of June 2 to constructing the cherished confederal "Commune of communes" that lingered in the historical memory of the Parisian *fédérés,* as they designated themselves, in 1871.

Hence, let me stress that a libertarian municipalist politics is not a mere "strategy" for human emancipation; it is a rigorous and ethical concordance, of means and ends (of instrumentalities, so to speak) with historic goals – which implies a concept of History as more than mere chronicles or a scattered archipelago of self-enclosed "social imaginaries." The *civitas*, humanly scaled and democratically structured, is the potential home of a universal *humanitas* that far transcends the parochial blood tie of the tribe, the geo-zoological notion of the "earthling," and the anthropomorphic and juvenile "circle of all Beings" (from ants to pussycats) promoted by Father Berry and his acolytes. It is the *immediate* sphere of public life – not the most "intimate," to use Clark's crassly subjectivized word – which, to be sure, does not preclude but indeed should foster intimacy in the form of solidarity and complementarity.

The *civitas*, humanly scaled and democratically structured, is the initiating arena of rational reflection, discursive decision-making, and secularity in human affairs. It speaks to us from across the centuries in Pericles' magnificent funeral oration and in the earthy, amazingly familiar, and eminently secular satires of Aristophanes, whose works demolish Castoriadis' emphasis on the "*mysterium*" and "closure" of the Athenian *polis* to the modern mind. No one who reads the *chronicles* of Western humanity can ignore the rational dialectic that underlies the accumulation of mere events and that reveals an unfolding of the human potentiality for universality, rationality, secularity, and freedom in an eductive relationship that alone should be called *History.* This History, to the extent that it has culminations at given moments of development, on which later civilizations built, is anchored in the evolution of a secular public sphere, in *politics*, in the emergence of the rational city – the city that is rational institutionally, creatively, and communally. Nor can imagination be excluded from History, but it is an imagination that must be elucidated by reason. For nothing can be more dangerous to a society, indeed to the world today, than the kind of unbridled imagination, unguided by reason, that so easily lent itself to Nuremberg rallies, fascist demonstrations, Stalinist idolatry, and death camps.

Social ecology refuses to allow this vast movement toward citification and the emergence of the citizen to be effaced by decontextualizing the city of its historical development. Nor can we allow the *political* domain – the most *immediate* public sphere that renders a face-to-face democracy possible – to be collapsed into the *social* sphere; we cannot afford to dismiss the qualitatively unique sphere called the *civitas*, and its history or dialectic.

Quietism or Confrontation?

The cultural and social barbarism that is closing around this period is above all marked by ideologies of regression: a retreat into an often mythic prelapsarian past; a narcissistic egocentricity in which the political disappears into the personal; and an "imaginary" that dissolves the various phases of a historical development into a black hole of "Oneness" or "interconnectedness," so

that all the moments of a development are flattened out. Underpinning this ideological flattening is a Heideggerian *Gelassenheit*, a passive-receptive, indeed quietistic, "letting things be," that is dressed up in countervailing Taoist "contraries" – each of which cancels out its opposite to leave practical reason with a blank sheet upon which *anything* can be scrawled, however hierarchical or oppressive. The Taoist ruler, who John Clark adduces in his writings, who does not rule, who does nothing yet accomplishes more than anyone else, is a contradiction in terms, a mutual cancellation of the very concepts of "ruler" and "sage" – or, more likely, a tyrant who shrewdly manipulates his or her subject while pretending to be self-effacing and removed from the object of his or her tyranny.

The Chinese ruling classes played at this game for ages – just as the pope, to this day, kisses the feet of his newly ordained cardinals with Christian "humility." What Marx's fetishism of commodities is for capitalism, this Heideggerian *Gelassenheit* is for present-day ideology, particularly for deep ecology in all its various mutations. Thus, we do not *change* the world; we "dwell" in it. We do not *reason* out a course of action; we "intuit" it, or better, "imagine" it. We do not pursue a rational eduction of the moments that make up an evolution; instead, we relapse into a magical reverie, often in the name of an aesthetic vanguardism that surrenders reality to fancy or imagination. Hence the explosion these days of mystical ecologies, primitivism, technophobia, anti-civilizationalism, irrationalism, and cheap fads from devil worship to angelology.

In fact, we are facing a real crisis in this truly counter-revolutionary time – not only in society's relationship with the natural world but in human consciousness itself. When John Clark started designating himself as a "social deep ecologist or a deep social ecologist,"[3] he obfuscated earnest attempts to demarcate the differences between a deadening mystical, often religious, politically inert, and potentially reactionary tendency in the ecology movement, and one that is trying to emphasize the need for fundamental social change and fight uncompromisingly the "present state of political culture."

Instead of retreating to quietism, mysticism, and purely personalized appeals for change, social ecology seeks to think out the *kinds* of institutions that would be required in a rational, ecological society; the kind of politics we should appropriately *practice*; and the political *movement* needed to achieve such a society. Should we fail to initiate new movements, based on new ideas, and advance new programs to mobilize the great mass of humanity, this planet may well be degraded beyond redemption socially even before it is degraded beyond redemption ecologically. It is this terrible prospect social ecology seeks to avert.

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[3] John Clark, "Not Deep Apart," *The Trumpeteer*, vol. 12, no. 2 (Spring 1995), p. 104.

Anarchism as Individualism

I have long suspected that anarchism, if thought out to its logical conclusions and reasoned out from its most fundamental roots, is inherently a negative conception of liberty in its most abstract form. Indeed, if the wild mix of anarchists today and yesterday all share one thing in common, it is their rejection of state coercion of the individual.

If we take a closer look at anarchism as an ideology, it has followed a careening trajectory. It originated (apart from some precursors) in the 1830s and 1840s as a form of unfettered egoism, a radical demand for personal autonomy. Initially it meant little more than unrelenting resistance to attempts by society and particularly the state to restrict individual liberty. Later it flirted with various social movements of the oppressed, embracing the collectivism of the archaic peasant village, then the syndicalism of craft and industrial workers, and later still it was heavily influenced by Marxism and associated itself with a libertarian form of communism. The commitment to various forms of collective social organization, I believe, was a response primarily to the spread of socialism among the working classes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

But by the turn of the twenty-first century, in the wake of social and cultural homogenization that has been produced by modern corporate capitalism and the mass media, anarchism has come full circle and has returned to its old individualistic, autonomist origins. Let me emphasize that recent developments are not anomalous to anarchism. The "left liberalism" found all over the place in anarchism, as well as the unsavory, even outright reactionary ideas in *Anarchy*, *Fifth Estate*, and the like (these are the largest circulation anarchist periodicals in the US), are built into some of the most fundamental premises of anarchism – notably, the individualism that forms the conceptual building block of the whole skewed edifice.

History can provide ample examples of how some self-professed anarchists explicitly denounced mass social action as futile and alien to their private concerns.[1] Yet, I am not primarily taking issue with full-frontal individualists or even the often explicitly anti-social elements that somehow have always been accepted within the folds of anarchism. What I would like to get at is the *essence* of this contradictory "ideology" and the social consequences it yields; even the most "social" forms of anarchism have been defined by a foundational individualism. In fact, the ideas of social and economic reconstruction that have in the past been offered in the name of "anarchy" have invariably been drawn to a great extent from Marxism and other forms of socialism. The fact that anarchism came wrapped in socialist concepts has often prevented anarchists from appearing as what they are: egoists.

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[1] A striking example is found in Victor Serge's quarrel with his French "pure" anarchist compatriots over the historical importance of the outbreak of revolution in Russia. In response to Serge's excitement, these café anarchists or "Individualists," as he chooses to call them, "mocked [Serge] with their store of cynical stock phrases: 'Revolutions are useless. They will not change human nature. Afterwards reaction sets in and everything starts all over again. I've only got my own skin; I'm not marching for wars or revolutions, thank you.'" Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, translated and abridged by Peter Sedgewick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 53.

The Individualistic Core of Anarchism

As far as I can judge, anarchists basically seek a future of "voluntary agreements" between individuals. Insofar as anarchists have called for a communal society, they have meant a form of association that was necessary for the individual's achievement of autonomy in a non-oppressive or "anti-authoritarian" manner. They share the belief that enforceable, structured or institutionalized relations within and between communes are evil, threatening their highly treasured individual autonomy.

Absolutely canonical for all anarchists – yes, including those who call themselves "anarcho-collectivist," "anarcho-communist," and "anarcho-syndicalist" – is the belief that the individual ego must be autonomous, and a free society must be one in which individual autonomy has free rein, unrestricted by laws and constitutions.

Throughout the writings of the canonical theorists militant assertions of individual liberty abound. Proudhon hardly requires much elucidation on this score – some of his most basic "social" ideas are built around entirely bourgeois concepts of individualism. Bakunin and Kropotkin, to be sure, criticized "Individualists" at great length, but my view is that their own ideas were themselves essentially individualistic, often overlaid with socialist ideas – and that the "collectivist" or "communist" overlay stood in utter contradiction to their individualistic foundations. I myself once used anarchism as a political label for my views, but further thought has forced me to conclude that anarchism is not a social theory at all but rather a personal psychology; it is not a political movement but a subculture.

Some of the ideas of classical anarchism will certainly be useful for a future libertarian radicalism. I have consistently invoked confederalism as one of anarchism's contributions to social theory. But I have also pointed out that the confederalist element in historical anarchism, heavily influenced by Proudhon, is so loosely constructed, and so charged with a belief in autonomy, that any component of the confederation could withdraw at any time. The form of confederalism that anarchists have advanced – "a federation of autonomous communes"

– recapitulates the same self-contradiction between individual and society: if a commune is completely autonomous, it cannot be part of a federation. Proudhon, for example, declared that he would divide and subdivide "power" until he reached its most elementary components. But in such a situation, nothing remains in the end but the individual, the purely self-sufficient ego, secure in his own way of life and sufficiency. Followed to its logical conclusion, Proudhon's "federalism" would render organized society untenable because of assertions of communal and individual "liberties."

If individuals must be free of constraint, anarchists have argued, so must the communes in a future society. (How communes could even exist when their members were all individually autonomous is an unresolved question.) Although Kropotkin called himself an anarcho-communist, he essentially agreed with Proudhon on his point: "the social revolution must be achieved by the liberation of the communes," he wrote, "and … it is the communes, *absolutely independent*, liberated from the tutelage of the state, that alone can give us the necessary setting for a revolution and the means of accomplishing it."[2] To bolster this notion, Kropotkin also rejects majority rule:

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[2] Peter Kropotkin, "The Commune," in *Words of a Rebel* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1992), p. 81; emphasis added.

he's against people "submitting themselves to the majority-rule, which always is a mediocrity-rule."[3]

By the same logic, anarchists claim that the future society must be one bereft of laws and constitutions, because they necessarily restrict the sovereign autonomy of the individual. When Proudhon was a member of the French Chamber of Deputies, he once declared that he refused to vote for a particular constitution, not because he opposed the content of it, but simply because it was a constitution. I fail to see how any free society can be constituted rationally without a constitution – and for that matter, laws, ordinances, rules, and the like. This condemnation of all constitutions, laws, and institutions – claiming they are all equivalent to a state – as all "great" anarchist thinkers did and others today continually do, is to appeal to wanton chaos, indeed to a sociality that essentially depends on good instincts and, hopefully, education (to which Bakunin added custom and others, habit). Such thinking reveals not only the basic socio-biologism that underpins most anarchist theory (if one can use the word theory at all), but also the tendency of anarchists to refer back to primordial levels for their moral philosophy – genes, custom, habit, tradition, and the like.

The Essence of Anarchy

The tension between individualism and collectivism or communism would not exist if the interests of individuals could somehow be conceived to be the same as or at least compatible with the interests of the larger society. Bakunin and Kropotkin tried to do just that. Bakunin asserted that individual and social interests were indeed compatible, blaming the idea that individual and social interests did not always harmoniously converge on, variously, the state or the religious doctrine of original sin. Kropotkin went further, maintaining that individual morality was in the end identical to social morality: he gave a socio-biological basis to the instinct for mutual aid, saying that most creatures, from the simplest to the most complex, are driven by an urge to cooperate. This being the case, he believed, the individual – freed from the trammels of the state – would make choices in behavior and thinking that were in harmony with the needs of his or her society. Thus Kropotkin could write:

> Humanity is trying now to free itself from the bonds of any government whatever, and to respond to its needs of organization by the free understanding between individuals pursuing the same common aims... Free agreement is becoming a substitute for law. And free cooperation a substitute for governmental guardianship... We already foresee a state of society where the liberty of the individual will be limited by no laws, no bonds – by nothing else but his own social habits and the necessity, which everyone feels, of finding cooperation, support, and sympathy among his neighbors.[4]

But this socio-biologically based cooperation rests, of course, on a fallacy. In fact, individuals have often placed their own personal interest above those of their community. Since Kropotkin,

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[3] See Peter Kropotkin, "Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles," in R. Baldwin, ed., *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York: Dover Press, 1970), pp. 51–2.

[4] Peter Kropotkin, "Anarchist Communism," p. 63; also *Conquest of Bread, ed. P. Avrich (New York: New York University Press, 1972), pp. 66–7.*

moreover, was always prone to highlight the steady advance of mutual aid in the world in which he lived, he would have had a hard time to explain the brutalities that occurred from 1914 onward, which opened one of the bloodiest periods in history. Alas, cooperation is not embedded in our genes. But it is on such genetically based cooperation that Kropotkin's "anarcho-communism" rests; and when it collapses, so does the whole edifice. What remains, again, is the individual ego.

Martin A. Miller, a Kropotkin biographer, wrote that "Kropotkin argued for the full and complete liberty of the individual, as the ethical basis of anarchism. He stopped short of falling into the trap of having to accept egoism and extreme individualism only because he believed in the innate sociability and passivity of man, when allowed to be free without constraint from above."[5] This belief too was mistaken. Lacking the linchpin that unites individualism and socialism, "anarcho-communism" and "anarcho-collectivism" become oxymoronic words, bereft of meaning.

Furthermore, anarchism, grounded in the egoistic individual, tends to reject anything about Western society with a flat "No!" and to demand its opposite instead, as if a libertarian society was simply the mere negation of bourgeois society. Radical as this posturing may seem at first, it implies the disbanding of society as such. Hence the fascination of so many anarchist writers with primitivism, their technophobic outlook, their aversion to regulation of any kind, and indeed their indifference to the realm of necessity, as though its compulsions – possibly including death itself – could be abolished.

In its world outlook, anarchism has consistently opposed dialectics and favored either positivism or mysticism instead. In the absence of any dialectical theory of history – unless one wants to believe that humanity is currently progressing toward mutual aid in the form of one sort of collective or other – anarchism hardly rises beyond a "vision." Its most appropriate "philosophy," in my view, is actually postmodernism, with its radical fragmentation of reality, its chaos, its vacuous spontaneity, and as Feyerabend put it, the notion that "anything goes."

Anarchists have always shown little regard for the place of reason in history, and they have not cared for a serious appreciation of historical development with an endeavor to distinguish the preconditional in key social developments (where Marx often excelled) from the conditional. Here, I completely agree with Marx's statement in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* that "men" make history but not under conditions of their own choosing.

Among anarchists, I find, such views are heinous. As Colin Ward puts it, "anarchy" is the wonderful society that, like soil, lies beneath the snow (of capitalism, the state, religion, and oppressive institutions generally); the snow only has to melt away, and then we will have our Wonderland. Kropotkin seems to have had no greater appreciation than other anarchist theorists for the mutual interaction between the legacy of domination and the legacy of freedom in history. Ward's "snow" metaphor is moreover very much in tune with Bakunin's continual reliance on an alleged instinct for revolution that lies latent in workers and peasants, and Kropotkin's tendency to fall back on an instinct for mutual aid.

While I would argue that the rejection of any limitation on behavior is symptomatic of anarchism's individualistic basis, the way anarchists are invoking "instinct" as an alternative social foundation not only makes a mockery of reason but also reduces us to a quasi-animalistic existence. The absence of any real historical sense – which makes anarchy possible anytime, even in

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[5] Martin A. Miller, "Introduction" to Peter Kropotkin's *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, ed. M.A. Miller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), p. 31.

the "affluent" societies of the Paleolithic and Neolithic – easily leads anarchists into primitivism and technophobia. Of course, the disregard for dialectical reason, indeed the antagonism toward it, fits in with the anti-rationalism that pervades much of anarchism; it is precisely the hypostatization of instinct, habit, and tradition, that leads anarchists into mysticism and anti-rationalism, and reinforces their proclivity for primitivism.[6]

Hence anarchism does not pay any attention to the "forms of freedom," nor to the imperative material, technological, and cultural preconditions for a free and rational society. Few if any of the major anarchist theorists clearly faced the problem of such institutions, and certainly none of them today propose to deal with it. Dozens of questions and issues, ranging from philosophy to the interpretation of history, to the evaluation of politics, capitalism, organization, programs, and so on, simply remain beyond the purview of anarchism.

In my mind, these notions taken together form a complete fit, on a level more basic than the differences between one form of anarchism and another. That anarchism's commitment to the ego outweighs its variously colored socialistic veneers is evident in its history. It is highly symptomatic that anarchists have been notoriously unable to develop beyond a small group level or to form organizations. Why not? we ask ourselves. What stands in the way, I assure you, is not the "communistic" dimension of anarchism – it is its foundational individualism.

Between 1917 and 1921, in Europe's climactic revolutionary years, anarchism played no major role (although various syndicalists often temporarily thought of themselves as anarchists). In 1917, for example, Russian anarchism, much to its discredit, did not embrace syndicalism but yielded to the Moscow "house expropriators."

What gave anarchism a semblance of a mass following was syndicalism, a form of libertarian socialism. It was syndicalists, not anarchists, who built the CNT, and hence the CNT is an example not of anarchism but of syndicalism. The anarchists formed a volatile but very small fraction within the CNT, consisting of small loosely structured affinity groups inside very highly structured trade unions that quarreled endlessly with the syndicalists.[7] The continuing demand of the anarchist *grupistas*, in the 1920s, was to reject the need for democratic decision-making and demand ever more decentralization within what was already a loose and unstable confederation – to the point where the individual group should be able to function on its own, autonomously, as it saw fit. Here the anarchists held true to the ideas of Proudhon and Kropotkin, quoted above. Throughout the 1930s the *faístas* were in endless conflicts with the *cenetistas*. Tragically, in 1933 the *grupistas* dragged the movement into the disastrous "cycle of insurrections" that contributed significantly to the outbreak of the civil war, for which the CNT–FAI was totally unprepared.

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[6] These basic assumptions can also go a long way in explaining why anarchism has been so fascinated by mystifications of the peasantry, bioregionalism, not to speak of deep ecology, Buddhism, Tolstoyism, Gandhi-ism, and the like.

[7] It should be mentioned, though, that despite their basic differences, syndicalism has also been burdened by its expressly anti-intellectual stance, and it shares with authentic anarchism a disdain for rationalism and theory. Despite its commitment to mass organization and social transformation, syndicalism has no strategy for fundamental change beyond the general strike. Invaluable as general strikes may be in revolutionary situations, they do not have the essentially mystical capacity that syndicalists assigned to them, as the vast general strike initiated in Germany in 1921 during the Kapp Putsch demonstrated. Such failures are, in fact, evidence that militant direct actions in themselves are not equatable with revolutions nor even with profound social changes. For a critique of syndicalism, see my "The Ghost of Anarcho- Syndicalism," in *Anarchist Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1993).

Anarchy or Libertarian Municipalism?

Apart from the syndicalists, many of whom were decidedly not anarchists, anarchism has shown little regard for institutions of direct democracy. In fact, the total identification of politics with the state leads anarchists to pit purely social actions and phenomena against the state, leading to incidents, "direct actions" such as "reclaiming the streets," cooperatives, squats, and mere forms of merriment or theater that I can no longer take seriously as political work. Some of these actions are useful gymnastics or training on cooperation, but they exhibit no concern for or interest in power.

Libertarian municipalism, by contrast, is concerned with power – and who will have it. How can power be acquired and communally managed by the oppressed? In what libertarian institutions should it be collected? How does one move toward creating those institutions?

Popular assemblies, in my view, are the means by which direct democracy can be institutionalized. While anarchism has no politics, libertarian municipalism is *intensely* political. It is my hope that a libertarian municipalist program will resonate among responsible and thinking people who are concerned with where power will repose in a free and rational society.

Libertarian municipalism is not only the *end* – the political infrastructure for the future society – but the *means*; a rare confluence of means and ends that has not been worked out in either Marxism or anarchism. Hence it is a matter of vital importance that when we run candidates to municipal elections, in order to achieve popular assemblies and confederal structures, they are as a matter of civic and political responsibility obliged to take office, or else there is no point in advocating a libertarian municipalist program. Thus to run candidates who will not occupy seats on city councils or similar institutions is to turn libertarian municipalism into a theater or propaganda for other ends. It does not show any true concern for how power will be institutionalized; indeed it makes a mockery of the potentialities of the municipality for creating an empowered people's assembly.

We are faced with a real dilemma. It is very difficult to govern or manage society from the "ground up" in an immensely populous and global world. I envision confederations within confederations, essentially structured around local, citywide, countywide, provincial, regional, and national confederal councils based on directly democratic procedures. The logic of anarchist thought and its endless demands for autonomy precludes that this vision can be realized within its framework. When Kropotkin and other anarchists extol "free agreements" they express a voluntarism by which individuals and communities not only confederate together but may withdraw from these confederations at will, making collective social and political life impossible. Popular assemblies, which would ultimately validate laws and constitutions, must operate with a deep sense of responsibility for one another by majority votes and within a framework that limits their right to walk out of a confederation without the consent of the majority of the entire confederation's members.

We must work to make left libertarian thought relevant today, and focus on how we can remake society by serious libertarian organization. To this end, I suggest that we must work to create a democratic form of government, one that is libertarian and municipalist. I prefer the word government here to self-management or even self-government for several reasons, most importantly because concepts of self-management and self-government seem to me to contain the implication – reinforced by this business-oriented and narcissistic society – that social life is basically an agglomeration of autonomous egos, or "selves," and that communal life can be

reduced to them. Indeed, many anarchists often refer to "self-government" when describing their dismissal of any kind of obligations of any sort as authoritarian or coercive or worse, since they are demanding unrestricted rights for every "sovereign" individual without requiring of them any duties.

I have come to the conclusion that these concerns merely float on the surface of a deeply flawed view of social reality. We must therefore clearly distinguish between anarchy and my ideas of libertarian municipalism. After 40 exhausting years in the anarchist scene, I've been forced to conclude that "anarchism" is more symptomatic of the decadence that marks the present era than a force in opposition to it.

It is my desire, in the time that I have left, to get out of the anarchist "loop" (as this generation likes to put it) before it turns into a noose and strangles me. I've tried to rescue a social anarchism, with social ecology and libertarian municipalism, from the rest of anarchism; but the response to these efforts have led me to conclude that this has been a failure among anarchists. With a few notable exceptions, they simply don't want these ideas – and that is that. I would like to put all the distance I can between this scene and myself. Yet I would also like to believe that we can develop a synthesis of the best in Marx's writings and in the anarchist tradition – a communalism that will be meaningful and relevant to serious, responsible people in the years ahead. This is the project that is now dearest to my heart, not an attempt to rescue movements and traditions that have been outlived by history.

Anarchism, Power, and Government

Today, when anarchism has become *le mot du jour* in radical circles, the differences between a society based on anarchy and one based on the principles of social ecology should be clearly distinguished. Therefore, just as elsewhere I have distinguished between politics and statecraft, I must now also point out the distinction between governments and states. All anarchists, and indeed most left libertarians, dismiss every government as a state. The fact is that no society can exist without an orderly way of administering itself, which necessarily implies administration or regulation of some kind.

Not Every Government is a State

All states are governments, but not all governments are states. A government is a set of organized and responsible institutions that are minimally an active system of social and economic administration. They handle the problems of living in an orderly fashion. A government may be a dictatorship; it may be a monarchy or a republican state; but it may also be a libertarian formation of some kind. But without a rudimentary body of institutions to sort out the rights and duties of its members, hopefully in a democratic way, society would simply dissolve into a disorderly aggregation of individuals.

Indeed, the very notion of community is meaningless unless those who claim allegiance to it take on obligations that allow it to function, flourish, and meet everyone's needs. Even self-government is therefore a form of government, for under systems of self-government community members contribute to its functioning. It is possible, and indeed necessary, for human beings to govern themselves in civilized and rational institutions. In fact, institutions as such are necessary for social organization.

Social revolutionaries have traditionally sought a social order that is concerned with "the administration of things, instead of the administration of men," but people must first be organized institutionally in such a way that they can administer things. One, in effect, cannot be done without the other. Thus if a society is to socially own or control property, if it is to produce goods to meet the needs of all instead of allow profit for a few, if it is to organize a system of distribution so that all rather than an elite share equitably in the material means of life – then clearly definable administrative institutions have to be established that not only make them workable but also constrain irrational behavior. In short, forms of authority have to be created that are meant not to exploit or oppress human beings, but rather to ensure that some human beings are *not* exploited or oppressed by others and to ensure the means for acquiring the good life.

Such institutions must exist in a society, even a libertarian one. Their absence would lead to a prevalence of chaos, disorder, instability, and disequilibrium – none of which necessarily has revolutionary or liberatory implications. That revolutions produce instability does not mean that instability is somehow a desirable condition or that it must produce a libertarian revolution. If

"anarchy is the highest form of order," as some anarchists have said, then it is also the highest form of administration and stability.

What kinds of governments, then, are not states? Tribal councils, town meetings, workers' committees, soviets (in the original sense of the word), popular assemblies and the like are governments, and no amount of juggling with words can conceal that fact. They are organized institutions that serve generalized human needs, such as those of a revolutionary proletariat or peasantry, in a libertarian fashion. The end that a government serves, no less than its structure, is an integral part of its nature and definition.

A state, by contrast, is a government that is organized to serve the interests of a privileged and often propertied class at the expense of the majority. This historic rise of the state transformed governance into a malignant force for social development. When a government becomes a state – that is, a coercive mechanism for perpetuating class rule for exploitative purposes – it invariably acquires different institutional characteristics. First, its members are professionalized to one degree or another, in order to separate them from the mass of the population and thereby impart to them an extraordinary status, which in turn renders them the full-time protectors of a ruling class. Second, the state, aided by military and police functionaries, enjoys a monopoly over the means of violence. The members of a state's armies and police may be drawn from the very classes they are organized to coerce – that is irrelevant; once they are separated from the population at large, uniformed, rigorously trained, disciplined, and placed in an explicit chain of command, they cease to belong to any class and become professional men and women of violence who are at the service of those who command them. The chain of command binds them together and places them at the disposal of their commanders.

The tendency of anarchists to classify all governments as states is a mischievous distortion (just as the tendency of anarchists to identify constitutions and laws as such with statism verges on the absurd). Both tendencies are the product of a radical ego-orientation that denies the need for any constraints – indeed, that unthinkingly sees all constraints as evil.

This issue is by no means an idle discussion. It played a pivotal role during the Spanish Revolution of 1936–37, a history that even has profound implications for the future of left libertarian theory and practice.

Libertarian Government in Revolutionary Spain

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Spain was the most important locus of worldwide anarcho-syndicalism. Here, uniquely, anarchists and syndicalists conjointly developed a mass movement that persisted for at least two generations. The National Confederation of Labor (CNT), formed in 1910 in Barcelona, was by the mid-1930s the largest anarcho-syndicalist union in the world. It was a strong and vital force, particularly on the eastern coast of Spain.

Despite or perhaps because of its breadth, the CNT was based on at least two distinct ideologies that were frequently in tension with each other. The first, syndicalism, was perhaps the most highly organized of all libertarian ideologies. Syndicalism emphasized discipline and unity, and its high regard for the importance of organizing the exploited classes could surpass even that of socialism. Syndicalists would have agreed strongly with the words of Joe Hill as he faced a firing squad in Utah: "Don't mourn – organize!"

For their part, anarchists historically distrusted organization. Leading figures of Spanish anarchism such as Anselmo Lorenzo and Federico Urales viewed the formation of the CNT with deep suspicion, if not outright hostility. Achieving a creative union between the more madcap members of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), who in fact were true to their anarchist precepts, and the syndicalists was difficult; fractious disputes often shredded the CNT and, in the early 1930s, led to an outright split.[1]

The outbreak of the Spanish Revolution in 1936 created a decisive crisis that tested the very integrity of the CNT. In the process, it challenged anarchism to deal with the serious question of acquiring and holding power.

On July 21, 1936, the workers of Catalonia and especially its capital, Barcelona, defeated the rebel forces of General Francisco Franco and thereby gained control over one of Spain's largest and most industrialized provinces, including many important cities along the Mediterranean coast and a considerable agrarian area. In the face of the conflict, the Catalan state institutions either floundered helplessly or dissolved. Something unprecedented in modern history then took place: an anarcho-syndicalist movement found itself in a position of power. Partly as the result of an indigenous libertarian tradition and partly as a result of the influence exercised by the CNT, Spain's mass revolutionary-syndicalist trade union was possessed of the authority to create a libertarian communist society and the institutions to structure it.

The CNT membership proceeded to create a dazzling series of libertarian institutions. In the cities it organized a huge network of defense, neighborhood, factory, supply, and transportation committees and assemblies, while in the countryside the more radical peasantry (a sizable part of the agrarian population) took over and collectivized the land. Catalonia and its population were protected against a possible counterattack by a revolutionary militia, which, notwithstanding its often archaic weapons, was sufficiently well armed to have defeated the rebel army and police force. This committee system assumed control over the economic and political life of eastern coastal Spain and parts of the peninsula's interior. It controlled nearly every aspect of social life in Barcelona, from the feeding of the city's population to its safety.

The committee structure had not been created by an elite group, such as the Bolsheviks. On the contrary, it decidedly emerged, under the guidance of CNT militants, from the workers and peasants of Catalonia themselves – to the surprise and even the patent unease of most of the CNT's regional and national leaders, who seemed to be unnerved and thrown off balance by the rapid tempo of revolutionary events. Notwithstanding their reputation for indiscipline, the majority of CNT members, or *cenetistas*, were libertarian syndicalists rather than anarchists; they were strongly committed to a well-structured, democratic, disciplined, and coordinated organization. In July 1936 they acted, often on their own initiative, to create these councils, committees, and assemblies, breaking through all predetermined ideologies within the revolutionary movement.

The result was that they shattered the bourgeois state-machine and created a radically new government or polity in which they themselves exercised direct control over public and economic affairs through institutions of their own making. For several months the CNT's grassroots pro-

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[1] As Ronald Fraser observes in *Blood of Spain* (in my view the best book to date on the Spanish Revolution): "The two differentiated but linked concepts which comprised anarcho-syndicalism, as its hyphenated name suggested, could by the 1930s be schematically stated in a series of polarities: rural/urban, local/ national, artisanal/industrial, spontaneous/organized, autarkic/ interdependent, anti-intellectual/intellectual." Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books; 1972), p. 542. These polarities were never reconciled; indeed, the civil war of 1936–39 exacerbated them to a near breaking point.

letarian and peasant militants provided rare examples of the use of federative principles of economic control, in contrast to private or statist methods, to effectively manage production in the cities and the countryside. Put bluntly, they took power by destroying the old institutions and creating radically new ones whose form and substance gave the masses the right to determine the operations of economy and polity.[2]

What they created was a libertarian government, one that constituted the authentic power in the expansive areas in which they existed.[3] The anarcho-syndicalist workers clearly desired to prevent the liberals and conservatives who had run the official Spanish state (and under whose cover the army rebels had plotted and executed their rebellion) from returning to power. The committee structure institutionally embodied the desire of most workers in the large area where it was established to take over society and manage it in the interests of the oppressed; in fact, in the interests of humanity as a whole. Never was anarcho-syndicalism in a more favorable position in its history to declare libertarian communism, their stated social goal. Many of the committees were eager to believe that the CNT would ideologically legitimate their existence and provide them with the guidance needed to achieve a libertarian communist society. They therefore turned to CNT – or rather to the union's "influential militants" (as CNT leaders were euphemistically called) – to coordinate the new institutions into an effective government.

The Downfall of Spanish Anarchism

The structure the Catalan workers and peasants had created in fact stood at odds with the individualism emphasized by anarchism. In this situation, the anarchist ideology embraced by the CNT leadership gave them no tools to function appropriately. After all, pure anarchism has nothing to do with government – indeed it rejects government, even libertarian, popular government, on the basis that all governments are inherently states.

Nonetheless, almost as a matter of course, the CNT membership gave its union leadership the authority to organize a revolutionary government and provide it with political direction. After all, for years the CNT had continuously propagated revolutions and uprisings; in the early 1930s it had taken up arms again and again, without the least prospect of actually being able to change Spanish society. Now in 1936, as its membership looked to it for coordination, the CNT leadership could finally have a significant impact on society.

What did it do? Apparently it stood around with a puzzled look, as if orphaned by the very success of its working-class members in achieving the goals embedded in its rhetoric. This confusion was not the result of a failure of nerve; it stemmed from a failure of the CNT's theoretical insight. For in the eyes of the "influential militants," the committee structure that the revolutionary works had created, and that now ran a very large part of Spain, bore some resemblance to that perennial nightmare that haunted the anarchist tradition from its inception: a state.

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[2] These revolutionary syndicalists conceived the means by which they had carried out this transformation as a form of direct action. They meant by that term well-organized and constructive activities directly involved in managing public affairs. Direct action, in their view, meant the creation of a polity, the formation of popular institutions, and the formulation and enactment of laws, regulations, and the like – which authentic anarchists regarded as an abridgment of individual will or autonomy.

[3] The Spanish socialists of the UGT, who rivaled the CNT among the workers, also created an appreciable number of these committees or participated in them, but the committee structure was primarily – and in Catalonia, entirely – in the hands of CNT workers.

On July 23, a mere two days after the workers' victory over the Francoist uprising, a Catalan regional plenum of the CNT convened in Barcelona. Here the CNT leadership would decide what to do with the power that the workers and peasants had fought for in the streets and villages and then offered up to it. The leadership could have accepted that power and decided to use it to transform the social order in the considerable and strategic area of Spain that was now under the union's de facto control. It could have declared libertarian communism and the end of the old political and social order. It could have created a "Barcelona Commune," one that might have been no more permanent than the "Paris Commune" but would have been far more memorable and inspiring to later generations. A few delegates from the militant Bajo de Llobregat region (on the outskirts of the city), and the CNT militant Juan García Oliver, fervently demanded that the plenum do just this: claim the power it already possessed and proclaim libertarian communism.

But to the astonishment of these militants, the plenum's members found themselves reluctant to take this decisive measure. Federica Montseny and the arguments of Diego Abad de Santillán (two CNT leaders) urged the plenum not to take this move, denouncing it as a "Bolshevik seizure of power." Their oratory prevailed. Betraying the historic trust of its class, the CNT plenary instead voted to establish a coalition government along with all the other parties in Barcelona that had opposed the military rebellion. This new body, called the Anti-Fascist Militia Committee, included the bourgeois liberals and the Stalinists. In effect, the CNT leadership surrendered its own power by entering into this "People's Front" style government. Incredibly, all these parties and unions were granted representation on the basis of parity, not in proportion to their memberships, which would have certainly provided the CNT with a commanding majority on the committee.

The monumental nature of this error should be fully appreciated because it reveals all that is internally contradictory about anarchist ideology. By mistaking a workers' government for a state, the CNT leadership rejected political power in Catalonia at a time when it was actually in their hands. In effect, the CNT turned the power that the workers' committees had vested in their hands over to a new state – and eventually, a few months later, to the bourgeois Generalidad itself. The CNT remained "pure" ideologically, but only by acting as a conduit to transform workers' power into capitalists' power. That is, the plenum did not eliminate power as such; it merely transferred it to its treacherous "allies."

In taking its action, the CNT revealed that while it could militantly protest the abuses of capitalism, it lacked any theoretical and organizational capacity to replace it. It was incapable of distinguishing between a worker– peasant government that the masses had created from below and a capitalist state (or, even more pathetically, a Stalinist-type dictatorship) carefully contrived by the bourgeoisie from above. By expressly rejecting the taking of the power as "statist," even "Bolshevistic" and "dictatorial," it permitted the bourgeoisie to occupy the power arena. This ensured the actual transfer of power away from the workers and peasants and into the hands of the bourgeoisie and the Stalinists, who then proceeded to consolidate their power and eventually used it to destroy the workers' and peasants' government. Adding insult to injury, the CNT soon joined the Generalidad, and the power of the revolutionary workers and peasants thus passed to the bourgeois state.

Why did the CNT leadership decide to transfer its power to the Anti-Fascist Militia Committee? Diego Abad de Santillán, who was one of the principal architects of this curious policy, later articulated the twisted logic:

We could have remained alone, imposed our absolute will, declared the Generalidad null and void, and imposed the true power of the people in its place, but we did not believe in dictatorship when it was being exercised against us, and we did not want it when we could have exercised it ourselves only at the expense of others. The Generalidad would remain in force with President Companys at its head, and the popular forces would organize themselves into militias to carry on the struggle for the liberation of Spain.[4]

This statement, reiterated in different ways by nearly all the leading figures of the CNT, combines outright falsehood with numbing stupidity. Had the CNT taken the power, it would not have "remained alone." All the revolutionary workers and, perhaps, a substantial number of the enlightened petty bourgeoisie in Catalonia would have supported it. Certainly the POUM, a large anti- Stalinist Marxist party in the province, would have actively supported a workers' government. Even the Stalinist leadership of the PSUC and UGT (both of which were quite small in 1936) would most likely have been unable to prevent a majority of their members from supporting workers' power in Catalonia.

Nor would a workers' government have had to be a "dictatorship" in any usual sense of the term. It could have been quite democratic, indeed libertarian, and still functioned in the interests of the working class and other oppressed strata. Structured from the bottom up, it would have been a popular power or government that could have allowed a free press, free expression, and public criticism. Even the middle-class press, provided that it did not incite people to armed rebellion against the new workers' regime, might have been allowed to publish its criticisms. True, the factories would have been taken over by workers' committees, but former technicians and even owners could have been employed for their expertise. In one or another permutation, Catalonia could have been recreated as a tolerant, even open libertarian communist region from a civil liberties' standpoint.

But this was not to be. The CNT's "influential militants" were wedded to a pseudo-theory that perceived no distinction between a government and a state. They were blind to the fact that no bourgeois government such as the Generalidad would permit the anarcho-syndicalist movement to exercise effective power once early revolutionary enthusiasm among the masses waned. Thus the CNT's shrewd opponents could lead the "influential militants" by the nose, step by step, into the clutches of the state apparatus.

Actually, in the intervening year, the CNT leaders discovered that their rejection of power for the Catalan proletariat and peasantry did not include a rejection of power for themselves as individuals. Four CNT-FAI leaders actually agreed to participate in the bourgeois state in Madrid, as cabinet ministers. But first, with a rather adolescent concern for form rather than content, they tried to get the prime minister, Largo Caballero, to change the state's name from that of a cabinet to a "Defense Council." Caballero, a humorless old social democrat, simply told the CNT to go to hell – whereupon the four anarcho-syndicalists, who were never notorious for their theoretical insights, meekly joined the Madrid state as outright ministers in the service of the bourgeoisie. There, they dutifully served the bourgeois state as long as they were useful, up to the closing days of the civil war.

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[4] Quoted in Pierre Broué and Emile Témine, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*, trans. Tony White (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), p. 131.

Thus did anarcho-syndicalism follow the unrelenting logic of events to the edge of the political cliff – and ignominiously jump off, by its presence legitimating a state that it was committed to oppose.

Needless to emphasize, the old ruling classes in Catalonia, the CNT's capitalist and petty-bourgeois opponents, celebrated it all. Aided by the Stalinists, they exhibited no qualms in accepting the power that the anarchists had donated to them. Inevitably, they used the power the workers had won to constitute their own state and systematically demolish all the strategic gains the workers had made.

In the autumn of 1936, the newly reempowered parties set out to dismantle the workers' government in the region. Under the circumstances, that process opened the door to an authoritarian Stalinist regime. Indeed, the reborn Catalan state, in order to eviscerate the power of the CNT workers, soon became a violently counter-revolutionary instrument of the bourgeoisie and the Stalinists. Systematically and with armed force, it swept away the committee system, it restored the old police forces (under new names), and it so abridged workers' control and management of the factories that their role for the rest of the civil war was ineffective. Eventually, it hunted down, arrested, and often executed militant CNT and POUM members. It finally booted the CNT out of the Catalan government, and the Stalinists had a free hand to further efface the revolution and hound its supporters.

Rather than refuse the political and economic power that its own members had offered to it, the CNT plenum should have accepted it and legitimated and approved the new institutions they had already created. Instead, the tension between metaphorical claims and painful realities finally became intolerable, and in May 1937 resolute CNT workers in Barcelona were drawn into open battle with the revived Catalan state in a brief but bloody war within the civil war. Finally the bourgeois state suppressed the last major uprising of the syndicalist movement, butchering hundreds if not thousands of CNT militants. How many were killed will never be known, but we do know that before it was over, the internally contradictory ideology called anarcho-syndicalism lost the greater part of the following it had possessed in the summer of 1936.

Addressing Power

Pure anarchism seeks above all the emancipation of individual personality from all ethical, political, and social constraints. In so doing, it fails to address the concrete issue of power that confronts all revolutionaries in a period of social upheaval. Rather than address how the people, organized into confederated popular assemblies, might capture power and create a fully developed libertarian society, anarchists have traditionally conceived of power as a malignant evil that must be destroyed. Proudhon, for example, once stated that he would divide and subdivide power until, in effect, it ceased to exist. Proudhon may well have intended that government should be reduced to a minimal entity, but his statement perpetuates the illusion that power can actually cease to exist.

Spain revealed the inability of this anti-intellectual, anti-theoretical, and ego-oriented ideology (however sincere and radical its adherents) to cope with the compelling issues of power and social reconstitution. Having staged no less than three insurrections in 1933, the Spanish anarchists and their syndicalist allies seem never to have asked themselves what they would do if they actually succeeded in overthrowing the republic. As a matter of self-defining dogma, an-

archism eschews the creation of institutional power. But in Spain anarchists could not tolerate even an entity that had sprung from its own loins: the revolutionary workers' committees. To stand at the head of these committees and simply take control over Catalonia and other areas would have violated a self-defining principle, but one that assured anarchism's ineffectuality in a revolutionary period.

Power always exists, and it must always be institutionalized – whether in democratic forms like popular assemblies, committees, and councils, or perniciously, in chiefdoms, aristocracies, monarchies, republics, dictatorships, and totalitarian regimes. To suggest that power can be abolished, and that "everyone" may come to feel "personally empowered," is to play with psychological fallacies that have in the past led more than one libertarian movement to come to grief. Confusion over the nature of popular power contributed to popular disempowerment, and to the disempowerment of popular institutions such as the sectional assemblies of 1794, the revolutionary clubs of 1848, the neighborhood committees of 1871, the soviets of 1917, and the committees and assemblies of 1936.

The fact is that power is as ubiquitous as gravity. Just as gravity is one of the forces that hold the universe together, so power is one of the forces that hold any society together. A defining feature of any society – whether it is tribal, slave, feudal, capitalist, socialist, communist, or even anarchist – is not whether power is being exercised but how. To argue that social power as such is somehow wrong or "evil" is fallacious. What counts is whether it belongs to the people, and by what kind of institutions is it being exercised. Communalism, to take one example, seeks as I have argued to transfer power from the state to organized confederations of popular assemblies.

The Spanish anarchist experience cannot be judged as an anomalous event, possible only on an isolated peninsula south of the Pyrenees. If we are to learn anything from this crucial error by the CNT leadership, it is that power is always a feature of social and political life. The real question that every revolutionary movement faces is not whether power has been eliminated, but where it is located: in institutions that serve the interests of oppressive classes and strata, or in those that serve the oppressed; will it rest in the hands of an elite or in the hands of the people?

That which is "pure" exists only within the confines of the laboratory and the workings of the human brain. In the real world, where real people, animals, and plants live, impurity is unavoidable; any development, change, or dialectic yields new elements and phenomena that instantly adulterate a seemingly pure process. Many of the stark dictums historically posed by the Left have been shown to belie the authenticity of the real world, yielding false results for social expectations. During the classical period of socialism many Marxists believed it inevitable that socialism would be achieved; similarly, many anarchists believe it inevitable that freedom can emerge without being conditioned by necessity. Unless those of us on the libertarian left are to accept the absurd notion of a decivilized "autonomous individual," we must concede that society cannot exist without organized institutions that abridge pure autonomy by situating the individual within contextual limitations.

Power that is not placed securely in the hands of the masses must inevitably fall into the hands of their oppressors. There is no closet in which it can be tucked away, no bewitching ritual that can make it evaporate, no superhuman realm where it can be placed in reserve – and no simplistic ideology can make it disappear. Self-styled radicals may try to ignore the problem of power, as the CNT leaders did in July 1936, but it will remain hidden at every meeting, lie concealed in public activities, and appear and reappear at every rally.

Social revolutionaries, far from removing the problem of power from their field of vision, must address the problem of how to give power a concrete institutional emancipatory form. To be silent with respect to this question, and to hide behind superannuated ideologies that are irrelevant to the present overheated capitalist development, is merely to play at revolution, even to mock the memory of the countless militants who have given their all to achieve it.

The Revolutionary Politics of Libertarian Municipalism

Libertarian municipalism is a revolutionary politics, and not a new version of Paul Brousse's reformist "possibilism" of the 1890s. Libertarian municipalism in no way compromises with parliamentarism, reformist attempts to "improve" capitalism, or the perpetuation of private property. Limited exclusively to the municipality as the locus for political activity, as distinguished from provincial and state governments, not to speak of national and supranational governments, libertarian municipalism is revolutionary to the core, in the very important sense that it seeks to exacerbate the latent and often very real tension between the municipality and the state, and to enlarge the democratic institutions of the commune that still remain, at the expense of statist institutions. It counterposes the confederation to the nation-state, and libertarian communism to existing systems of private and nationalized property. Libertarian municipalism is an explicit attempt to update the traditional anarchist-communist ideal of the federation of communes or "Commune of communes." More specifically, it aims for the confederal linking of libertarian communist municipalities, in the form of directly democratic popular assemblies as well as the collective control or "ownership" of socially important property.

Where anarchist-communists in the past have regarded the federation of communes as an ideal to be achieved after an insurrection, libertarian municipalists, I contend, regard the federation – or confederation – of communes as a political practice that can be developed, at least partly, prior to an outright revolutionary confrontation with the state – a confrontation which, in my view, cannot be avoided and, if anything, should be encouraged by increasing the tension between the state and confederations of municipalities. In fact, libertarian municipalism is a communalist practice for creating a revolutionary culture, and for bringing revolutionary change into complete conformity with our social goals.

In the last case, it unifies practice and ideal into a single and coherent means-and-ends approach for initiating a libertarian communist society, without any disjunction between the strategy for achieving such a society and the society itself. At no point should libertarian municipalists cultivate the illusion that the state and bourgeoisie will allow such a continuum to find fulfillment without open struggle.

The Revolutionary Municipality

It would be helpful to place libertarian municipalism in a broad historical perspective, all the more to understand its revolutionary character in human affairs generally as well as its place in the repertoire of anti-statist practices. The town or city, or, more broadly, the municipality, is not merely a "space" created by a given density of human habitations. In terms of its history as a civilizing tendency in humanity's development, the municipality is integrally part of the sweeping process whereby human beings began to dissolve biologically conditioned social relations based

on real or fictitious blood ties, with their primordial hostility to "strangers," and slowly replace them by largely social and rational institutions, rights, and duties that increasingly encompassed all residents of an urban space, irrespective of consanguinity and biological facts. The town, city, municipality, or *commune* (the equivalent word, in Latin countries, for "municipality") was the emerging civic substitute, based on residence and social interests, for the tribal blood group, which had been based on myths of a common ancestry. The municipality, however slowly and incompletely, formed the necessary condition for human association based on rational discourse, material interest, and a secular culture, irrespective of and often in conflict with ancestral roots and blood ties. Indeed, the fact that people can come together peacefully and share creatively in the exchange of ideas without hostility or suspicion today, despite our disparate ethnic, linguistic, and national backgrounds, is a grand historic achievement of civilization, one that is the work of centuries involving a painful discarding of primordial definitions of ancestry, and the replacement of these archaic definitions by reason, knowledge, and a growing sense of our status as members of a common humanity.

In great part, this humanizing development was the work of the municipality – the increasingly free space in which people, as people, began to see each other realistically, steadily unfettered by archaic notions of biological consanguinity, tribal affiliations, and a mystical, tradition-laden, and parochial identity. I do not contend that this *process of civilization* has been completely achieved. Far from it. Without the existence of a rational society, the municipality can easily become a megalopolis, in which community, however secular, is replaced by atomization and an inhuman social scale beyond the comprehension of its citizens – indeed, becomes the space for class, racial, religious, and other irrational conflicts.

But both historically and contemporaneously, citification forms the necessary condition – albeit by no means fully actualized – for the realization of humanity's potentiality to become fully human, rational, and collectivistic, thereby shedding divisive, essentially animalistic divisions based on presumed blood affiliations and differences, mindless custom, fearful imaginaries, and a non-rational, often intuitional, notion of rights and duties.

Hence the municipality is the potential arena for realizing the great goal of transforming parochialized human beings into truly universal human beings, a genuine *humanitas*, divested of the darker animalistic attributes of the primordial world. The rational municipality in which all human beings can be citizens – irrespective of their ethnic background and ideological convictions – constitutes the true arena of a communalist society. Metaphorically speaking, it is not only a desideratum for rational human beings, without which a free society is impossible; it is also the future of a rational humanity, the indispensable space for actualizing humanity's potentialities for freedom and self-consciousness.

I do not presume to claim that a confederation of libertarian municipalities – a Commune of communes – has ever existed in the past. Yet no matter how frequently I disclaim the existence of any historical "models" and "paradigms" for libertarian municipalities, my critics still try to saddle me with the many social defects of Athens, revolutionary New England towns, and the like, as if they were somehow an integral part of my "ideals." This criticism is cynical demagogy and beneath contempt. I privilege no single city or group of cities – be they classical Athens, the free cities of the medieval world, the town meetings of the American Revolution, the sections of the Great French Revolution, or the anarcho-syndicalist collectives that emerged in the Spanish Revolution – as the full actualization, still less the comprehensive "models" or "paradigms," of the libertarian municipalist vision.

Yet significant features – despite various, often unavoidable, distortions – existed among all of these municipalities and the federations that they formed. Their value for us lies in the fact that we can learn from all of them about the ways in which they practiced the democratic precepts by which they were guided; and we can incorporate the best of their institutions for our own and future times, study their defects, and gain inspiration from the fact that they did exist and functioned with varying degrees of success for generations, if not centuries.

At present, I think it is important to recognize that when we advance a politics of libertarian municipalism, we are not engaged in discussing a mere tactic or strategy for creating a public sphere; rather, we are trying to create a new political culture that is not only consistent with our communalist goals but that includes real efforts to actualize these goals, fully cognizant of all the difficulties that face us and the revolutionary implications that they hold for us in the years ahead.

Let me note here that the "neighborhood" is not merely the place where people make their homes, rear their children, and purchase many of their goods. Under a more political coloration, so to speak, a neighborhood may well include those vital spaces where people congregate to discuss political as well as social issues. Indeed, it is the extent to which public issues are openly discussed in a city or town that truly defines the neighborhood as an important political and power space.

By this I do not mean only an assembly, where citizens discuss and gird themselves to fight for specific policies; I also mean the neighborhood as the center of a town, where citizens may gather as a large group to share their views and give public expression to their policies. This was the function of the Athenian agora, for example, and the town squares in the Middle Ages. The spaces for political life may be multiple, but they are generally highly specific and definable, not random or ad hoc.

Such essentially political neighborhoods have often appeared in times of unrest, when sizable numbers of individuals spontaneously occupy spaces for discussion, as in the Hellenic agora. I recall them during my own youth in New York City, in Union Square and Crotona Park, where hundreds and possibly thousands of men and women appeared weekly to informally discuss the issues of the day. Hyde Park in London constituted such a civic space, as did the Palais-Royal in Paris, which was the breeding ground of the Great French Revolution and the revolution of 1830.

And during the early days of the 1848 revolution in Paris, scores (possibly hundreds) of neighborhood assembly halls existed as clubs and forums and potentially formed the basis for a restoration of the older neighborhood sections of 1793. The best estimates indicate that club membership did not exceed 70,000 out of a total population of about a million residents. Yet had this club movement been coordinated by an active and politically coherent revolutionary organization, it could have become a formidable, possibly a successful, force during the weeks of crisis that led to the June insurrection of the Parisian workers.

There is no reason, in principle, why such spaces and the people who regularly occupy them cannot become citizens' assemblies as well. Indeed, like certain sections in the Great French Revolution, they may well take a leading role in sparking a revolution and pushing it forward to its logical conclusion.

Recreating a Political Sphere

Libertarian municipalism seeks to go beyond the problems and limitations in classical anarchist-communist theory. Above all by insisting that a political sphere, distinguishable from the state and potentially libertarian in its possibilities, must be acknowledged, and its potentialities for a truly libertarian politics must be explored. We cannot simply content ourselves with simplistically dividing civilization into a workaday world of everyday life that is properly social, as I call it, in which we reproduce the conditions of our individual existence at work, in the home, and among our friends, and, the world of the state, which reduces us at best to docile observers of the activities of professionals who administer our civic and national affairs. Between these two worlds is still another world, the realm of the political, where our ancestors in the past, at various times and places historically, exercised varying degrees of control over the commune and the confederation to which it belonged.

It has always been a lacuna in anarchist-communist theory that the political was conflated with the state, thereby effacing a major distinction between a political sphere in which people in varying degrees exercised power, often through direct assemblies, over their civic environment, and the state, in which people had no direct control, often no control at all, over that environment.

If politics is denatured to mean little more than statecraft and the manipulation of people by their so-called "representatives," then a condition that has acquired varying forms of expression in the classical Athenian assembly, popular medieval civic assemblies, town meetings, and the revolutionary sectional assemblies of Paris, is conveniently erased, and the multitudinous institutions for managing a municipality become reducible to the behavior of cynical parliamentarians, or worse. Yet, it is a gross simplification of historical development and the world in which we live to see the political simply as the practice of statecraft. Just as the tribe emerged long before the city, so the city emerged long before the state – indeed, often in opposition to it. Mesopotamian cities, appearing in the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers some 6,000 years ago, are believed to have been managed by popular assemblies long before they were forced by intercity conflicts to establish state-like institutions and ultimately despotic imperial institutions. It was in these early cities that politics – that is, popular ways of managing the city – were born and may very well have thrived. The state followed later and elaborated itself institutionally, often in bitter opposition to tendencies that tried to restore popular control over civic affairs.

Nor can we afford to ignore the fact that the same conflict also emerged in early Athens and probably other Greek *poleis* long before the development of the state reached a relatively high degree of completion. One can see the recurrence of similar conflicts in the struggle of the Gracchi brothers and popular assemblies in Rome against the elitist Senate and, repeatedly, in the medieval cities, long before the rise of late medieval aristocracies and the Baroque monarchies of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Kropotkin did not write nonsense when he pointed to the free cities of Europe, marked not by the existence of states but by their absence.

Indeed, let us also acknowledge that the state itself underwent a process of development and differentiation, at times developing no further than into a loose, almost minimal system of coercion; extending further at other times into an ever-growing apparatus; finally, in this century in particular, acquiring totalitarian control over every aspect of human existence – an apparatus that was only too familiar thousands of years ago in Asia and even in Indian America in pre-Columbian times. The classical Athenian city-state was only partially statist; it constituted a fraternity, often riven by class conflicts, of select citizens who collectively oppressed slaves,

women, and even foreign residents. The medieval state was often a much looser state formation than, say, the Roman imperial state, and at various times in history (one thinks of the *comuñeros* in Spain during the sixteenth century and the sections in France during the eighteenth) the state almost completely collapsed and direct democracies based on what approximated communalist political principles played a hegemonic role in social affairs.

Libertarian municipalism is concerned with this political sphere, including aspects of basic civic importance, such as economic issues, as well as the many cultural factors that must play a role in the formation of true citizens, indeed, of rounded human beings. (In this respect, it does not draw strict impenetrable barriers between politics and economics to the point where they are implacably set against each other: libertarian municipalism calls for the *municipalization* of the economy and, where material interests between communities overlap, the *confederalization* of the economy.) In a very fundamental sense, the libertarian municipalist arena may be a school for educating its youth and its mature citizens; but what makes it particularly significant, especially at this time, is that it is a sphere of power relations that must be crystallized against capitalism, the marketplace, the forces for ecological destruction, and the state. Indeed, without a movement that keeps this need completely in mind, libertarian municipalism may easily degenerate in this age of academic cretinism into another subject in a classroom curriculum.

Libertarian municipalism rests its politics today on the historically preemptive role of the city in relation to the state, and above all on the fact that civic institutions still exist, however distorted they may appear or however captive to the state they may be, institutions that can be enlarged, radicalized, and eventually aimed at the elimination of the state. The city council, however feeble its powers may be, still exists as the remnant of the communes with which it was identified in the past, especially in the Great French Revolution and the Paris Commune of 1871. The possibility of recreating a sectional democracy still remains, assuming either a legal or extralegal form. We must bear in mind that the French revolutionary sections did not have any prior tradition on which to rest their claims to legitimacy – indeed, they even emerged from the elitist assemblies or districts of 1789, which the monarchy had created to elect the Parisian deputies to the Estates General – except that they refused to disband after they completed their electoral role and remained as watchdogs over the behavior of the Estates in Versailles.

We, too, are faced with the task of restructuring and expanding the civic democratic institutions that still exist, however vestigial their forms and powers may be; of attempting to base them on old or new popular assemblies – and, to be quite categorical, of creating new legal or, most emphatically, extralegal popular democratic institutions where vestiges of civic democracy do not exist. In doing so, we are direly in need of a movement – indeed, a responsible, well-structured, and programmatically coherent organization – that can provide the educational resources, means of mobilization, and vital ideas for achieving our libertarian communist and municipalist goals.

Our program should be flexible in the special sense that it pose minimum demands that we seek to achieve at once, given the political sophistication of the community in which we function. But such demands would easily degenerate into reformism and even possibilism if they did not escalate into a body of transitional demands that would ultimately lead to our maximum demands for a libertarian and ecological society.

Nor can we give up our seemingly utopian vision that the great metropolitan areas can be structurally decentralized. Cities on the scale of New York, London, and Paris, not to speak of Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Bombay, and the like, must ultimately be parceled into smaller cities and decentralized to a point where they are once again humanly scaled communities, not huge

and incomprehensible urban belts. Libertarian municipalism takes its immediate point of departure from the existing facts of urban life, many of which are beyond the comprehension of its residents. But it always strives to physically as well as politically fragment the great cities, until it achieves the great anarchist-communist and even Marxian goal of scaling all cities to human dimensions.

Criticisms of Assembly Democracy

Perhaps the most common criticism that both Marxists and anarchists have presented against libertarian municipalism is the claim that modern cities are too huge to be organized around workable popular assemblies. Some critics assume that if we are to have true democracy, everyone from age zero to one hundred, irrespective of health, mental condition, or disposition, must be included in a popular assembly – and that an assembly must be as small as a touchy-feely American encounter group (say 30 or 40 people), or "affinity group," as one critic calls it. But in large world cities, these critics suggest, which have several million residents, we would require many thousands of assemblies in order to achieve true democracy. In such cities such a multiplicity of small assemblies, they argue, would be just too cumbersome and unworkable.

But a large urban population is itself no obstacle to libertarian municipalism. Indeed, based on this kind of calculation – which would count all residents as participating citizens – the 48 Parisian sections of 1793 would have been completely dysfunctional, in view of the fact that revolutionary Paris had a total of 500,000 to 600,000 people. If every man, woman, and child, indeed every pathological lunatic and totally dysfunctional person, had attended sectional assemblies, and each assembly had had no more than 40 people, my arithmetic tells me that about 15,000 assemblies would have been needed to accommodate all the people of revolutionary Paris. Under such circumstances one wonders how the French Revolution could ever have occurred.

Such critics are usually not revolutionaries at all, and would probably believe that history would have been all the better if the sections had never existed to push the French Revolution forward. Their objection represents the instrumental mind qua calculating machine at its worst. A popular democracy, to begin with, is not premised on the idea that everyone can, will, or even wants to attend popular assemblies. Nor should anyone make participation compulsory, coercing everyone into doing so. Even more significantly, it has rarely happened – indeed, to my knowledge, it has never happened in revolutionary history – that the great majority of people in a particular place, still less everyone, engage in revolution. In the face of insurrection in a revolutionary situation, while unknown militants aided by a fairly small number of supporters rise up and overthrow the established order, most people tend to be either active or inactive observers.

Having reviewed carefully the course of almost every major revolution in the Euro-American world, I can say with some knowledge that, even in a completely successful revolution, it was always a minority of the people who attended meetings of assemblies that made significant decisions about the fate of their society. The very differentiated political and social consciousness, interests, education, and backgrounds among masses in a capitalist society guarantee that people will be drawn into revolutions in waves, if at all. The foremost, most militant wave is, at first, numerically surprisingly small; it is followed by seeming bystanders who, if an uprising seems to be capable of success, merge with the foremost wave, and only after the uprising is likely to

be successful do the politically less developed waves, in varying degrees, follow it. Even after an uprising is successful, it takes time for a substantial majority of the people to fully participate in the revolutionary process, commonly as crowds in demonstrations, more rarely as participants in revolutionary institutions.

In the English Revolution of the 1640s, for example, it was primarily the Puritan army that raised the most democratic issues, with the support of the Levellers, who formed a very small fraction of the civilian population. The American Revolution was notoriously supported, albeit by no means actively, by only one-third of the colonial population; the Great French Revolution found its principal support in Paris and was carried forward by 48 sections, most of which were rooted in assemblies that were poorly attended, except at times when momentous decisions aroused the most revolutionary neighborhoods.

Indeed, what decided the fate of most revolutions was less the amount of support their militants received than the degree of resistance they encountered. What brought Louis XVI and his family back to Paris from Versailles in October 1789 was certainly not all the women of Paris – indeed, only a few thousand made the famous march to Versailles – but the king's own inability to mobilize a sufficiently large and reliable force to resist them. The Russian Revolution of February 1917 in Petrograd – for many historians the "model" of a mass spontaneous revolution (and an uprising far more nuanced than most accounts suggest) – succeeded because not even the tsar's personal guard, let alone such formerly reliable supports of the autocracy as the Cossacks, was prepared to defend the monarchy. Indeed, in revolutionary Barcelona in 1936, the resistance to Franco's forces was initiated by only a few thousand anarcho-syndicalists with the aid of the Assault Guards, whose discipline, weaponry, and training were indispensable factors in pinning down and ultimately defeating the regular army's uprising.

It is such constellations of forces, in fact, that explain how revolutions actually succeed. They do not triumph because "everyone," or even a majority of the population, actively participates in overthrowing an oppressive regime, but because the armed forces of the old order and the population at large are no longer willing to defend it against a militant and resolute minority.

Nor it is likely, however desirable it may be, that after a successful insurrection the great majority of the people or even of the oppressed will personally participate in revolutionizing society. Following the success of a revolution, the majority of people tend to withdraw into the localities in which they live, however large or small, where the problems of everyday life have their most visible impact on the masses. These localities may be residential and/or occupational neighborhoods in large cities, the environs of villages and hamlets, or even at some distance from the center of a city or region, fairly dispersed localities in which people live and work.

In short, I fail to see why the large size of modern cities should constitute an insuperable obstacle to the formation of a neighborhood assembly movement. The doors of the neighborhood assemblies should always be open to whoever lives in the neighborhood. Politically less aware individuals may choose not to attend their neighborhood assembly, and they should not be obliged to attend. The assemblies, regardless of their size, will have problems enough, without having to deal with indifferent bystanders and passersby. What counts is that the doors of the assemblies remain open for all who wish to attend and participate, for therein lies the true democratic nature of neighborhood assemblies.

Another criticism I have heard against libertarian municipalism is that a forceful speaker or faction may manipulate a large crowd, such as numerous citizens at an assembly meeting. This philistine criticism could be directed against any democratic institution, be it a large assembly,

a small committee, an ad hoc conference or meeting, or even an "affinity" group. In my view, such a transparent effort to inflict bruises on any attempt to create a popular organization hardly deserves discussion. The size of the group is not a factor here – some very abusive tyrannies appear in very small groups, where one or two intimidating figures can completely dominate everyone else.

What the critics might well ask – but seldom do – is how we are to prevent persuasive individuals from making demagogic attempts to control any popular assembly, regardless of size. In my view the only obstacle to such attempts is the existence of an organized body of revolutionaries – yes, even a faction – that is committed to seeking truth, exercising rationality, and advancing an ethics of public responsibility. Such a faction or organization will be needed, in my view, not only before and during a revolution but also after one, when the constructive problem of creating stable, enduring, and educational democratic institutions becomes the order of the day.

Such an organization will be particularly needed during the period of social reconstruction, when attempts are made to put libertarian municipalism into practice. We cannot expect that, just because we propose the establishment of neighborhood assemblies, we will always – or perhaps even often – be the majority in the very institutions that we have significantly helped to establish. We must always be prepared, in fact, to be in the minority, until such time as circumstances and social instability make our overall messages plausible to assembly majorities.

Class And Trans-Class Issues

Indeed, wherever we establish a popular assembly, with or without legal legitimacy, it will eventually be invaded by competing class interests. Libertarian municipalism, I should emphasize here, is not an attempt to overlook or evade the reality of class conflict; on the contrary, it attempts, among other things, to give due recognition to the class struggle's civic dimension. Modern conflicts between classes have never been confined simply to the factory or workplace; they have also taken a distinctly urban form, as in "Revolutionary Paris," "Red Petrograd," and "Anarcho-syndicalist Barcelona." As any study of the great revolutions vividly reveals, the battle between classes has always been a battle not only between different economic strata in society but also within and between neighborhoods.

Moreover, the neighborhood, town, and village also generates searing issues that cut across class lines: between working people (the traditional industrial proletariat, which is now dwindling in numbers in Europe and the United States and is fighting a rearguard battle with capital), middle-class strata (which lack any consciousness of themselves as working people), the vast army of government employees, a huge professional and technical stratum that is not likely to regard itself as a proletariat, and an underclass that is essentially demoralized and helpless.

We cannot ignore the compelling fact that capitalism has changed since the end of the World War Two; that it has transformed the very social fiber of the great majority of people, both attitudinally and occupationally, in Western Europe and the United States; that it will wreak even further changes in the decades that lie ahead, with dazzling rapidity, especially as automation is further developed and as new resources, techniques, and products replace those that seem so dominant today.

No revolutionary movement can ignore the problems that capitalism is likely to generate in the years that lie ahead, especially in terms of capital's profound effects on both society and the

environment. The futility of syndicalism today lies in the fact that it is still trying to address the problems generated by the old Industrial Revolution, and in the context of the social setting that gave these problems meaning in the first half of the twentieth century. If we have historically exhausted the syndicalist alternative, it is because the industrial proletariat is everywhere destined, by virtue of technological innovation, to become a small minority of the population. It will not do to try to theoretically fabricate a "proletariat" out of clerical, service, and professional "workers" who, in many if not most cases, will not acquire the class consciousness that identified and gave a historical standing to the authentic proletarian.

But these strata, often among the most exploited and oppressed, can be enlisted to support our communalist ideals on the basis of the larger environment in which they live and the larger issues of their sovereignty in a world that is racing out of control: namely their neighborhoods, cities, and towns, and the expansion of their democratic rights as free citizens in a world that has reduced them to mere electoral constituents. They can be mobilized to support our communalist ideals because they feel their power to control their own lives is diminishing in the face of centralized state and corporate power. Needless to say, I am not denying that working people have grim economic problems that may pit them against capital, but their quasi-middle-class outlook if not status diminishes their ability to see the ills of capitalism exclusively as an economic system.

Today we live in an era of permanent industrial revolution in which people tend to respond to the extreme rapidity and vast scope of change with a mysticism that expresses their disempowerment and a privatism that expresses their inability to contend with change. Indeed, capitalism, far from being "advanced," still less "moribund," continues to mature and extend its scope. What it will look like half a century or a century from now is open to the boldest of speculations.

Hence, more than ever, any revolutionary left libertarian movement must, in my view, recognize the importance of the municipality as the locus of new, indeed often trans-class problems that cannot simply be reduced to the struggle between wage labor and capital. Real problems of environmental deterioration affect everyone in a community; real problems of social and economic inequities affect everyone in a community; real problems of health, education, sanitary conditions, and the nightmare, as Paul Goodman put it, of "growing up absurd" plague everyone in a community – problems that are even more serious today than they were in the alienated 1960s decade. These trans-class issues can bring people together with workers of all kinds in a common effort to seek their self-empowerment, an issue that cannot be resolved into the conflict of wage labor against capital alone.

Nor are workers mere "agents" of history, as vulgar Marxists (and implicitly, syndicalists) would have us believe. Workers live in cities, towns, and villages – not only as class beings but also as civic beings. They are fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, friends and comrades, and no less than their ecological counterparts among the petty bourgeoisie, they are concerned with environmental issues. As parents and young people, they are concerned with the problems of acquiring an education, entering a profession, and the like. They are deeply disturbed by the decay of urban infrastructures, the diminution of inexpensive housing, and issues of urban safety and aesthetics. Their horizon extends far beyond the realm of the factory or even the office to the residential urban world in which they and their families live. After I had spent years working in factories, I was not surprised to find that I could reach workers, middle-class people, and even relatively affluent individuals more easily by discussing issues relating to their lived environments – their neighborhoods and cities – rather than to their workplaces.

Today, in particular, the globalization of capital raises the question of how localities can keep productive resources within their own confines without impairing the opportunities of peoples in the so-called "Third World" or South to freely develop technologically according to their own needs. This conundrum cannot be resolved by legislation and economic reforms. Capitalism is a compulsively expansive system. A modern market economy dictates that an enterprise must grow or die, and nothing will prevent capitalism from industrializing – more accurately, expanding – endlessly over the entire face of the planet whenever it is prepared to do so. Only the complete reconstruction of society and the economy can end the dilemmas that globalization raises, including the one-sided economic development of the South, often at the expense of workers in the North, and the enhancement of corporate power to the point of threatening the stability, indeed the very safety, of the planet.

Here again, I would contend that only a grassroots economic policy, based on a libertarian municipalist agenda and movement, can offer a major alternative – and it is precisely an alternative that many people seek today – capable of arresting the impact of globalization. For the problem of globalization, there is no global solution. Global capital, precisely because of its very hugeness, can only be eaten away at its roots, specifically by means of a libertarian municipalist resistance at the base of society. It must be eroded by the myriad millions who, mobilized by a grassroots movement, challenge global capital's sovereignty over their lives and try to develop local and regional economic alternatives to its industrial operations. Developing this resistance would involve subsidizing municipally controlled industries and retail outlets, and taking recourse to regional resources that capital does not find it profitable to use. A municipalized economy, slow as it may be in the making, will be a moral economy, one that – concerned primarily with the quality of its products and their production at the lowest possible cost – can hope to ultimately subvert a corporate economy, whose success is measured entirely by its profits rather than by the quality of its commodities.

Let me stress that when I speak of a moral economy, I am not advocating a communitarian or cooperative economy in which small profiteers, however well-meaning their intentions may be, simply become little "self-managed" capitalists in their own right. In my own community I have seen a self-styled "moral" enterprise, Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, grow in typical capitalist fashion from a small, presumably "caring," and intimate enterprise into a global corporation, intent on making profit and fostering the myth that "capitalism can be good." Cooperatives that profess to be moral in their intentions have yet to make any headway in replacing big capitalist concerns or even in surviving without themselves becoming capitalistic in their methods and profit-oriented in their goals.

The Proudhonist myth that small associations of producers – as opposed to a genuinely socialistic or libertarian communistic endeavor – can slowly eat away at capitalism, should finally be dispelled. Sadly, these generally failed illusions are still promoted by liberals such as Harry Boyte and by naive lifestyle anarchists such as the journalistic ruffians at *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, and pure academics such as John Clark and his associates. Either municipalized enterprises controlled by citizens' assemblies will try to take over the economy, or capitalism will prevail in this sphere of life with a forcefulness that no mere rhetoric can diminish.

Capitalist society has effects not only on economic and social relations but on ideas and intellectual traditions as well, indeed, on all of history, fragmenting them until knowledge, discourse, and even reality become blurred, divested of any distinctions, specificity, and articulation. The culture that promotes this celebration of diffuseness and fragmentation – a culture that is epi-

demic in American colleges and universities – goes under the name of poststructuralism or, more commonly, postmodernism. Given its corrosive precepts, the postmodernist worldview is able to level or homogenize everything that is unique or distinctive, dissolving it into a low common denominator of ideas.

Consider, for example, the obscurantist term "earth citizenship," which dissolves the very complex notion of "citizenship," with its presuppositions of *paideia* – that is, the lifelong education of the citizen for the practice of civic self-management – into a diffuse category, by extending (and cheapening) the notion of citizenship to include animals, plants, rocks, mountains, the planet, indeed the very cosmos itself. With a purely metaphorical label for all relationships as an "earth community," the historical and contemporary uniqueness of the city disappears. It presumably preempts every other community because of its wider scope and breadth. Such metaphors ultimately flatten everything, in effect, into a universal "Oneness" that, in the name of "ecological wisdom," denies definition to vital concepts and realities by the very ubiquity of the "One."

If the word "citizen" applies to every existing thing, and if the word "community" embraces all relationships in this seemingly "green" world, then nothing, in fact, is a citizen or a community. Just as the logical category "Being" is rendered as mere existence, Being can only be regarded as interchangeable with "Nothing." So, too, "citizen" and "community" become a universal passport to vacuity, not to uniquely civic conditions that have been forming and differentiating dialectically for thousands of years, through the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds. To reduce them to an abstract "community" is to ultimately negate their wealth of evolutionary forms and particularly their differentiation as sophisticated aspects of human freedom.

Challenges for Our Movements

As a revolutionary politics, libertarian municipalism must nonetheless be conceived as *a process*, a patient practice that will probably have only limited success at the present time, and even then only in select areas that can at best provide examples of the possibilities it could hold if and when it is adopted on a large scale. We will not create a libertarian municipalist society overnight, and in this era of counter-revolution we must be prepared to endure more failures than successes. Patience and commitment are traits that revolutionaries of the past cultivated assiduously; alas today, in our fast consumerist society, the demand for immediate gratification, for fast food and fast living, inculcates a demand for fast politics. Individuals who are prone to adopt a fast lifestyle over one that acknowledges the need for slow growth, with all its disappointments, would do well to learn the art of throwing bricks and painting graffiti rather than commit themselves to the educational responsibilities required by a libertarian municipalist movement. What should count for us is whether libertarian municipalism is a rational means for achieving the rational culmination of human development, not whether it is suitable as a quick fix for present social problems.

We must learn to be flexible without allowing our basic principles to be replaced by a postmodernist quagmire of ad hoc, ever-changeable opinions. For example, if we have no choice but to use electronic means, such as to establish popular participation in relatively large citizens' assemblies, then so be it. But we should, I would argue, do so only when it is unavoidable and for only as long as is necessary. By the same token, if certain desirable measures require a degree of centralization, then we should accept that – without sacrificing, let me insist, the right to immediate recall. But here, too, we should endure such organizational measures for only as long as

they are necessary and no longer. Our basic principles in such cases must always be our guide: we remain committed to a direct face-to-face democracy and a well-coordinated, confederal, but decentralized society.

Nor should we fetishize consensus over democracy in our decision-making processes. Consensus, as I have argued, is practicable with very small groups in which people know each other intimately. But in larger groups it becomes tyrannical because it allows a small minority to decide what will be the practice of a large or even sizable majority; and it fosters homogeneity and stagnation in ideas and policies. Minorities and their factions are the indispensable yeast for maturing new ideas – and nearly all new ideas start out as the views of minorities. In a libertarian group, the "rule" of the majority over a minority is a myth; no one expects a minority to give up its unpopular beliefs or to yield its right to argue its views – but the minority must have patience and allow a majority decision to be put into practice. This experience and the discussion it generates should be the most decisive element in impelling a group or assembly to reconsider its decision and adopt the minority's viewpoint, spurring on the further innovation of practices and ideas as other minorities emerge. Consensus decision-making can easily produce intellectual and practical stagnation if it essentially compels a majority to forgo a specific policy in order to please a minority.

I will not enter here into my distinction between policy decisions and their enactment in practice by those qualified to administer them. I will only note something that my friend Gary Sisco has pointed out: that if the US Congress – a gathering, for the most part, of lawyers – can make basic policy decisions on the reconstruction of the American infrastructure, on war and peace, on education and foreign policy, etc., without having full knowledge of all aspects of these fields, leaving the administration of their decisions to others, then it is difficult to understand why a citizens' assembly cannot make policy decisions on usually more modest issues and leave their administration, under close supervision, to experts in the fields involved.

Among the other issues we must at some point consider are the place of law or *nomos* in a libertarian municipalist society, as well as constitutions that lay down important principles of right or justice and freedom. Are we to vest the perpetuation of our guiding principles simply in blind custom, or in the good nature of our fellow humans – which allows for a great deal of arbitrariness? For centuries oppressed peoples demanded written founding constitutional provisions to protect them from arbitrary oppression by the nobility. With the emergence of a libertarian communist society, this problem does not disappear. For us, I believe, the question can never be whether law and constitutions are inherently "authoritarian," but whether they are rational, mutable, secular, and restrictive only in the sense that they prohibit the abuse of power.

Admittedly, the present time is not one that is favorable for the spread of revolutionary and libertarian anti-capitalist ideas and movements. Unless we are to let the capitalist cancer spread over the entire planet, however, absorbing even the natural world into the world economy, we must develop a theory and practice that provides us with an entry into the public sphere – a theory and practice, I should emphasize, that is consistent with the goal of a rational libertarian communist society.

Finally, we must assert the historic right of speculative reason – resting on the real potentialities of human beings as we know them from the past as well as the present – to project itself beyond the immediate environment in which we live, indeed, to claim that the present irrational society is not the actual – or "real" – that is worthy of the human condition. Despite its prevalence – and, to many people, its permanence – the present society is untrue to the project of fulfilling

humanity's potentiality for freedom and self-consciousness, and hence it is unreal in the sense that it is a betrayal of the claims of humanity's greatest qualities, the capacity for reason and innovation.

If our attempts to think, fight for, educate people about, and rise in battle for, a libertarian communist society based on the Commune of communes, are evidence of "Bakuninist will," for which present-day mystics such as John Clark (aka "Max Cafard" or "C") have criticized me, then I can only reply that I find all the more flattering this association with Bakunin, who would have denounced Clark's Taoist notions of passivity and "going with the flow" as a fundamental accommodation to the status quo. Libertarian municipalists must distinguish themselves from those who, in the name of organic thought, reduce themselves to bystanders, their behavior guided by the Taoist doctrine of "wu-wei," that is, the "virtues" of non-action.

By the same token, that broad school of ideas we call "anarchism" is faced with a parting of the ways between those who genuinely wish to focus their efforts on the revolutionary elimination of hierarchical and class society, and self-indulgent lifestyle anarchists who, if they believe in anything beyond mere adventures (say, throwing bricks at police), see social change only in terms of their personal self-expression and the replacement of serious ideas with mystical fantasies.

Left libertarian revolutionaries cannot have any hopes of creating a public movement unless they formulate a politics that opens it to social intervention, indeed that is brought into the public sphere as an organized movement that can grow, think rationally, mobilize people, and actively seek to change the world. The social democrats have offered us parliamentary reforms as a practice, and the results they have produced have been debilitating – most notably, a radical decline in public life and a disastrous growth in consumerist self-indulgence and privatism. Although the Stalinists as architects of the totalitarian state have mostly passed from the public scene, a few persist as parasites on whatever radical movement may emerge among oppressed peoples. And fascism, in its various mutations, has attempted to fill the void created by disempowerment and a lack of human scale in politics as well as community, with tragic results.

As left libertarians we must ask ourselves what mode of entry into the public sphere is consistent with our vision of empowerment. If our ideal is the Commune of communes, then I submit that the only means of entry and social fulfillment is a *politics* – that is, a *movement* and *program* that finally emerges on the local electoral scene as the uncompromising advocate of popular neighborhood and town assemblies and the development of a municipalized economy. I know of no other alternative to capitulation to the existing society – unless some among us wish to throw rocks at police, deface walls with graffiti, or engage in ad hoc "actions" that disappear without any trace like a pebble thrown into a lake.

I have no doubt that libertarian municipalism, if it meets with a measure of success, will face many obstacles and the possibility of being co-opted or degenerated; that it will face not only a civic realm of ideological discord but internal discord within its own organizational framework; and that it opens a broad field of political conflict, with all its risks and uncertainties. At a time when social life has been trivialized beyond description, when accommodation to capitalist values and life-ways has reached unprecedented levels, when anarchism and socialism are seen as the "lost causes" of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – one can only hope that such discord becomes a genuine public reality. At no time has mediocrity been more triumphant than it is today, and at no time has indifference to social and political issues been as widespread.

I do not believe that social change can be achieved without taking risks, allowing for uncertainties, and recognizing the possibility of failure. If we are to have any effect on the fossilization

of public life – to the extent that the present period is marked in any sense by a genuine public life – history too must move with us. On this score, I am much too old to make worthwhile predictions about how the course of events will unfold, except to say that the present, whether for good or ill, will hardly be recognizable to the generation that will come of age 50 years from now, so rapidly are things likely to change in the present century.

But where change exists, so too do possibilities. The times cannot remain as they are – any more than the world can be frozen into immobility. What we can hope to do is to preserve the thread of rationality that distinguishes true civilization from barbarism – and barbarism would indeed be the outcome of a world that is permitted to tumble into a future without rational activity or guidance. For those who will a world of freedom and self-consciousness, there can be no accommodation with the status quo.

The Future of the Left

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Left had reached an extraordinary degree of conceptual sophistication and organizational maturity. Generally what was called leftism at that time was socialist, influenced in varying degrees by the works of Karl Marx. This was especially the case in Central Europe, but socialism was also intermixed with populist ideas in Eastern Europe and with syndicalism in France, Spain, and Latin America. In the United States all of these ideas were melded together, such as in Eugene V. Debs's Socialist Party and in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

On the eve of World War One leftist ideas and movements had become so advanced that they seemed positioned to seriously challenge the existence of capitalism, indeed, of class society as such. The words from the *Internationale*, "Tis the final conflict," acquired a new concreteness and immediacy. Capitalism seemed faced with an insurgency by the world's exploited classes, particularly the industrial proletariat. Indeed, given the scope of the Second International and the growth of revolutionary movements in the West, capitalism appeared to be facing an unprecedented, international social upheaval. Many revolutionaries were convinced that a politically mature and well-organized proletariat could finally take conscious control over social life and evolution and satisfy, not the particularized elitist interests of a propertied minority class, but the general interests of the majority.

The "Great War," as it was called, actually did end amid socialistic revolutions. Russia established a "proletarian dictatorship," premised ostensibly on revolutionary Marxist principles. Germany, with the largest and most ideologically advanced industrial proletariat in Europe, went through three years of Marxist-influenced revolutionary upheaval, while Bavaria, Hungary, and other places experienced short-lived insurgencies. In Italy and Spain, the end of the war saw the emergence of great strike movements and near-insurrections, although they never reached a decisive revolutionary level. Even France seemed to be teetering on revolution in 1917, when entire regiments at the Western Front raised red flags and tried to make their way to Paris. Such upheavals, which recurred into the 1930s, appeared to support Lenin's view that a "moribund" capitalism had finally entered into a period of war and revolution, one that in the foreseeable future could end only with the establishment of a socialist or communist society.

From Classicism to Decadence

By this time, moreover, major intellectual innovators – from Diderot and Rousseau through Hegel and Marx to an assortment of libertarian rebels – had brought secular and radical ideologies to a point where, sorted into a logical whole, they provided the framework for a truly coherent body of ideas that gave a *rational* meaning to historical development, combining a due recognition of humanity's material needs with its hopes for intellectual and social emancipation. For the first time, it seemed, without recourse to divine or other archaic non-human forms of intervention, humanity would finally be able to draw upon its *own* advancing intellectuality, knowledge,

and virtues, and upon its unique capacity for innovation, to create a new world in which all the conditions would exist to actualize its potentiality for freedom and creativity. These eminently human goals, embodied in Marx's great theoretical synthesis of the ideas he had drawn from the Enlightenment as well as new ideas he had developed on his own, could be initiated in *practice* by the downtrodden themselves, who would be driven inexorably by the contradictions of capitalist society into revolution and the establishment of a rational society for humanity as a whole.

I should note that many of my own words – "inexorably," "moribund," "decaying," and "general interests" – are drawn from the literature of early twentieth-century leftist theorists and movements. Yet whatever may be the limits of this literature and its writers – as we, at the turn of the millennium, are now privileged to see in retrospect – this sweeping language was not the product of mere sloganeering: it was derived from an integrated and coherent leftist outlook and culture that appeared on the eve of the Great War. This outlook and culture formed what we can properly call a *classical* body of universalist ideas, continually enlarged by the generations that followed the French Revolution of 1789 to 1794. In the years that passed, this body of ideas was steadily enlarged by experience and succeeded in mobilizing millions of people into international movements for human emancipation and social reconstruction.

Quite obviously, the Enlightenment goals and Lenin's prognoses, with their promise of successful socialist revolutions, were not to be realized in the twentieth century. Indeed, what has occurred since the midpoint of the twentieth century is a very different development: a period of cultural and theoretical *decadence* so far as revolutionary ideas and movements are concerned – a period of decomposition, in fact, that has swept up nearly all the philosophical, cultural, ethical, and social standards that the Enlightenment had produced. For many young people who professed to hold a radical outlook in the 1960s and 1970s, leftist theory has shriveled in scope and content to the level of spectatorial esthetics, often focused on the scattered works of people like the indecisive critic Walter Benjamin, the postmodernist Jacques Derrida, or the constipated structuralist Louis Althusser, as social theory has retreated from the lusty debating forums of 1930s socialism to the cloistered seminar rooms of contemporary universities.

Now that the twentieth century has come to a close, we are justified in asking: Why has humanity's emancipation failed to achieve fruition? Why, in particular, has the proletariat failed to make its predicted revolution? Indeed, why did the once-radical Social Democrats fail from their very inception to achieve even a majority vote in such centers as Germany? Why did they, in 1933, surrender so tamely to Hitler? (The German Communists, of course, were simply shunted aside after 1923, assuming they could even be taken seriously in that year, except as contrived targets for demagogic propagandistic purposes to frighten the middle classes with the menace of social disorder.)

How, moreover, did capitalism manage to free itself from the "chronic economic crisis" in which it seemed hopelessly mired during the 1930s? Why, especially after World War Two, did it produce advances in technics so dazzling that bourgeois society is now undergoing a *permanent* "Industrial Revolution" whose results are difficult to foresee? Finally, why did it come to pass that, following the profound economic and social crises of the 1930s, capitalism emerged from a second world war as a more *stable* and more *socially entrenched* order than it had ever been in the past?

None of these events, so important in the predictive calculations of revolutionary Marxists, have been adequately explained in a fundamental and historical sense, notably the *progressive* role

that Marx assigned to capitalism in his "stages theory" of history.[1] Instead, for years Marxists largely expended their polemical energy in throwing epithets at each other and at other labor movements for their "betrayals" – without asking why Marxism was so vulnerable to betrayal in the first place. In more recent years Marxists have tried to appropriate fragments of ideas that belong to once-despised utopian ideologies, such as Fourierism (Marcuse, to cite only one example) or to other alien ideologies, such as syndicalism, anarchism, ecology, feminism, and communitarianism, appropriating ill-fitting ideological tenets from one or the other to refurbish their limited view of a changing bourgeois reality, until what passes for Marxism today is often a pastiche of fragments patched together with planks from basically alien ideologies.

How, in short, did it come to pass that the classical era, marked by its coherence and unity in revolutionary thought and practice, gave way to a completely decadent era in which incoherence is celebrated, particularly in the name of a postmodernism that equates chaotic nihilism with freedom, self-expression, and creativity – not unlike the chaos of the marketplace itself?

Moribund or Mature Capitalism?

We can answer these questions because we now enjoy over a half-century of hindsight. What the past fifty years have shown us is that the uniquely insurgent period between 1917 and 1939 was not evidence of capitalist morbidity and decline, as Lenin surmised. Rather, it was a period of *social transition.* During those decades the world was so torn by circumstantially created tensions that Lenin's view of capitalism as a dying social order seemed indeed confirmed by reality.

What this classical prognosis and its supporting theoretical corpus did not take into account were various alternative developments that faced capitalism before the outbreak of the Great War and even during the interwar period – alternatives that lay beneath the tumultuous surface of the early twentieth century. The classical Left did not consider other possible social trajectories that capitalism could have followed – and eventually did follow – that would make for its stabilization. It not only failed to understand these new social trajectories but also failed to foresee, even faintly, the emergence of new issues that extended beyond the largely worker-oriented analysis of the classical Left.

For one thing, what makes so much of the classical revolutionary prognoses formulated by prewar and wartime socialism seem paradoxical is that the "moribund" period in which many classical leftists anchored their hopes for revolution was still not even a period of "mature" capitalism, let alone one of "dying" capitalism. The era before the Great War was one in which mass production, republican systems of government, and so-called "bourgeois-democratic" liberties were still *emerging* from a chrysalis of precapitalist forms of craft production and commerce, state structures ruled by royal families and courts, and economies in which ennobled landlords such as the German Junkers, British aristocrats, and Latin Grandees coexisted with a huge, technically backward peasant population. Even where most great estates were owned by bourgeois elements, as in Spain, their management of agriculture was conducted lethargically, emulating the diffident economic habits that characterized parasitic agrarian elites of a precapitalist era.

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[1] Whether in Russia or in Germany, the conviction that "bourgeois democracy" (that is, capitalism) was a preconditional stage for leading society to socialism helped justify the reluctance of Social Democracy to lead the workers to make a proletarian revolution between 1917 and 1919. Marx's "stages theory," in effect, was not only an attempt to give an interpretation to historical development; it played a vital role in Marxist politics from the German and Russian Revolutions of 1917–21 to the Spanish Revolution of 1936–37.

Capitalism, while it was the dominant *economy* of the United States, Great Britain, Germany, more ambiguously France, and only marginally in other European countries, was still subordinated *culturally* and even *structurally* to elite strata, often based on kinship, that were more feudal than bourgeois, and marked by the rentier and militaristic values that distinguished a waning era.

In effect, even modern industry, while becoming central to the development of major nation-states in the early twentieth century, was still anchored in a craft-peasant social matrix. The ownership of land and of small-scale workshops, often family managed, formed the traditional features of social status in a very status-ridden world, such as England and Germany. It is hard to recall today how low was the real status of women during the early 1900s; how degraded was the status of propertyless, often mendicant workers; how eagerly even substantial capitalists tried to marry into titled families; how feeble were elementary civil liberties in a world that acknowledged the validity of inherited privilege and the authority of monarchs; and how embattled was the industrially regimented proletariat (often removed by a generation or two from village life with its more natural life-ways) in its efforts to merely organize reformist trade unions.

The Great War – a monstrous event that was as much, if not more, the product of dynastic ambitions, military obtuseness, and the awesome authority allowed to preening monarchs, as it was of economic imperialism – was not a "historical necessity." An entangled Europe, caught up in Kaiser Wilhelm II's juvenile posturing and dizzying images of German national grandeur, the blind spirit of French *revanchisme* following the country's loss of Alsace and Lorraine in 1871 to the Wilhelmine Reich, and the naive nationalism of the masses, whose class internationalism was often more rhetorical than real – all led to a horrible form of trench warfare that should have been unendurable to any civilized people within a few months after it fell into place, let alone for four bloody years. The Deutsche Mark, the emblematic expression of German capitalism, managed to perform economic prodigies that neither Wilhelm's nor Hitler's bayonets could hope to perform during the last century – so different are the alternatives that the postwar era finally revealed!

Yet, ironically, it was not the battlefront in the Great War that generated the revolutions of 1917–18; it was the rear, where hunger managed to do what the terrifying explosives, machine guns, tanks, and poison gas at the front never quite succeeded in achieving – a revolution over issues such as bread and peace (in precisely that order). It is breathtaking to consider that, after three years of constant bloodletting, mutilation, and incredible daily fear, the German strikes of January 1918 that had the pungent odor of revolution actually subsided, and the German workers remained patiently quiescent when General Ludendorff's spring and summer offensives of that year gained substantial ground from French and British troops in the West to the "greater glory" of the Reich. So much for the "revolutionary instincts" of the people, which Bakunin was wont to celebrate. It speaks volumes that, despite the horrors of the Great War, the masses went along with the conflict until it was completely unendurable materially. Such is the power of adaptation, tradition, and habit in everyday life.

A Period of Transition

Notwithstanding the Russian Revolution, the Great War came to an end without overthrowing European capitalism, let alone world capitalism. The war actually revealed that the classical tradition of socialism was very limited and, in many respects, was greatly in need of repair. Understandably, Lenin and Trotsky tried to foreshorten historical development and bring about the

likelihood of socialism within their own life spans, although this is less true of Luxemburg and particularly of Marx, who was far more critical of Marxism than his acolytes. Indeed, Marx was at pains to warn that it had taken centuries for feudalism to die and for capitalism to emerge, hence Marxists should hardly expect that the bourgeoisie would be overthrown in a year, a decade, or even a generation. Trotsky was far more sanguine than Lenin in his conviction that capitalism was "moribund," "decaying," "rotting," and otherwise falling apart, and that the proletariat was growing "stronger," or "more class conscious," or "organized" – but it matters little today to dwell on his expectations and prognoses.

Nevertheless the Great War – while not completely sweeping the historical slate clean of the feudal detritus that contributed so greatly to its outbreak – left the Western world in a cultural, moral, and political stupor. An era was clearly ending, but it was not capitalism that was faced with imminent oblivion. What was disappearing was the traditional, time-worn status and class system of a feudal past, yet without any fully developed form of capitalism to take its place. With the Great Depression, British landlordism began to enter into hard, even devastating times, but it had not completely disappeared during the 1930s. The Prussian Junkers were still in command of the German army at the beginning of the 1930s and, thanks to von Hindenburg's election as president of the German state, still enjoyed many of the privileges of an established elite early in the Hitler period. But this once haughty stratum was eventually faced with the challenge of Hitler's *Gleichschaltung*, the process of social leveling that finally degraded the Prussian officer caste. In the end, it was the Anglo-American and Russian armies that swept the Junkers away by seizing their estates in the East and dissolving them as a socio-economic entity. France was fighting its last battles as a middle-class republic during the mid 1930s, with Catholic reactionaries and the blooded young fascists of the Croix de Feu, who aspired to an aristocratic Gallicism led by rich and titled leaders.

Thus, the interwar decades were a stormy period of *transition* between a declining quasi-feudal world, already shattered but not buried, and an emerging bourgeois world, which, despite its vast *economic* power, had still not penetrated into every pore of society and defined the basic values of the century. The Great Depression, in fact, showed that the pedestrian maxim, "money isn't everything," is true when there is no money to go around. Indeed, the Depression threw much of the world, especially the United States, into a disorderly world that resembled its own hectic populist era of the 1870s and 1880s, hence the flare-up of trade unionism, violent strikes, great demonstrations, and "Red" agitation that swept over the American and European continents in the 1930s.

In this socially hyperactive but indecisive period of social tensions between the old and new, when the ruling classes as well as the dominated masses lived in murderous antipathy toward each other, history unlocked the door to revolutionary upheavals. Amid the uncertainty of a tension-filled world, the fulfillment of Marx's dream – a democratic workers' system of government – seemed achievable. As a result of the tensions that existed within that interwar period, it appeared that capitalism had collapsed economically and a worldwide movement toward a democratic, possibly libertarian socialist society was achievable. But to create such a society required a highly conscious movement with an able leadership and a clear-eyed sense of purpose.

Tragically, no such movement appeared. Grossly pragmatic bureaucrats such as Friedrich Ebert and Philip Scheidemann, and pedestrian theorists such as Karl Kautsky and Rudolf Hilferding, assumed the deflated mantle of the Socialist International and set its tone up until the rise of German fascism. Shortly afterward Stalin intervened in every potentially revolutionary situation

in Europe and poisoned it to serve Russia's – and his own – interests. The prestige of the Bolshevik revolution, to which this tyrant contributed absolutely nothing and which he defamed when he came to power, was still not sufficiently sullied to allow the classical Left to create its own authentic movements and expand its vision to accord with emerging social issues that reflected changes in capitalism itself.

What must now be acknowledged is that between 1914 and 1945 capitalism was *enlarging* its foundations with mass manufacture and new industries, *not* digging its grave, as Lenin and Trotsky had opined. Its status as a dominant world economy *and* society still lay before it in 1917, not behind it. And it would be sheer myopia not to see that it is still industrializing the world – the agrarian as well as the urban – which is basically what the word "globalization" means. Moreover, it is still eroding the particularisms that divide human beings on the basis of nationalism, religion, and ethnicity. Most of the "fundamentalisms" and "identity politics" erupting in the world today are essentially reactions against the encroaching secularism and universalism of a business-oriented, increasingly homogenizing capitalist civilization that is slowly eating away at a deeply religious, nationalistic, and ethnic heritage. The commodity is still performing prodigies of social erosion in precapitalist cultures, be they for good or bad, such as Marx and Engels described in the first part of *The Communist Manifesto*. Where sanity and reason do not guide human affairs, to be sure, the good is nearly always polluted by the bad, and it is the function of any serious revolutionary thinker to separate the two in the hope of unearthing the rational tendency in a social development.

At the same time capitalism is not only homogenizing old societies and remaking them in its urbanized, commodity-oriented image; it is doing the same to the planet and the biosphere in the name of "mastering" the forces of the natural world. This is precisely the "historically progressive" role that Marx and Engels assigned, in a celebratory manner, to the capitalist mode of production. How "progressive" this process of homogenization is, in fact, remains to be seen. For the present, it behooves us to examine the failure of Marxism and anarchism (arguably the two principal wings of the revolutionary tradition) to deal with the transitional nature of the twentieth century.

Assessing The Revolutionary Tradition

In the post-World War Two period the weakest elements in Marx's schema of history, class struggle, capitalist development, and political activity have been subjected to penetrating critical examination.[2] The Marxian canon to the contrary, history, viewed *as a whole*, cannot be reduced to economic factors as Marx tried to do in his key works, although capitalism may well be mutating *homo sapiens* into *homo consumerans* and fostering the tendency among masses of people to experience reality as a huge market. Marx's basic views may have provided his acolytes with the *necessary* or preconditional causes for social development – admittedly material or economic causes – but they failed to explain the enormous role of the *efficient* causes – the immediate

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[2] I refer, here, not to the conventional criticisms that were mounted against Marxism by political opponents – criticisms that emerged from the very inception of Marx's theoretical activities and the emergence of the socialist movements based in varying degrees on his ideas. Nor am I concerned with Marxist critics such as Eduard Bernstein, who mounted their critiques within the Marxist movement itself in the 1890s. Rather I refer to the critiques that emerged with the Frankfurt School and assorted writers like Karl Korsch, who seriously challenged the many premises of Marx's philosophical and historical concepts.

causes, such as culture, politics, morality, juridical practices, and the like (which Marx denoted as a "superstructural") – for producing social change.

Indeed, what else besides "superstructural" (particularly moral, religious, and political) factors can explain why the development of capitalism, which always existed in varying degrees in agrarian and craft economies, was arrested for thousands of years and became a major economy in only one country (England) early in the nineteenth century? Or why revolutions occur only under conditions of *complete* social breakdown, that is, after a vast body of massively influential "superstructural" belief systems (often accepted in their time as eternal realities) are shattered? Marx was not oblivious to the extent to which belief-systems override bourgeois forces in precapitalist societies, especially in his discussions on the predominance of agrarian values over urban ones in his *Grundrisse*. Very significantly, Marxists were riddled by conflicts over the status of capitalism at various points in its development, especially during the early twentieth century, when the bourgeoisie faced one of the stormiest periods of its history – precisely *because* capitalism had not fully shed the trappings of feudalism and come "completely into its own," so to speak.

How, for example, was it possible for many Marxists to insist that capitalism was in decline at a time when major technical innovations like mass manufacture, radically new forms of transportation such as the automobile, advances in electrical and electronic machines and goods, and new chemical innovations were occurring in the decade directly following the Great War? Had Marx not written, after all, that "No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces [technology] for which there is room in it have developed"?[3] Could this be said of capitalism in 1914–18 and 1939–45? Indeed, will it *ever* be said of the capitalist mode of production in the future?

In asking these questions, I am not trying to suggest that capitalism will never produce problems that necessitate its overthrow or replacement. My purpose is, rather, to suggest that the problems that may well turn most of humanity against capitalism may not necessarily be strictly economic ones or rooted in class issues.

Arguable as Marx's productivist interpretation of social development and its future may be, it becomes a very forced and artificial, even contorted explanation of history if it is not greatly modified by the dialectic of ideas, that is, by political and social ideology, morality and ethics, law, juridical standards, and the like. Marxism has yet to forthrightly acknowledge that these different spheres of life have their own dialectic, indeed, that they can unfold from inner forces of their own and not simply result from a productivist dialectic called the "materialist interpretation of history." Moreover, it has yet to emphasize that a dialectic of ethics or religion can profoundly affect the dialectic of productive forces and production relations. Is it possible, for example, to ignore the fact that Christian theology led logically to a growing respect for individual worth and finally to radical conceptions of social freedom – a dialectic, in turn, that profoundly influenced social development by altering the way human beings interacted with each other and with the material world?

By the time of the French Revolution, centuries of deeply entrenched ideas on property, such as the enormous esteem that accompanied the ownership of land, were intermingling and modifying seemingly objective social forces, such as the growth of an increasingly capitalistic market. As

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[3] Karl Marx, "Preface to a Contribution of the Critique of Political Economy," in *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), Vol. 1, p. 504.

a result, the exalted image of the independent, often self-sufficient peasant, who began to emerge in the wake of the Revolution with his small bit of property and his craft-oriented village, actually inhibited capitalist economic development in France well into the nineteenth century by closing off large parts of the domestic market to commodities mass-produced in the cities. The image of the French Revolution as a "bourgeois" revolution that fostered a capitalist development at home is arguably more fictitious than real, although in the long run it created many preconditions for the rise of the industrial bourgeoisie.

In short, by educing the dialectic of history along overwhelmingly productivist lines, Marx easily deceived himself as well as his most important followers, notably Lenin and Trotsky, about capitalism's morbidity, by assuming that the bourgeoisie had finally prepared all the economic preconditions for socialism and hence was prepared to be replaced by socialism. What he ignored was that many of the problems, contradictions, and antagonisms he imputed almost exclusively to capitalism were, in fact, the product of lingering feudal traits that society had not shed; moreover, that the seemingly "superstructural" institutions and values that had characterized precapitalist societies played a major role in defining a seemingly predominant capitalist society that was still aborning. On this score, the anarchists were right when they called not so much for the economic improvement of the proletariat as for its moral development being vital to the formation of a free society – improvements that the Marxists largely brushed aside as issues that fell within the domain of "private life."

Marx and Marxism also fail us when they focus overwhelmingly on the working class – even enhancing its social weight by presumably elevating transparently petty-bourgeois elements such as salaried white-collar employees to a proletarian status when industrial workers are evidently declining numerically. Nor does the authentic proletariat, which assumed an almost mystical class status in the heyday of Marxism, act as though it is a uniquely hegemonic historical agent in the conflict with capitalism as a system. Nothing proved to be more misleading in the advanced industrial countries of the world than the myth that the working class, when appealed to as an *economic class*, could see beyond the immediate conditions of its given life-ways – the factory and bourgeois forms of distribution (exchange).[4] It consistently adopted reformist programs designed to gain higher wages, shorter working days, longer vacations, and improved working conditions until thunderous events drove it to revolutionary action – together, it should be added, with non-proletarian strata. Virtually none of the classical socialist movements, it is worth noting, appealed to the workers as *people*, such as parents, city dwellers, brothers and sisters, and individuals trying to live decent lives in a decent environment for themselves and their offspring.

Most conventional Marxist theorists to the contrary, the worker is first of all a human being, not simply the embodiment of "social labor" that is definable in strictly class terms. The failure of classical socialism to make a human and civic appeal to the worker – even to seriously consider him or her as more than a class being – created a warped relationship between socialist organizations and their alleged "constituency." Although the classical Social Democracy, especially the German Social Democrats, provided workers with a highly varied cultural life of their own, from educational activities to sports clubs, the proletariat was usually boxed into a world bounded by a concern for its most immediate material interests. Even in the pre-World War Two cultural

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[4] All of which induced Georg Lukács to impart this hegemonic role to the "proletarian party," which mystically embodies the proletariat as a class even when its leadership is usually predominantly petty bourgeois.

centers of the socialists, such as the *casas del pueblo* established by the Spanish Socialists, it was fed primarily on discussions of its exploitation and degradation by the capitalist system, which in any case it experienced daily in factories and workshops. The attempt to redefine the proletariat and make it a majority of a national population lost all credibility when capitalism began to create a huge "salariat" of office employees, managers, sales people, and an army of service, engineering, advertising, media, and governmental personnel who see themselves as a new middle class deeply invested in bourgeois property through stocks, bonds, real estate, pensions, and the like, however minor these may seem by comparison with the big bourgeoisie.

Finally, a very significant failing of Marxism when it came to building a revolutionary movement was its commitment to the statist acquisition and maintenance of parliamentary power. By the late 1870s Marx and Engels had developed into "Red Republicans," notwithstanding Marx's encomiums to the Parisian Communards and their quasi-anarchist vision of a confederal form of government. What is often ignored is that Marx disclaimed these encomiums shortly before his death a decade later. Doubtless Marx's vision of a republic was marked by more democratic features than any that existed in Europe and America during his lifetime. He would have favored the right to recall deputies at all levels of the state, as well as minimal bureaucracy and a militia system hopefully based on working-class recruits. But none of the *institutions* he attributed to a socialist state were incompatible with those of a "bourgeois-democratic" state. Not surprisingly, he believed that socialism could be voted into power in England, the United States, and the Netherlands, a list to which Engels years later added France.

In vowing that only insurrection and a complete restructuring of the state were compatible with socialism, Lenin and Luxemburg among others (especially Trotsky) decidedly departed from Marx and Engels's political ideas in their late years. At least in trying to work within republican institutions, the early Social Democrats were more consistently Marxist than were their revolutionary critics. They viewed the German Revolution of 1918–19 as an indispensable preliminary to the creation of a republican system that would open a peaceful but, more significant, *institutionally sound* road to socialism. That workers' councils such as the Russian soviets and German *Räte* were more radically democratic made them, as institutional measures, frightening, more akin to anarchism and certainly Bolshevism than to a parliament elected by universal suffrage. Although a younger Marx would have found a state structured around councils more to his taste, there is little to show in his later writings (apart from his flirtation with the libertarian features of the Paris Commune) that he would have "smashed the state," to use Lenin's terminology, to the point of rejecting parliamentary government.

Does this mean that anarchist precepts, spawned nearly two centuries ago, provide a substitute for Marxism?

After 40 years of trying to work with this ideology, my own very considered opinion is that such a hope, which I entertained as early as the 1950s, is unrealizable. Nor do I feel that this is due only to the failings of the so-called "new anarchism" spawned in recent years by young activists. The problems raised by anarchism belong to the days of its birth, when writers like Proudhon celebrated its use as a new alternative to the emerging capitalist social order. In reality, anarchism has no coherent body of theory other than its commitment to an ahistorical conception of "personal autonomy" – that is, to the self-willing, asocial ego, divested of constraints, preconditions, or limitations short of death itself. Indeed, today, many anarchists celebrate this theoretical incoherence as evidence of the highly libertarian nature of their outlook and its often dizzying, of not contradictory, respect for diversity. It is primarily by giving priority to an ideologically petri-

fied notion of an "autonomous individual" that anarchists justify their opposition not only to the state but to any form of constraint, law, and often organization and democratic decision-making based on majority voting. All such constraints are dismissed in principle as forms of "coercion," "domination," "government," and even "tyranny" – often as though these terms are coequal and interchangeable.

Nor do anarchist theorists take cognizance of the social and historical conditions that limit or modify the ability to attain "Anarchy," which is often described as a highly personal affair or even an episodic or "ecstatic" experience. Followed to its logical conclusion, indeed to its most fundamental premises, Anarchy to anarchists is essentially a moral desideratum, a "way of life," as one anarchist put it to me, that is independent of time or place. Anarchy, we are justified in concluding, emerges from the exercise of pure will. Presumably, when enough wills converge to "adopt" Anarchy, it will simply *be* – like the soil that remains beneath melting snow, as one British anarchist ideologist put it.

This revelatory interpretation of how Anarchy makes its appearance in the world lies at the core of the anarchist vision. Anarchy, it would appear, has *always* been "there," as Isaac Puente, the most important theorist of Spanish anarchism in the 1930s, put it, save that it was concealed over the ages by an historically imposed layer of institutions, entrenched experiences, and values that are typified by the state, civilization, history, and morality. Somehow, it must merely be restored from its unsullied past like a hidden geological stratum.

This summary easily explains the emphasis on primitivism and the notion of "recovery" that one so often encounters in anarchist writing. *Recovery* should be distinguished from the notion of *discovery* and *innovation* that modern thinking and rationalism was obliged to counterpose to the premodern belief that truth and virtue in all their aspects were already in existence but concealed by an oppressive or obfuscating historical development and culture. More than one anarchist could easily use this formulation to justify social passivity apart from mere protest. One had only to let the "snow" (that is the state, and civilization) melt away for Anarchy to be restored, a view that may well explain the pacifism that is so widespread among anarchists throughout the world today.

In any event, some anarchists have argued that the civilization, technics, and rationality which in recent years have been singled out by many anarchists as the greatest failings of the human condition must be replaced by a more primitive, presumably "authentic" culture that eschews all the attainments of history in order to restore humanity's primal "harmony" with itself and with an almost mystical "Nature." Insofar as anarchists currently espouse this view, they have actually returned anarchism to its true home after its centuries-long meanderings through the mazes of syndicalism and other basically alien social causes. Proudhon's wistful image of the self-sufficient peasant farm or village, wisely presided over by an all-knowing paterfamilias, is finally recovered – this, I would add, at a time when the world is more interdependent and technologically sophisticated than at any other in history!

Inasmuch as anarchism emphasizes primitivism as against acculturation, recovery as against discovery, autarchy as against interdependence, and naturism as against civilization – often rooting its conceptual apparatus in a "natural," conceivably "basic" ahistorical autonomous ego, freed of the rationalism and theoretical burden of "civilization" – it in fact stands in marked contrast to the *real* ego, which is *always* located in a given temporal, technological, cultural, traditional, intellectual, and political environment. Indeed, the anarchist version of the stripped-down, indeed vacuous, ego disturbingly resembles Homer's description of the Lotus Eater in the *Odyssey*, who,

while eating the lotus fruit, slips into the indolence of forgetfulness, atemporality, and blissfulness that actually represents the very *annihilation* of personality and selfhood.

Historically, this "autonomous ego" became the building block that anarchists used to create various movement-type structures that often gave it a highly social and revolutionary patina. Syndicalism, to cite the most important case in point, became the architectural form in which these blocks were most commonly arranged – not as a defining foundation for an anarchist movement but as a highly unstable superstructure. When workers in the closing decades of the nineteenth century became actively involved in socialism, unionism, organization, democracy, and everyday struggles for better living and working conditions, anarchism took on the form of a radical trade unionism. This association was precarious at best. Although both shared the same libertarian ambience, syndicalism existed in sharp tension with the basic individualism that pure anarchists prized, often above – and *against* – all organizational institutions.

Both ideologies – Marxism and anarchism – emerged at times when industrial societies were still in their infancy and nation-states were still in the process of being formed. While Marx tried to conceptualize small-scale, often well-educated Parisian craftsmen as "proletarians," Bakunin's imagination was caught up with images of social bandits and peasant jacqueries. Both men, to be sure, contributed valuable insights to revolutionary theory, but they were revolutionaries who formulated their ideas in a socially limited time. They could hardly be expected to anticipate the problems that emerged during the hectic century that followed their deaths. A major problem facing radical social thought and action today is to determine what can be incorporated from their time into a new, highly dynamic capitalist era that has long transcended the old semi-feudal world of independent peasants and craftsmen; a new era, also, that has largely discarded the textile–metal–steam-engine world of the Industrial Revolution, with its burgeoning population of totally dispossessed proletarian masses. Their place has been taken in great part by technologies that can replace labor in nearly all spheres of work and provide a degree of abundance in the means of life that the most imaginative utopians of the nineteenth century could not have anticipated.

But just as advances in an irrational society always taint the most valuable of human achievements with evil, so too the Industrial Revolution has produced new problems and potential crises that call for new means to deal with them. These new means must go beyond mere protest if they are not to suffer the fate of all movements such as the Luddites, that could offer little more than a return to the past by trying to destroy the technical innovations of their era. Any assessment of the revolutionary tradition immediately raises the question of the future of the Left in a social environment that is not only beset by new problems but demands new solutions. What can incorporate the best of the revolutionary tradition – Marxism and anarchism – in ways and forms that speak of the kind of problems that face the present time? Indeed, in view of the remarkable dynamism of the twentieth century and the likelihood that changes in the new one will be even more sweeping, it now behooves us to speculate about the analyses that will explain its forthcoming development, the kind of crises it is likely to face, and the institutions, methods, and movements that can hope to render society rational and nourishing as an arena for human creativity. Above all, we must think beyond the immediate present and its proximate past by trying to anticipate problems that may lie at least a generation, if not further, beyond a highly transitory present.

Capitalism and Globalization

What remains very contemporary in Marx's writings, even after a century and a half, is the insight they bring to the nature of the capitalist development. Marx fully explored the competitive forces that inhere in the buyer–seller exchange, a relationship that, under capitalism, *compels* the bourgeoisie to continually expand its enterprises and operations. Ever since the capitalist economy became prevalent over a sizable area of the world it has been guided by the competitive market imperative of "grow or die," leading to continual industrial expansion and to the consolidation of competing concerns into ever-larger, quasi-monopolistic complexes. Would the process of capital concentration culminate in a worldwide economy under the tutelage of a few or of a single corporate entity, thereby terminating the process of accumulation and bringing capitalism to an end? Or would capital expansion (that is, "globalization") so level market differentials that the exchange of commodities as a source of accumulation becomes impossible? These were serious topics of discussion during the heyday of classical Marxism. They remain conundrums today.

Today we can say for certain that existing quasi-monopolistic complexes furiously accelerate the rate at which society undergoes economic and social change. Not only do firms expand at an ever-increasing pace, either annihilating or absorbing their competitors, but the commodities they produce and the resources they devour affect every corner of the planet. Globalization is not unique to modern capitalist industry and finance – the bourgeoisie has been eating its way into isolated and seemingly self-contained cultures for centuries and, either directly or indirectly, transforming them. What is unusual about present-day globalization is the scale on which it is occurring and the far-reaching impact it is having on cultures that once seemed to be insulated from modern commodity production and trade and from nation-state sovereignty. Now the presumably "quaint" traits of precapitalist peoples have been turned into marketable items to titillate Western tourists who pay exorbitant prices to enjoy a presumably "primitive" item or experience.

Marx and his followers considered this process of expanding industrialization and market relations to be a progressive feature of the capitalist "stage" of history, and they expected that it would eventually eliminate all preexisting territorial, cultural, national, and ethnic ties and replace them with class solidarity, thereby removing obstacles to the development of revolutionary internationalism. Commodification, Marx famously emphasized, turns everything solid into air. It once eliminated the economic exclusivity of guilds and other economic barriers to innovation; and it continues to corrode art, crafts, familial ties, and all the bonds of human solidarity – indeed, all the honored traditions that nourished the human spirit.

Marx saw the homogenizing effects of globalization as destructive insofar as they dissolved the meaningful relationships and sentiments that knitted society together; but his formulation was not only a critique. He also saw these effects as progressive insofar as they cleared away precapitalist and particularistic detritus. Today, radicals emphasize that the worldwide invasion of the commodity into society is overwhelmingly destructive. Capitalism (not simply globalization and corporatization) not only turns everything solid into air but replaces earlier traditions with distinctly bourgeois attributes. Implicit in Marx's remarks was the belief that globalized capitalism would provide the future with a clean slate on which to inscribe the outlines of a rational society. But as capitalism writes its message of uniquely bourgeois values, it creates potentially monstrous developments that may well undermine social life itself. It supplants traditional ties of solidarity and community with an all-pervasive greed, an appetite for wealth, a system of moral

accounting focused on "the bottom line," and a heartless disregard for the desperation of the poor, aged, and physically disabled.

Not that greed and heartlessness were absent from capitalism in the past. But in an earlier time, the bourgeoisie was relatively marginal and vulnerable to the patronizing outlook of the landed nobility; preindustrial values more or less held capitalists in check. Then the market economy rendered increasingly prevalent an unbridled capitalist spirit of self-aggrandizement and unfeeling exploitation. Naked bourgeois greed and heartlessness, illuminated by the vigilance of great writers such as Balzac and Dickens, produced a wave of revulsion that swept over people who were exposed. In past epochs the rich were neither admired nor turned into embodiments of virtue. The honored virtue of most of the precapitalist world, rather, was not self-aggrandizement but self-sacrifice, not accumulating but giving, however much these virtues were honored in the breach.

But today capitalism has penetrated into *all* aspects of life; greed, an inordinate appetite for wealth, an accounting mentality, and a disdainful view of poverty and infirmity have become a moral pathology. Under these circumstances bourgeois traits are the celebrated symbols of the "beautiful people" and, more subtly, of yuppified baby boomers. These values percolate into less fortunate strata of the population who, depending upon their own resources, view the fortunate with envy, even awe, and guiltily target themselves for their own lack of privilege and status as "ne'er-do-wells."

In this new embourgeoisement the dispossessed harbor no class antagonisms toward the "rich and beautiful" (a unique juxtaposition) but rather esteem them. At present, poor and middle-class people are less likely to view the bourgeoisie with hatred than with servile admiration; they increasingly see the ability to make money and accrue wealth not as indicative of a predatory disposition and the absence of moral scruples, as was the case a few generations ago, but as evidence of innate abilities and intelligence. Newsstands and bookstores are filled with a massive literature celebrating the lifestyles, careers, personal affairs, and riches of the new wealthy, who are held up as models of achievement and success. That these "celebrities" of postmodernity bubble up from obscurity is an added asset: it suggests that the admiring but debt-burdened reader can also "make it" in a new bourgeois world. Any obscure candidate can "become a millionaire" – or a multimillionaire – merely by winning in a television game show or a lottery. The myriad millions who envy and admire the bourgeoisie no longer see its members as part of a "class"; they are rather a "meritocracy" who have become, as a result of luck and effort, winners in the lottery of life. If Americans once widely believed that anyone could become the president of the United States, the new belief holds that anyone can become a millionaire or – who knows? – one of the ten richest people in the world.

Capitalism, in turn, is increasingly assumed to be the natural state of affairs toward which history has been converging for thousands of years. Even as capitalism is achieving this splendor, we are witnessing a degree of public ignorance, fatuity, and smugness unseen since the inception of the modern world. Like fast food and quick sex, ideas and experiences simply race through the human mind, and far from being absorbed and used as building blocks for generalizations, they quickly disappear to make room for still newer and faster-moving ideas and experiences, of an ever more superficial or degraded character. Every few years, it would seem, a new generation initiates ostensibly "new causes" that were exhausted only a decade or two earlier, thereby casting into ideological oblivion invaluable lessons and knowledge that are indispensable for a radical social practice. Each new generation has a concomitantly arrogant notion that history began only

when it was born; hence all experiences from the past, even the recent past, are to be ignored. Thus the struggle against globalization, which was fought for decades under the rubric of anti-imperialism, has been reinvented and renamed.

The problem of lost definition and specificity, of everything being turned into "air," and the disastrous loss of the memory of experiences and lessons vital to establishing a Left tradition, confronts any endeavor to create a revolutionary movement in the future. Theories and concepts lose their dimensions, their mass, their traditions, and their relevance, as a result of which they are adopted and dropped with juvenile flippancy. The chauvinistic notion of "identity," which is the *byproduct* of class and hierarchical society, ideologically corrodes the concept of "class," prioritizing a largely psychological distinction at the expense of a socio-political one. "Identity" becomes a highly personal problem with which individuals must wrestle psychologically and culturally rather than a root social problem that must be understood by and resolved through a radical *social* approach.

Indeed, the bourgeoisie can easily remedy such a problem by promoting ethnically discriminated employees to upper-level managers and by promoting female lieutenants in the military into majors or generals. Hence the amazing willingness that new enterprises and the media exhibit in selecting blacks and women for high spots in their operations or media presentations. Baby-boomer capitalists such as Tom Peters, who season their ideas of non-hierarchical practices in business administration with dashingly anarchic traits, often regard race and gender as archaisms. Colin Powell has shown that even with an African-American as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the American military can be as deadly as it needs to be, and Oprah Winfrey has demonstrated that what Americans read or buy needs have no bearing on the race or gender of a television purveyor of those commodities.

The middle and working classes no longer think of the present society as structured around classes. Current opinion holds that the rich are deserving and the poor are not, while an incalculable number of people linger between the categories. A huge section of public opinion in the Western world tends to regard oppression and exploitation as residual abuses, not inherent features of a specific social order. The prevailing society is neither rationally analyzed nor forcefully challenged; it is prudently psychoanalyzed and politely coaxed, as though social problems emerge from erratic individual behavior. Although strident protests explode from time to time, a growing gentility is watering down the severity of social disputes and antagonisms, even among people who profess leftist views.

Beyond a Politics of Protest

What is absent in this type of sporadic and eruptive opposition is an understanding of the *causal continuities* that only serious and above all *rational* explorations can reveal. In the so-called "Seattle rebellion" in late November and early December 1999 against the World Trade Organization, what was at issue was not the substitution of "fair trade" for "free trade." It was the question of the ways in modern society produces the wealth of the world and distributes it. Although some militant demonstrators attempted to invoke the "injustices" of capitalism – actually, capitalism was not being peculiarly "unjust" any more than lethal bacilli are being "unfair" when they produce illness and death – few, if any, of the demonstrators appeared to understand the logic of a market economy. It has been reported that during anti-WTO demonstrations little

literature was distributed that explained the basic reason for denouncing the WTO and "preventing" its delegates from doing their business.

Indeed, the demonstration in Seattle, like the one in Washington, DC, that followed it several months later, however well-meant, created the illusion that acts of mere disruption, which became increasingly staged, can do more than moderate the "excesses" of globalization. The Washington demonstration, in fact, was so negotiated in character that the police allowed the demonstrators to walk across a chalked line as a mere symbol of illegality and then to allow themselves to be escorted into buses as arrestees. Police spokesmen pleasantly agreed that the young demonstrators were "decent" and "socially concerned kids" who meant well, and WTO delegates tolerantly acknowledged that the demonstrators drew their attention to troubling economic and environmental problems that needed correction. Undoubtedly, the authorities expect these "socially concerned kids" to eventually grow up and become good citizens.

The demonstrations appeared more like acts of catharsis than aroused protest; demonstrators hugged each other lovingly and wore idiosyncratic clothing, unwittingly turning themselves into cultural oddities. If anything, they *separated* themselves from the general public rather than related to it. Rather than meaningful protests, the demonstrations were noteworthy mainly because protest of *any* kind is such a rarity today. The limited number of participants seemed to lack an in-depth understanding of what the WTO represented. Even to protest "capitalism" is simply to voice an opposition to an abstract noun, which in itself tells us nothing about capitalist social relations, their dynamic, their transformation into destructive social forces, the prerequisites for undoing them, and finally the alternatives that exist to replace them. Few of the demonstrators appeared to know the answers to these questions; thus they castigated corporations and multinationals, as though these are not the unavoidable outcome of historic forces of capitalist production. Would the dangers of globalization be removed from the world if the corporations were scaled down in size? More fundamentally, could smaller enterprises ever have been prevented from developing into industrial, commercial, and financial giants that would not differ from modern multinationals?

My point is less to advance criticisms than to question the extent to which the Seattle and Washington demonstrators adequately understood the problems they were dealing with. Indeed, what is a demonstration meant to demonstrate? It must not only protest but also *confront official power with popular power*, even in incipient form. Demonstrations are mobilizations of sizable numbers of serious people who, in taking to the streets, intend to let the authorities know that they earnestly oppose certain actions by the powers-that-be. Reduced to juvenile antics, they become self-deflating forms of entertainment. As such, they constitute no challenge to the authorities; indeed, where idiosyncratic behavior replaces the forcefulness of stern opposition, they merely show the public that advocates of their view are mere eccentrics who need not be taken seriously and whose cause is trivial. Without the gravitas that commands respect – and, yes, the discipline that reveals serious intentionality – demonstrations and other such manifestations are worse than useless; they harm their cause by trivializing it.

A politics of mere protest, lacking programmatic content, a proposed alternative, and a movement to give people direction and continuity, consists of little more than *events*, each of which has a beginning and an end and little more. The social order can live with an event or series of events and even find this praiseworthy. Worse still, such a politics lives or dies according to an agenda established by the social order it opposes. Corporations proposed the WTO; they needed worldwide participation in the Organization and, in their own way, generated the very opposition that

now denounces its lack of democracy and lack of humaneness. They expected opposition, and only police amateurism in Seattle let it get slightly out of hand. It ill-becomes such an opposition to then plan to demonstrate before nominating conventions of major political parties whose very existence many of the demonstrators profess to oppose. Indeed, the demonstrators, however well-meaning, legitimate the existence of the parties by calling upon them to alter their policies on international trade, as though they even have a justifiable place in a rational society.

A politics of protest is not a politics at all. It occurs within parameters set by the prevailing social system and merely responds to remediable ills, often mere symptoms, instead of challenging the social order as such. The masked anarchists who join in these events by smashing windows use the clamor of shattered glass to glamorize limited street protests with the semblance of violence and little more.

A Left for the Future

I have not made these critical remarks about the state of the Left today in order to carp against people, activities, and events, or from any generational or sectarian disdain. On the contrary, my criticisms stem from a deep sympathy for people who are sensitive to injustices and particularly for those who are striving to remedy them. Better to do something to end the silence of popular acquiescence than simply to perpetuate the complacency generated by a consumer-oriented society.

Nor have I presented my criticisms of Marxism and anarchism – the main players in the classical Left – in order to try to astound a new generation of activists with the grandeur of revolutionary history that they somehow must match. Again to the contrary, I have invoked the classical Left of yesteryear not only to suggest what it has to teach us but also to note its own limitations, as the product of a different era, and one that, for better of worse, will never return. What the classical Left has to teach us is that ideas must be systematic – *coherent* – if they are to be productive and understandable to people who are seriously committed to basic social change; indeed, a future Left must show that the seemingly disparate problems of the present society are *connected* with each other and that they stem from a common social pathology that must be removed as a totality. Moreover, no attempts to change the existing society will ever be *basic* unless we understand how its problems are interconnected and how the solutions that can resolve them can be educed from humanity's potentialities for freedom, rationality, and self-consciousness.

By coherence, I do not mean only a methodology or a system of thinking that explores basics; rather that the very process of attempting to link together the various social pathologies to common causes and to resolve them in their totality is an *ethical* endeavor. To declare that humanity has a potentiality for freedom, rationality, and self-consciousness – and, significantly, that this potentiality is not being realized or actualized today – leads inexorably to the demand that every society justify its existence according to the extent to which it actualizes these norms. Any endeavor to assess a society's success in achieving freedom, rationality, and self-consciousness makes an implicit judgment. It raises the searing question of what a society "should be" within its material and cultural limits. It constitutes the realizable ideal that social development raises for all thinking people and that, up to now, has kept alive movements for the fulfillment of freedom.

Without that ideal as a continual and activating presence, no lasting movement for human liberation is possible – only sporadic protests that themselves may mask the basic irrationality of an unfree society by seeking to cosmetically remove its blemishes. By contrast, a constant awareness that a given society's irrationality is deep-seated, that its serious pathologies are not isolated problems that can be cured piecemeal but must be solved by sweeping changes in the often hidden sources of crisis and suffering – that awareness alone is what can hold a movement together, give it continuity, preserve its message and organization beyond a given generation, and expand its ability to deal with new issues and developments.

Too often ideas that are meant to yield a certain practice are instead transported into the academy, as fare for "enriching" a curriculum and, of course, generating jobs for the growing professoriat. Such has been the unhappy fate of Marxism, which, once an embattled and creative body of ideas, has now acquired academic respectability – to the extent that it is even regarded as worthy of study.

At the same time the routine use of the word "activist" raises problems that unintentionally can be regressive. Can there be action without theory and insight into the nature of social ills and an understanding of the measures needed to resolve them? Can the activist even *act* meaningfully and effectively without drawing upon the rich body of experiences and ideas that have grown up over the years and that can show us the dangerous pitfalls that lie below the surface, or the many strategies that have been tested by earlier generations?

In what likely directions is capitalist society developing in the coming century, and what are the most basic problems it is raising for humanity? Is there any *special* sector, class, or group in society to which we must appeal if we are to hope to create a revolutionary movement? What kind of movement and institutions must we create that will play a leading role in social change? Do we need any well-organized movement at all, or will our hoped-for changes occur spontaneously, emerging out of demonstrations around specific issues or street festivals or communitarian enterprises such as co-ops, alternative enterprises, and the like? Or do we have to build political entities, and if so, what kind? What is the relationship of a revolutionary movement to these new political entities? And how should power be situated and institutionalized in a rational society? Finally, what ethical considerations should guide us in our efforts?

Marxism failed to form an adequate picture of the worker as a many-sided human being and indeed fetishized him or her to the point of absurdity. It did not normally see workers as more than economic entities, but rather endowed them with semi-mystical properties as revolutionary agents, possessed of secret powers to understand their interests and a unique sensitivity to radical possibilities in the existing society. To read Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Leon Trotsky, the syndicalist propagandists, and even run-of-the-mill old-time Social Democrats is to sense that they held the socialist judgment of workers in awe and imbued them with remarkable revolutionary powers. That workers could also become fascists or reactionaries was inconceivable.

This mystification has not entirely been dispelled, but even so we must ask: which part of society can play a leading role in radical change today? The fact is that the leveling role of Western capitalism and the increasing development of social struggles along ever vaguer lines has opened up a vista much different from that which once hypnotized the classical Left. The technological level of the Industrial Revolution was highly labor intensive; the brutish exploitation of labor and the simplification of the work process with its consequent destruction of skills by a deadening division of labor made it possible for Marx and other theorists to single out the proletariat as the principal victim of capitalism and the principal engine of its demise.

Although many traditional factories are still with us, especially in the Third World, in Europe and North America they are giving way to highly skilled and differentiated systems of production. Many new strata can no longer be regarded, except in the most elastic way, as "workers" in any industrial sense. Such people are even becoming the majority of the "working class," while the industrial proletariat (contrary to Marx's expectations) is visibly becoming an ever-smaller minority of the population. For the present, at least, these workers are well paid (often receiving salaries rather than wages), consumer-oriented in tastes, and far removed from a working-class outlook and a disposition to hold leftist social views.

Capitalism, in effect, is creating the bases for a *populist* politics – hopefully a radical and ultimately revolutionary one – that is focused on the broadening and expanding of professional opportunities, the quality of life, and a more pleasant environment. Economically, maturing capitalism can properly be descriptively divided into strata of the wealthy, the well-off, the comfortable, and the poor. Industrial wage workers in the West have more in common with salaried technicians and professionals than with underpaid unskilled workers in the service sector of fast-food restaurants and retail sales and the like, let alone with the nearly lumpenized poor. In the absence of economic crises, social disquiet may focus on fears of crime, shortcomings in public services and education, the decline of traditional values, and the like. More momentously, this populist outlook fears environmental degradation, the disappearance of open spaces, and the growing congestion of once-human-scaled communities – indeed, of community life in all its aspects.

For more than a half century, capitalism has managed not only to avoid a chronic economic crisis of the kind Marx expected but also to control crises that potentially had a highly explosive character. As a system, capitalism is one of the most unstable economies in history and hence is always unpredictable. But equally uncertain is the traditional radical notion that it must slip with unfailing regularity into periodic crises as well as chronic ones. The general population in Europe and the United States has displayed a remarkable confidence in the operations of the economy; more than 40 percent of US families have now invested in the stock market and accept its huge swings without being swept up by panics, such as afflicted financial markets in the past. A strictly class-oriented politics based on industrial workers has receded, and the Left now faces the imperative to create a populist politics that reaches out to "the people" as they are today, in anticipation that they can now more easily be radicalized by issues that concern their communities, their civil liberties, their overall environment, and the integrity of their supplies of food, air, and water, not simply by a focus on economic exploitation and wage issues. The importance of economic issues cannot be overstated, but especially in periods of relative well-being a future Left will be successful only to the extent that it addresses the public as a "people" rather than as a class, a population whose disquiet has at least as much to do with freedoms, quality of life, and future well-being as it does with economic crises and material insecurity.[5]

By the same token, a future Left can hope to exercise influence only if it can mobilize people on issues that cut across the class lines. From Marx's day until the Depression and fascist

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[5] I am not trying to downplay the importance of economic issues. Quite to the contrary: only in recent times, especially since the mid twentieth century, has capitalism's commodity economy become a commodity *society*. *Commodification* has now penetrated into the most intimate levels of personal and social life. In the business-ese that prevails today, almost everything is seen as a trade-off. Love itself becomes a "thing" with its own exchange value and use value, even its own price – after all, do we not "earn" the love of others by our behavior? Still, this kind of commodification is not complete; the value of love is not entirely measurable in terms of labor or supply and demand.

decade of the 1930s, the principal victims of capitalist exploitation appeared to be workers at the point of production. The French Revolution, it was argued, allowed the peasantry to gain greater control of the land, and the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century granted the lower middle classes a major place in all spheres of French society. But they left one class unsatisfied: the emerging industrial proletariat, which was subjected to harsh working conditions, prevented from organizing, and suffered a declining standard of living. Engels portrayed a working-class life based on the English proletariat of 1844 at the height of the first Industrial Revolution; Marx argued that the concentration of capital and the displacement of workers by machines would create insufferable misery in the factories of England and the continent. This anti-capitalist vision was predicated on the belief that the proletariat's material conditions of life would worsen steadily while its numbers would increase to a point where it became the majority of the population.

By the late nineteenth century, however, these predictions were falling short, and by 1950 they were wholly discredited. What with the sophistication of machinery, the appearance of electronics, the spectacular increase in motor vehicle production, the rise of the chemical industry, and the like, the proportion of industrial workers to the population at large was diminishing, not rising. Moreover, due in large part to the struggles of legal trade unions to improve the living conditions of the proletariat in particular, the conflict between capital and labor was being significantly muted. Marxism, then, was clearly boxed into the class relations of a historically limited period, the era of the first Industrial Revolution.

Far from becoming proletarianized or declining to a minority of the population, as Marx had predicted, the middle class retained the psychology and consciousness of people who could hope for an ever-higher status. Propertyless as it may have been in reality and often cowed by the real bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie was (and remains to a great extent) convinced that it has a privileged place in the market economy and entertains expectations that it can climb upward on the social ladder of the capitalist system. If anything, the working class has made sufficient gains that it expects its children, equipped with a better education than their parents, to step upward in life. Small property owners are invested by the millions in financial markets. Workers now describe themselves as "middle class" or, with a nuance that heightens the dignity of labor, as "working families." Combative and exclusive expressions like "workers," "toilers," and "laborers" that once implicitly hinted at the existence of class struggle are now used with increasing rarity or not at all.

The sharp lines that once distinguished a plant's accounting office from the proletariat are being blurred ideologically and eating away at working-class consciousness. Notwithstanding Marx's theory of history as an account of class struggles, with its many truths, a class is no more authentic than the consciousness with which it views reality. No worker is truly a *class* being, however much he is exploited, when he views social life in bourgeois terms. The bourgeoisie learned this fact quite early when it exploited ethnic, religious, gender, and craft divisions within the proletariat as a whole. Hence the blue-collar or white-collar worker is a class being according to how she thinks of herself, relates to her boss, and holds expectations in life. A worker without a combative class consciousness is no more an exploited proletarian, for all practical purposes, than a policeman is an ordinary worker. Radical intellectuals' mystification of the worker has its origins in their imputation that "consciousness follows being," that is, when the worker recognizes that he *is* exploited and that capitalism is his social enemy.

What does this mean for a future Left? Unless capitalism unexpectedly collapses into a major chronic crisis (in which case workers may well turn to the fascism of a Le Pen in France or the reactionism of a Buchanan in the US), then the Left must focus on issues that are *interclass* in nature, addressing the middle as well as the working class. By the very logic of its "grow or die" imperative, capitalism may well be producing ecological crises that gravely imperil the integrity of life on this planet. The outputs of factories and the raw material industries, the destructive agricultural practices, and the consumption patterns in privileged parts of the world are simplifying the highly complex ecological ties that emerged over millions of years of natural evolution, reducing highly fertile areas to concrete landscapes, turning usable water into an increasingly degraded resource, surrounding the planet with a carbon dioxide layer that threatens to radically change the climate, and opening dangerous holes in the ozone layer. Rivers, lakes, and oceans are becoming garbage dumps for poisonous and life-inhibiting wastes. Almost every tangible component of daily life, from the food on the dinner table to substances used in the workplace, is becoming polluted with known or potentially dangerous toxicants. Cities are growing into vast, polluted, sprawling environments whose populations are larger than those of many nation-states only a few decades ago. The equatorial belt of tropical forests that surround the planet's land areas and large parts of the temperate zones are being deforested and denuded of their complex life-forms.

Yet for capitalism to desist from its mindless expansion would be for it to commit social suicide. By definition capitalism is a competitive economy that cannot cease to expand. The problems it may be creating for humanity as a whole – problems that transcend class differences – can easily become the bases for a vast critique if current environmentalists are willing to raise their concerns to the level of a radical social analysis and organize not simply around saving a select species or around the vices of automobile manufacturers but around replacing the existing irrational economy by a rational one. The fact that the nuclear industry still exists must be seen not simply as an abuse or a matter of stupidity, for example, but as an integral part of a greater whole: the need for an industry in a competitive economy to grow and out-compete its rivals. Similarly, the successes of the chemical industry in promoting the use of toxicants in agriculture, and the growing output of the automobile and petroleum industries – all must be seen as the results of the *inner* workings of a deeply entrenched system. Not only workers but the public must be educated in the reality that our emerging ecological problems stem from our irrational society.

Issues such as gender discrimination, racism, and national chauvinism must be recast not only as cultural and social regressions but as evidence of the ills produced by hierarchy. A growing public awareness must be fostered that oppression includes not only exploitation but also domination, and that it is based not only on economic causes but on cultural particularisms that divide people according to sexual, ethnic, and similar traits. Where these issues come to the foreground in the form of patent abuses, then a conscious revolutionary movement must expand their implications to show that society as it exists is basically irrational and dangerous.

Such a revolutionary movement needs a distinctive body of tactics designed to *expand* the scope of any issue, however reformist it may seem at first glance, steadily radicalizing it and giving it a potentially revolutionary thrust. It should make no agreement with liberals and the bourgeoisie on retaining the existing order. If the solution to a specific environmental problem seems fairly pragmatic, then the movement must regard it as a step for widening a partly open door until it can show that the entire ecological problem is *systemic* and expose it as such to public view. Thus a revolutionary movement should insist not only on blocking the construction

of a nuclear plant but on shutting down all nuclear plants and replacing them with alternative energy sources that enhance the environment. It should regard no limited gains as conclusive but rather must clearly link a given demand to the need for basic social change. The same strategy applies to the use of chemicals in agriculture, current agricultural methods of growing food, the manufacture of harmful means of transportation, the manufacture of dangerous household products – indeed, every item whose production and use debases the environment and degrades human values.[6]

Programmatic Issues and Prospects

I have examined elsewhere the reasons why power cannot be ignored – a problem that beleaguered the Spanish anarchists. But can be we conceive of a popular movement gaining power without an agency that can provide it with guidance?

A revolutionary Left that seeks to advance from protest demonstrations to *revolutionary* demonstrations must resolutely confront the problem of organization. I speak here not of ad hoc planning groups but rather of the creation and maintenance of an organization that is enduring, structured, and broadly programmatic. Such an organization constitutes a definable entity and must be structured around lasting and formal institutions to make it operational; it must contain a responsible membership that firmly and knowledgeably adheres to its ideals; and it must advance a sweeping program for social change that can be translated into everyday practice. Although such an organization may join a coalition (or united front, as the traditional Left called it), it must not disappear into such a coalition or surrender its independence, let alone its identity. It must retain its own name at all times and be guided by its own statutes. The organization's program must be the product of a reasoned analysis of the fundamental problems that face society, their historical sources and theoretical fundaments, and the clearly visible goals that follow from the potentialities and realities for social change.

One of the greatest problems that revolutionaries in the past faced (from the English revolutionaries in the seventeenth century to the Spanish in the twentieth) was their failure to create a resolute, well-structured, and fully informed organization with which to counter their reactionary opponents. Few uprisings expand beyond the limits of a riot without the guidance of a knowledgeable leadership. The myth of the purely spontaneous revolution can be dispatched by a careful study of past uprisings (as I have attempted in my own work on *The Third Revolution*). Even in self-consciously libertarian organizations, leadership always existed, even in the form of "influential militants," spirited men and women who constituted the nuclei around which crowds transformed street protests into outright insurrections. In his famous etching "The Revolt," Daumier intuitively focuses on a single individual, amid other rebels, who raises the cry that brings the masses into motion. Even in seemingly "spontaneous insurrections," advanced militants, scattered throughout rebellious crowds, spurred the uncertain masses on to further action. Contrary to anarchistic myths, none of the soviets, councils, and committees that arose in Russia in 1917,

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[6] What the public thinks at any time should play no role in determining the policies of a rational movement. If the public should want nuclear power, then it is wrong – and nothing more – and the movement should do whatever can be done to change its mind in a manner consistent with democratic procedure. But at no time, in my view, should the movement drop, modify, or bypass the issue of eliminating nuclear power because it lacks public support or alienates people. In this terribly dumbed-down and juvenilized society, truth must learn to stand on its own feet, so to speak, and continually gnaw away at public naivety, ignorance, and fatuity, if only to provide an example of integrity.

Germany in 1918, and Spain in 1936 were formed simply of their own accord. Invariably specific militants (a euphemism for leaders) took the initiative in forming them and in guiding inexperienced masses toward the adoption of a radical course of action.

Absorbed as they were with making concrete and immediate demands, few of these councils and committees had a broad overview of the social possibilities opened by the insurrections they initiated or a clear understanding of the enemies they had temporarily defeated. By contrast, the bourgeoisie and its statesmen knew only too well how to organize themselves, thanks to their considerable experience as entrepreneurs, political leaders, and military commanders. But the workers too often lacked the knowledge and experience so vital to developing an overview. It remains a tragic irony that insurrections that were not defeated outright by superior military forces often froze into immobility once they took power from their class enemies and rarely took the organizational steps necessary to retain their power. Without a theoretically trained and militant organization that had developed a broad social vision of its tasks and could offer workers practical programs for completing the revolution that they had initiated, revolutions quickly fell apart for lack of further action. Their supporters, zealous at the outset and for a brief period afterward, soon floundered, became demoralized for want of a thoroughgoing program, lost their *élan*, and then were crushed physically. Nowhere was this destructive process more apparent than in the German Revolution of 1918–19 and, to a great degree, in the Spanish Revolution of 1936–37, mainly because the mass anarcho-syndicalist union, the CNT, surrendered the power it had received from the Catalan workers in July 1936 to the bourgeoisie.

A future Left must carefully study these tragic experiences and determine how to resolve the problems of organization and power. Such an organization cannot be a conventional party, and find a comfortable place in a parliamentary state, without losing its revolutionary *élan*. The Bolshevik party, structured as a top-down organization that fetishized centralization and internal party hierarchy, exemplifies the way a party can merely replicate a state and become a bureaucratic and authoritarian entity.

If Marxists, when they found themselves in revolutionary situations, could not conceive of any politics that abolished the state, then the anarchists, and tragically the syndicalists who were deeply influenced by them intellectually, were so fixated on avoiding the state that they destroyed vital, self-governing revolutionary institutions. This not the place to discuss Spanish anarchism and its rather confused anarcho-syndicalist "farrago," as Chris Ealham has so aptly called it,[7] but the CNT-FAI leadership seems to have lacked the slightest idea how to achieve a libertarian communist revolution: when power was actually thrust into their trembling hands, it simply did not know what to with it.

Every revolution, indeed, even every attempt to achieve basic social change, will always meet with resistance from the elites in power. Every effort to defend a revolution will require the amassing of power – physical as well as institutional and administrative – which is to say, the creation of a government. Anarchists may call for the abolition of the state, but coercion of some kind will be necessary to prevent the bourgeois state from returning in full force with unbridled terror. For a libertarian organization to eschew, out of misplaced fear of creating a "state," the taking of power when it can do so with the support of the revolutionary masses is confusion at

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[7] Chris Ealham, "From the Summits to the Abyss: The Contradictions of Individualism and Collectivism in Spanish Anarchism," in *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain*, eds. Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 140. This essay is one of the most important contributions I have read to the literature on the contradictions in anarchism.

best and a total failure of nerve at worst. Perhaps the CNT-FAI actually lived in awe of the very state apparatus whose existence it was committed to abolish. Better that such a movement gets out of the way than remain cloaked in a seemingly "radical" camouflage that makes promises to the masses that it cannot honor.

The history of the libertarian Left does suggest, however, a form of organization that is consistent with attempts to create a left libertarian society. In a confederation, seeming higher bodies play the role of administering policy decisions that are made at the base of the organization. In the end, nearly all policy decisions, especially basic ones, must be made at the base of the organization by its branches or sections. Decisions made at the base move to the top and then back again in modified form to the base until, by majority votes at the base, they become policies whose implementation is often undertaken by special or standing committees.

No organizational model, however, should be fetishized to the point where it flatly contradicts the imperatives of real life. Where events require a measure of centralization, coordination at a confederal level may have to be tightened to implement a policy or tactic – to the extent that it is necessary and only for as long as it is necessary. A confederation can allow necessary centralization on a temporary basis, without yielding to a permanent centralized organization, only if its membership is conscious and *thoroughly* informed, theoretically, to guard against the abuses of centralization and only if the organization has structures in place to recall leaders who seem to be abusing their powers. Otherwise we have no certainty that *any* libertarian practices will be honored. I have seen people who for decades were committed to libertarian practices and principles throw their ideals to the wind, and even drift into a coarse nationalism, when events appealed more to their emotions than to their minds. A libertarian organization must have in place precautions such as the right to recall by the organization's membership and the right to demand a full accounting of a confederal body's practices, but the fact remains that there is no substitute for knowledge and consciousness. Certainly no dogmatic formula can provide an adequate method for defying the imperatives of real life, particularly in times of armed conflict.

A libertarian communist society would have to make decisions on how resources are to be acquired, produced, allocated, and distributed. Such a society must seek to prevent the restoration of capitalism and of old or new systems of privilege, which may involve civil war and military regimentation. It must try to achieve a degree of administrative coordination and regulation on a huge scale among communities, and decision-making must be forceful if social life of any kind is not to collapse completely.

These constraints are necessary to provide the greatest degree of freedom possible, but they will not be imposed simply by "good will," "mutual aid," "solidarity," or even "custom," and any notion that they will rests more on a prayer than on human experience. Material want will quickly erode any "good will" and "solidarity" that a successful, indeed forceful revolution with its fighting and expropriations creates among the libertarian victors; hence the need for post-scarcity as a precondition for a communalist society. In the Spanish Revolution of 1936– 37 many of the new society's collectives – all flying the black-and-red flag of anarcho-syndicalism – entered into blatant competition with one another for raw materials, technicians, and even markets and profits. The result was that they had to be "socialized" by the CNT – that is, the trade union had to exert control to equalize the distribution of goods and the availability of costly machinery, and oblige "rich" collectives to share their wealth with poor ones. (Later this authority was taken over by the Madrid nation-state for reasons of its own.) Nor were all peasants eager to join collectives when they were also afforded the opportunity to function as small property owners. Still others

left the collectives in sizable numbers when they found themselves free to do so without fear. In other words, to establish a viable communalist society, more than personal and moral commitments will be needed – least of all, those extremely precarious variables that are based on "human nature" and "instincts for mutual aid."

The problem of *achieving* libertarian communism is one of the most untheorized aspects of the libertarian repertoire. The communist maxim "From each according to ability, to each according to need" presupposes a sufficiency of goods and hence complex technological development. That achievement involves a close agreement with Marx's emphasis that advances in the instruments of production are a precondition for communism. The success of libertarian communism, then, depends profoundly on the growth of the productive forces over many centuries and on the increasing availability of the means of life.

History is filled with countless examples where natural scarcity or limited resources obliged peoples to turn popular governments into kingly states, captives into slaves, women into subjugated drudges, free peasants into serfs, and the like. No such development lacks excesses, and if kindly rulers did not turn into brutal despots, it would have been miraculous. That we can sit in judgment on these societies, their states, and their oppressive methods is evidence that progress *has* occurred and, equally importantly, that *our* circumstances differ profoundly from theirs. Where famine was once a normal feature of life, we today are shocked when no effort is made to feed the starving. But we are shocked only because we have already developed the means to produce a sufficiency, disallowing indifference to scarcity. In short, the circumstances have changed profoundly, however unjust the distribution of the means of life may continue to be. Indeed, that we can even say that the distribution is unjust is a verdict that only a society that can eliminate material scarcity – and create, potentially, a *post-scarcity society* – can make.

Thus our expansive visions of freedom, today, have their preconditions: minimally, technological advancement. Only generations that have not experienced the Great Depression can ignore the preconditional bases for our more generous ideologies. The classical Left – particularly thinkers such as Marx – gave us much systematic thinking on history and contemporary social affairs. But will we elect to follow a truly libertarian use of the resources at our command and create a society that is democratic, communistic, and communalistic, based on popular assemblies, confederations, and sweeping civil liberties? Or will we follow a course that is increasingly statist, centralized, and authoritarian? Here another "history" or dialectic comes into play – the great traditions of freedom that were elaborated over time by unknown revolutionaries and by libertarian thinkers such as a Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Malatesta. We are thus faced with two legacies that have unfolded in tandem with each other: a material one and an ideological one.

Let us be frank and acknowledge that these legacies are not well-known or easily understood. But from them we can weave an ethical approach to social change that can give our endeavors definition and a possibility of success. For one thing, we can declare that "what should be," humanity's potentialities for freedom, rationality, and self-consciousness, is to be actualized and guide our social lives. We can affirm "what should be" on the basis of decidedly real material possibilities and realizable ideological ones. Knowledge of "what should be" if reason is to guide our behavior becomes the force driving us to make social change and to produce a rational society. With our material preconditions in place and with reason to guide us to the actualization of our potentialities, notably a rational society, we can begin to formulate the concrete steps that a future Left will be obliged to take to achieve its ends. The material preconditions are demonstrably at hand, and reason, fortified by a knowledge of past endeavors to produce a relatively rational

society, provides the means to formulate the measures and the means, step by step, to produce a new Left that is relevant for the foreseeable future.

An Ethical Compass for the Left

Far from eschewing reason and theory, a future Left that is meaningful must be solidly grounded in theory if it is to have any power to understand the present in relationship to the past, and the future in relationship to the present. A lack of philosophical equipment to interpret events, past and present, will render its theoretical insights fragmentary and bereft of contextuality and continuity. Nor will it be able two show how specific events relate to a larger whole and link them together in a broad perspective. It was this admirable intention, I should note, that induced Marx to give his ideas a systematic and unified form, not any personal disposition on his part for "totalitarianism." The world in which he lived had to be shown that capital accumulation and the bourgeoisie's unrelenting concentration of industrial resources were not products of greed but vital necessities for enterprises in a sharply competitive economy.

One can project an alternative to the present society only by advancing *rational* alternatives to the existing order of things – alternatives that are objectively and logically based on humanity's potentialities for freedom and innovation. In this respect, the ability of human beings to project themselves beyond their given circumstances, to rationally recreate their world and their social relations, and to infuse innovation with ethical judgments, becomes the basis for actualizing a rational society.

This "what should be," as educed by reason, stands on a higher plane of truthfulness and wholeness than does the existential and pragmatic "what is." Figuratively speaking, the contrast between the "what should be" and the "what is," as elaborated and challenged by mind as well as by experience, lies at the heart of dialectic. Indeed, the "what should be," by sitting in judgment on the validity of the given, joins dialectical development in the biosphere with dialectical development in the social sphere. It provides the basis for determining whether a society is rational and to what degree it has rational content. Absent such a criterion, we have no basis for social ethics apart from the egocentric, adventitious, anarchic, and highly subjective statement "I choose!" A social ethics cannot remain suspended in the air without an objective foundation, a comprehensive evolution from the primitive to the increasingly sophisticated, and a coherent content that supports its development.

Moreover, without an objective potentiality (that is, the *implicit* reality that lends itself to rational eduction, in contrast to mere daydreaming) that sits in "judgment" of existential reality as distinguished from a rationally conceived reality, we have no way to derive an ethics that goes beyond mere personal taste. What is to guide us in understanding the nature of freedom? Why is freedom superior to mere custom or habit? Why is a free society desirable and an enslaved one not, apart from taste and opinion? No *social* ethics is even possible, let alone desirable, without a processual conception of behavior, from its primal roots in the realm of potentiality at the inception of a human evolution, through that evolution itself, to the level of the rational and discursive. Without criteria supplied by the *dialectically derived* "ought," the foundations for a revolutionary movement dissolve into an anarchic vacuum of personal choice, the muddled notion that "what is good for me constitutes the good and the true" – and that is that!

As much as we are obliged to deal with the "what is" – with the existential facts of life, including capitalism – it is the dialectically derived "true," as Hegel might put it, that must always remain our guide, precisely because it defines a rational society. Abandon the rational, and we are reduced to the level of mere animality from which the course of history and the great struggles of humanity for emancipation have tended to free us. It is to break faith with History, conceived as a rational development toward freedom and innovation, and to diminish the defining standards of our humanity. If we often seem adrift, it is not for lack of a compass and a map by which to guide ourselves toward the actualization of our uniquely human and social potentialities.

Which leads us to another premise for acquiring social truth: the importance of dialectical thinking as our compass. This logic constitutes both the method and the substance of an eductive process of reasoning and unfolding. Eduction is the procedure that immanently elicits the implicit traits that lend themselves to rational actualization, namely freedom and innovation. A deep ecologist once challenged me by asking why freedom should be more desirable than unfreedom. I reply that freedom, as it develops objectively through various phases of the ascent of life, from mere choice as a form of self-maintenance to the recreation of the environment by intellection and innovation, can make for a world that is more habitable, humane, and creative than anything achieved by the interplay of natural forces. Indeed, to rephrase a famous axiom of Hegel's, a point can be reached in a free society where what is not free is not real (or actual).

Indeed, a task of dialectical thinking is to separate the rational from the arbitrary, external, and adventitious in which it unfolds, an endeavor that demands considerable intellectual courage as well as insight. Thus the conquests of Alexander the Great dovetail with the rational movement of History, insofar as Alexander unified a decomposing world made up of rotting city-states and parasitic monarchies and transmitted Hellenic thought to it. But the explosion of Mongol horsemen from the steppes of central Asia contributed no more to the rational course of events than did, say, a decline in rainfall over North Africa that turned a vast forested area into a grim formidable desert. Moreover, to speak of a Mongol invasion as evidence of a "potentiality for evil" is to divest the rich philosophical term *potentiality* of its creative content. Much better to use here the ideologically neutral term *capacity*, which can be applied anywhere for any phenomenon – and to no intelligible purpose whatever.

The Libertarian Municipality

Remote as it may seem to some, dialectical thinking is in my view indispensable for creating the map and formulating the agenda for a new Left. The actualization of humanity's potentiality for a rational society – the "what should be" that is achieved by human development – occurs in the fully democratic municipality, the municipality based on a face-to-face democratic assembly composed of free citizens, for whom the word *politics* means direct popular control over the community's public affairs by means of democratic institutions. Such a system of control should occur within the framework of a duly constituted system of laws, rationally derived by discourse, experience, historical knowledge, and judgment. The free municipality, in effect, is not only a sphere for deploying political tactics but a product of reason. Here means and ends are in perfect congruence, without the troubling "transitions" that once gave us a "dictatorship of the proletariat" that soon turned into a dictatorship of the party.

Furthermore, the libertarian municipality, like any social artifact, is constituted. It is to be consciously created by the exercise of reason, not by arbitrary "choices" that lack objective ethical criteria and therefore may easily yield oppressive institutions and chaotic communities. The municipality's constitution and laws should define the duties as well as the rights of the citizen – that is, they should explicitly clarify the realm of necessity as well as the realm of freedom. The life of the municipality is determined by laws, not arbitrarily "by men." Law as such is not necessarily oppressive: indeed, for thousands of years the oppressed demanded laws, as *nomos*, to prevent arbitrary rule and the "tyranny of structurelessness." In the free municipality, law must always be rationally, discursively, and openly derived and subject to careful consideration. At the same time we must continually be aware of regulations and definitions that have harnessed oppressed humanity to their oppressors.

As Rousseau saw, the municipality is not merely an agglomeration of buildings but of free citizens. Combined with reason, order can yield coherent *institutions*. Lacking order and reason, we are left with a system of arbitrary rule, with controls that are not accountable or answerable to the people – in short, with tyranny. What constitutes a state is not the existence of institutions but rather the existence of professional institutions, set apart from the people, that are designed to dominate them for the express purpose of securing their oppression in one form or another.

A revolutionary politics does not challenge the existence of institutions as such but rather assesses whether a given institution is emancipatory and rational or oppressive and irrational. The growing proclivity, in oppositional movements, to transgress institutions and laws merely because they are institutions and laws is in fact reactionary and, in any case, serves to divert public attention away from the need to create or transform institutions into democratic, popular, and rational entities. A "politics" of disorder or "creative chaos," or a naive practice of "taking over the streets" (usually little more than a street festival), regresses participants to the behavior of a juvenile herd; by replacing the rational with the "primal" or "playful," it abandons the Enlightenment's commitment to the civilized, the cultivated, and the knowledgeable. Joyful as revolutions may sometimes also be, they are primarily earnestly serious and even bloody – and if they are not systematic and not astutely led, they will invariably end in counter-revolution and terror. The Communards of 1871 may have been deliriously drunk when they "stormed the heavens" (as Marx put it), but when they sobered up, they found that the walls surrounding Paris had been breached by the counter-revolutionary Versaillais. After a week of fighting, their resistance collapsed, and the Versaillais shot them arbitrarily and in batches by the thousands. A politics that lacks sufficient seriousness in its core behavior may make for wonderful Anarchy but is disastrous revolutionism.

What specific political conclusions do these observations yield? What political agenda do they support?

First, the "what should be" should preside over every tenet that makes up a future political agenda and movement. As important as a politics of protest may be, it is no substitute for a politics of social innovation. Today Marxists and anarchists alike tend to behave defensively, merely reacting to the existing social order and to the problems it creates. Capitalism thus orchestrates the behavior of its intuitive opponents.

Moreover it has learned to mute opposition by shrewdly making partial concessions to protesters. Thus when an anti-nuclear movement reaches major proportions, one country may decide to limit the construction of new reactors – but they multiply in other countries where no anti-nuclear movement is threatening. Similarly, bioengineered foods may be curbed in some

places because of public fears about their effects, but bioengineering expands exponentially in other places and disciplines; or the industry may agree to take prudent self-limiting measures rather than yield to complete public control.

The municipality, as we have seen, is the authentic terrain for the actualization of humanity's social potentialities to be free and innovative. Still, left to itself, even the most emancipated municipality may become parochial, insular, and narrow. Confederalism remains at once the operational means of rounding out the deficits that any municipality is likely to face when it introduces a libertarian communist economy. Few, if any, municipalities are capable of meeting their needs on their own. An attempt to achieve economic autarchy – and the concomitant cultural parochialism that it so often yields in less economically developed societies – would be socially undesirable. Nor does the mere exchange of surplus products remove the commodity relationship; the sharing of goods according to a truly libertarian view is far different from an exchange of goods, which closely resembles market exchanges. By what standard would the "value" of surplus commodities be determined – by their congealed labor? The incipient bases for a capitalist economy remained unrecognized even in anarchist Catalonia, among those who boasted of their communist convictions.

Still another distinction that must be drawn is that between policy-making decisions and strictly administrative ones. Just as the problems of distribution must not be permitted to drag a community into capitalist mores and market practices, administrators must not be allowed to make policy decisions, which properly belong to the popular assemblies. Such practices must be made, quite simply, illegal – that is, the community must establish regulations, with punitive features, *forbidding* committees and agencies to exercise rights that properly belong to the assembled community. As insensitive as such measures may seem to delicate libertarian sensibilities, they are justified by a history in which hard-won rights were slowly eroded by elites who sought privileges for themselves at the expense of the many. Post-scarcity in the availability of the means of life may serve to render any pursuit of economic privilege a laughable anachronism. But, as hierarchical society has shown, something more than economic privileges, such as the enhancement of status and power, may be involved.

Human beings actualize their potentialities not only in the free municipality but in one that is rationally and discursively constituted and institutionalized in free popular assemblies. Whatever politics abets this development is historically progressive; any self-professed politics that diminishes this development is reactionary and reinforces the existing social order. Mere expressions of formless "community" that devolve into "street festivals," particularly when they become substitutes for a libertarian municipalist politics (or, more disturbingly, a distortion of them), feed the overall juvenilization that capitalism promotes through its impetus to dumb down society on a massive scale.

The Radical Challenge

During the interwar years, when proactive forces for revolutionary change seemed to threaten the very existences of the social order, the classical Left was focused on a distinct set of issues: the need for a planned economy, the problems of a chronic economic crisis, the imminence of a worldwide war, the advance of fascism, and the challenging examples provided by the Russian Revolution. Today, contemporary leftists are more focused on major ecological

dislocations, corporate gigantism, the influence of technology on daily life, and the impact of the mass media. The classical Left looked at deep-seated crises and the feasibility of revolutionary approaches to create social change; the contemporary Left is more attentive to a different set of abuses.

The issues dominant today are characteristic of a seemingly settled and basically secure society that feels it can contain demands for change within its orbit. The ills that currently exist, however troubling, seem correctable without challenging the premises of the existing society. Continental Europe especially, where cynicism has taken deep root in an "end of history" mentality and where an unending repetition of the status quo is assumed as the only future of humanity, sees the United States as emblematic of the unshakable overall stability of the existing order. America, in turn, has become almost gluttonously consumerist; capitalist accumulation has brought with it a form of public accumulation in which a corps of buyers with an unending number of insatiable needs purchases an infinity of new products. Indeed, one of the greatest problems facing American industry and commerce is how to create new products to titillate public taste, even it means dredging up old, long-discarded forms of entertainment and products and adding on the vulgar glitz of the present age.

The capitalism under which we live today is far removed from the capitalism that Marx knew and that revolutionaries of all kinds tried to overthrow in the first half of the twentieth century. It has, indeed, developed in great part along the lines Marx suggested in his closing chapters of the first volume of *Capital*: as an economy whose very law of life is accumulation, concentration, and expansion. When it can no longer develop along these lines, it will cease to be capitalism. This follows from the very logic of commodity exchange, with its expression in competition and technological innovation.

Marxist productivism and anarchist individualism have both led to blind alleys, albeit widely divergent ones. Where Marxism tends to over-organize people into parties, unions, and proletarian "armies" guided by elitist leaders, anarchism eschews organization and leaders as "vanguards" and celebrates revolutionism as an instinctive impulse unguided by reason or theory. Where Marxism celebrates technological advances, without placing them in a rational, ethical, and ecological context, anarchism deprecates sophisticated technics as the demonic parent of the "technocratic man" who is lured to perdition by reason and civilization. Technophilia has been pitted against technophobia; analytical reason against raw instinct; and a synthetic civilization against a presumably primeval nature.

The future of the Left, in the last analysis, depends upon its ability to accept what is valid in both Marxism and anarchism for the present time – and for the future that is coming into view. In an era of permanent technological revolution, the validity of a theory and a movement will depend profoundly on how clearly it can see what lies just ahead. Radically new technologies, still difficult to imagine, will undoubtedly be introduced that will have a transformative effect upon the entire world. New power alignments may arise, that may well produce a degree of social disequilibrium that has not been seen for decades. New weapons of unspeakable homicidal and ecocidal effects may emerge. The ecological crisis may continue.

But no greater damage could afflict human consciousness than the loss of the Enlightenment program: the advance of reason, knowledge, science, ethics, and even technics, which must be modulated to find a progressive place in a free and humane society. Without the attainments of the Enlightenment, no libertarian revolutionary consciousness is possible. In assessing the revolutionary tradition, a *reasoned* Left has to shake off dead traditions that, as Marx warned, weigh

on the heads of the living, and to commit itself to create to a rational society and a rounded civilization. A Marxism that retains a meaningless focus on proletarian hegemony, and an anarchism that has never stirred the "soil" beneath the "snow" of reason, civilization, and technics, may well serve to make irrelevant the components of past revolutionary ideologies that are still vital, components whose lasting achievements our time greatly needs.

Toward a Communalist Approach

There is an urgent need for a new radical approach to adequately address the new economic, ecological, technological, and cultural challenges of contemporary society; it must be one of theory and action, one that will draw on features from classical Marxism, socialism, and anarchism, yet go beyond their historical and theoretical limitations.

Conceived as they all were in the socially tumultuous era of industrial revolution, the ideologies of communism, socialism, and the more *social* versions of anarchism responded with a reasonable degree of adequacy to the challenges of the oppressive and exploitative circumstances and contexts in which they took form. In Marx's hands, communism provided a philosophy, a theory of history, and a political strategy centered on a revolutionary class agent – the industrial proletariat – the coherence of which was unequaled by any other body of social theory and practice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But Marxism's historical adequacy as a revolutionary ideology depended overwhelmingly on the social and economic conditions of the Industrial Revolution as they existed between 1848 and 1871. The degradation of the factory proletariat and the oppressions inflicted by the industrial bourgeoisie led to a furious class war. A remarkable confluence of circumstances – particularly the outbreak in 1914 of the worst war that humanity had ever known and the instability of quasi-feudal governments in most of continental Europe – allowed Lenin to use (and misuse) Marxism to take power in a vast, economically backward empire. The first "proletarian state" to hold power in history went on to produce a tyrannical state system that lasted for decades and tragically smothered socialism under a dark totalitarian regime.

Once World War One opened the revolutionary interwar period, however, socialism qua social democracy, despite its professed radical goals, responded by retreating to the liberal credo it had always held close to its heart, finally abandoning all its rhetorical pretensions as a radical movement for social change. In all fairness, however, the conventional social democratic parties constituted more of an authentic working-class movement than most of their competitors on the Left. Apart from rare – and remarkable – occasions brought about by unusual constellations of events, the proletariat proved not to be the fervent revolutionary agent that Marx, Engels, and the syndicalist theorists had believed it was. While its left-wing devotees celebrated the working class fervently for its alleged susceptibility to revolutionary ideas, workers in reality proved to be as closely wedded to bourgeois society as were the middle classes with which Marxists and anarchosyndicalists contrasted them. With few exceptions the proletariat responded in vastly greater numbers to the reformist directives of pragmatic trade union leaders than to the revolutionary pleas of communist propagandists. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht of the revolutionary Spartacus League, for example, never exercised the enormous influence over the German workers that Karl Legien, of the reformist (social democratic) Free Trade Unions, enjoyed.

Capitalism thus survived the horrors of two long world wars, the international impact of the Russian Revolution, and a highly unstable Depression decade in the 1930s. Although it was badly shaken at times, in the end capitalism did not lose its overall legitimacy (except perhaps in Spain

in 1936) in the eyes of the very class that Marxism and syndicalism had selected as its historically revolutionary agent.

Anarchism (which should not be confused with syndicalism and communism) in its pure form meant little more than unrelenting resistance to and protest against attempts by society and particularly the state to confine individual liberty. It appealed mainly to marginal, déclassé elements, ranging from the dispossessed to idiosyncratic artists and writers. Although rarely influential as an ideology, it resonated with the agrarian *bunty*, the Russian peasant uprisings that were notorious for their destructive, sometimes anti-urban insurrections. When impulsive anarchist sentiments affected well-organized proletarian struggles, they mutated into anarcho-syndicalism, which was seldom internally stable or free of serious tensions. Many anarcho-syndicalist notions, such as workers' control over industry and confederally structured revolutionary trade unions, enjoyed a considerable vogue among industrial workers; still, in the absence of external pressure and persecution by the bourgeoisie and the state, anarcho-syndicalist unions seldom refrained from compromising their libertarian principles.

The great theories advanced by Marxists, socialists, anarchists, and anarcho-syndicalists, then, were insightful on many issues and were sometimes inspiring in making a socialistic revolution a realizable possibility. But today these theories are understandably incapable of *encompassing* and programmatically *integrating* into a coherent whole the new social issues, potential class realignments, and economic advances that have arisen (and that continue to arise) with extraordinary rapidity since the end of World War Two. To simply resuscitate them, even in the face of the failures they produced, and pretend that they enjoy an unchallengeable ideological immortality, would be dogmatic fatuity.

Significantly, capitalism has changed in many respects since World War Two. It has created new, *generalized social issues* that are not limited to wages, hours, and working conditions – notably environmental, gender, hierarchical, civic, and democratic issues. The problems raised by these issues *cut across* class lines, even as they exacerbate or modify the problems that once gave rise to the classical revolutionary movements. Older definitions of freedom, while preserving certain unassailable components, become inadequate in the light of later historical advances; so too older revolutionary theories and movements, while losing none of their insights and lessons, become inadequate with the passage of time, as the emergence of new issues necessitate broader programs and movements.

Since Marxism was fashioned in the context of the Industrial Revolution, it would indeed be uncanny if it did not require sweeping revisions and redefinitions as a body of ideas. Or if socialism (qua social democracy) – all its cross-currents and variations notwithstanding – remained a fixed strategy for achieving basic social change in the face of new developments over the past fifty years. Or if anarchism and its variants, with their central demand for personal autonomy (as opposed to social freedom), could adequately deal with the new ecological, hierarchical, technological, democratic, and civic issues that have arisen.

Nor can the proletariat, whose class identity is being subverted by an immense middle class, hope to speak for the majority of the population. Capitalism is inflicting generalized threats on humanity, sweeping problems such as globalization, climate changes that may alter the very face of the planet, challenges to civil rights and traditional freedoms, and the radical transformation of civic life as a result of rampant urbanization; other issues have yet to emerge as a result of the immensely transformative technologies that will make the coming century unrecognizable. A new revolutionary movement must be capable of dealing not only with the more familiar issues

that linger on, but with new, more general ones that potentially may bring the vast majority of society into opposition to an ever evolving and challenging capitalist system.

That these major problems that confront us were not on the agenda of previous socialistic movements, or else were treated marginally, should not surprise us. A socially oriented *ecology* has yet to take hold, despite newly arrived anarchists' attempts to impute one to Peter Kropotkin or Elisée Reclus. Older movements regarded *hierarchy*, if they saw it as undesirable at all, more as an epiphenomenon of class structures and the state than as the oppressive institutionalization of cultural and economic differentiation among men, and between men and women, that emerged very early in social life. Classical socialists and anarchists cloaked the role of the *city* and *democracy* in human affairs in such strictly class terms that they barely explored them as arenas for human development and self-realization. Indeed, nearly all classical radical and revolutionary discussions centered on the industrial proletariat, which was supposed to become the majority of the population in Western European countries and would inevitably be driven to revolution by capitalist exploitation and immiseration.[1]

What classical revolutionary ideologies can teach us is that capitalism remains a grossly irrational social order in which the pursuit of profit and the accumulation of wealth for its own sake pollutes every material and spiritual advance. It is an economic and social order that now threatens to afflict humanity with the homogenization and atomization of human relationships by the spread of commodity production and by the disintegration of community life and solidarity. This crisis-ridden society will not disappear on its own: it has to be opposed unrelentingly by a dedicated Left that must be committed to the rescuing of the high estate of reason in human affairs that is currently under siege by anti-Enlightenment forces. To encompass the problems we face today, the ideological orbit described by Marxism, anarchism, and (to a lesser degree) socialism qua social democracy would have to be expanded beyond recognition. To this end the idea of *communalism* is presented as a project – one that will render the best in classical revolutionary ideologies relevant to a new century and confront problems that were formerly little more than ancillary anticipations.

What is Communalism?

Communalism is an attempt to enter into a more advanced terrain of revolutionary ideas. From the outset, we must distinguish *communalism*, as a tradition and a theory, from *communitarianism*, with which it is often mistaken. Communitarianism was and is a movement to establish communities that are organized around cooperative personal living and working arrangements, such as were common among counter-cultural youth during the 1960s and 1970s. Their propaga-

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[1] Today ecological issues are highly fashionable and acceptable to leftists, but even during the tumultuous 1960s they were readily dismissed. I recall publishing key, manifesto-type articles such as "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought" in 1964, and raising environmental issues for years in radical circles, only to be snidely derogated for "ignoring" class issues (as though the two were in conflict with each other!) and not adopting views that were more closely linked to Cold War diplomacy than they were to socialism. The same was true of feminist issues. It took the Left decades to show any appreciation of the crises opened by global warming, to which I had alluded in "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought," and several decades to remove itself from the mire of Cold War "socialism," such as Maoism. Now, to be sure, one learns that Marx, Engels, Kropotkin, and Reclus were ecologically oriented all the time – as far back as the nineteenth century – and clairvoyantly anticipated all the new issues that were raised in the last half of the twentieth century! Nevertheless, the left-wing movements lack a clear idea of how these issues can be given a programmatic character on which people can act.

tors saw these islets of the good life as products of healthy normal human impulses, in contrast to evil conventional norms that warped or blotted out such impulses. The most famous communitarians were nineteenth-century utopian visionaries such as Robert Owen (whose followers established the New Harmony community) and John Humphrey Noyes (a religious social reformer who established the more successful Oneida community in New York State). These experiments and radical ones like them rested on the conviction that once enough people adopted cooperative lifestyles, they would eventually abandon the evil world of private property and egoism in favor of new cooperative living arrangements.

Most commonly, however, the social perspective of communitarians was highly limited. They usually saw their communities as personal refuges from the ills of the surrounding world. But communitarianism – which is still alive in the writings of Robert Theobald, a variety of cooperativists, and assorted anarchists – is basically a *lifestyle* project, committed to the ethical and often quasi-religious principle that humanity is innately good and must be restored to its pristine condition of kindness and mutual aid, primarily by example and gradual physical expansion. In a word, communitarianism – to the extent that it even seeks to change the world – slowly inculcates the values of goodness by a one-to-one conversion to particular living arrangements.

Communalism, by contrast, is a *revolutionary* political theory and practice, deeply rooted in the general socialist tradition. Far from setting up models or examples of cooperative lifestyles, it actively seeks to confront capital and the basic structures of state power. Far from functioning as a personal refuge, it seeks to construct a broad civic sphere and markedly enhance political involvement. Indeed, it seeks to reconstruct municipalities as a whole to form a counter-power to the nation-state. The word has roots as a political term in the Paris Commune of 1871, when the armed people of the French capital fought for the idea of a quasi-socialistic confederation of the nation's cities and towns or *communes* (as they are called to this day in many parts of Europe). Today, we can still get a sense of the far-reaching social goals of *communalism* from consulting even conventional reference books like *The American Heritage Dictionary.*

Socialist revolutionary theory seldom attributed an important place to municipalities. Early nineteenth-century socialists were concerned mainly with influencing the working class and ultimately gaining control of the nation-state. Apart from anarchists, most left-wingers tended retrospectively to admire the Jacobins of the Great French Revolution, who were the advocates of a highly centralized state apparatus. The Jacobins' principal opponents on the Left, the Girondins, preached a federalist message but were closely associated with the counter-revolution of the 1790s and hated revolutionary Paris so deeply that their federalist ideas fell into disrepute on the Left. Not for decades would federalism gain a good name among French radicals.

After the Revolution the most active European movements for social change were spawned less in the countryside than in towns and cities. Insurgent Paris exploded in the insurrection of 1830 and in a workers' uprising in June 1848 – and the French capital was highly conscious of its ancient municipal identity and liberties. Well into the twentieth century it clung to that identification with civic freedom with extraordinary fervor. Indeed, in the years to come many socialistic revolutions that swept over Europe, even those that were internationalist in character, were notable for the hegemonic role that municipalities played in their uprisings. "Red Petrograd," "Red Berlin," and "Red and Black Barcelona" became synonymous with particularly incendiary uprisings between 1917 and 1936. More often than not, a municipality initiated a revolution, and its success in overthrowing the old local authorities initiated a nationwide insurrection.

On closer inspection, the civic nature of most modern revolutions points to the fundamental role that municipalities have played as incubators of social development and the functions they have performed in fulfilling humanity's potentialities. When Aristotle wrote his political works he set a standard for the Western conception of the city, defining it as the arena for the development of citizenship and even humanness itself, specifically reason, self-consciousness, and the good life. The Hellenic word *polis*, from which we derive the word *political*, has too often been wrongly translated as "city-state." In fact the Athenian *polis* was not a state but a humanly scaled municipality that became an outright face-to-face democracy. The Athenians of the fifth century BCE would have regarded even a modern republic as oppressive and would have found its bureaucratic apparatus oligarchical at best and tyrannical at worst. In Periclean times they drew a clear distinction between monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, and democracy. They generally viewed a face-to-face democracy as the fulfillment of the *polis*'s evolution out of assemblages of households, and they continued to treasure its essentially democratic features over all other forms, even after their Roman conquerors virtually eliminated it.

Communalism not only recaptures these functions but goes beyond them as an effort to constitute the developmental arena of mind and discourse. By contrast, modern urbanized cities reduce citizens to mere co-dwellers who live in close physical proximity to one another, or to taxpayers who expect the city to provide them with goods and services in return for revenue. As such, communalism sees the municipality as potentially a transformative development beyond organic evolution into the domain of social evolution. Indeed, for communalists the municipality is the domain wherein mere adaptation to changing environments is supplanted by proactive association based on the free exchange of ideas, the creative endeavor to bring consciousness to the service of change, and the collective vehicle, where necessary, to intervene in the world with a view toward ending environmental as well as economic insults. The municipality, once it is freed of hierarchical domination and material exploitation – indeed, once it is recreated as rational arena for human creativity in all spheres of life – is potentially the *ethical space* for the good life. It is also potentially the *school* for the formation of a new human being, the *citizen*, who has shed the archaic blood ties of tribalism and the hierarchical impulses created by differences in ethnicity, gender, and parochial exclusivity.

Historically, the municipality was the domain that, at least juridically, dissolved the blood tie, which had formerly united family and tribe according to the facts of biology, to the exclusion of the outsider. It was in the municipality, eventually, that the once-feared stranger could be absorbed into a community of citizens, initially as the coequal of all other residents who occupied a common territory and eventually as a member of the citizens' assembly, engaging with all other free male residents in making policy decisions. In this respect, the formation of the municipality antedated the rise of the state – which, it is worth noting, appeared among agrarian peoples well before it appeared among their urban cousins.

Indeed, the state, which may be defined as an organized system of dominance by a privileged class, was continually in tension, if not in open warfare, with the municipality. The so-called autonomous cities of the medieval world were in conflict with medieval and Renaissance monarchs as well as with territorial lords, both of whom threatened their civic freedoms. To be sure, internal conflicts raged within their own walls between various classes and estates. But if they were not often at peace either with themselves or with their external opponents, their libertarian origins were seldom forgotten: during periods of crisis, these sentiments surfaced as revolutionary upsurges in Europe and even Asia. Indeed today, when the nation-state seems supreme, whatever

rights municipalities retain are the hard-won gains of commoners, who over the course of history preserved them against assaults by ruling classes. Characteristically, the *comuñero* uprising of the Castilian cities in 1520–22 and the *journées* of the Parisian sectional assemblies during the French Revolution (to cite only two of the more outstanding cases) were impelled by strong civic sentiments and by demands for a Federation of Communes.

Thus communalism is no contrived body of political and social concepts, spun out from the vagrant fancies of mere imagination. In many respects, it expresses an abiding concept of political reconstruction, one that long antedates nationalism. As a movement of downtrodden classes, its pedigree is perhaps more ambiguous. The guildsmen who kept their muskets and swords at the ready beside their workbenches, so as to be able to immediately rise to the defense of their hard-won liberties, often had a class status somewhere between the beggarly crowds that filled the medieval cities and the patricians. In fact, upper-class nobles often hired déclassés from the towns to undermine the status and political influence of the craftsmen-burghers. Nevertheless, it was this burgher stratum that fashioned the ideals of civic freedom and political participation, upon which all the great revolutionaries of later years drew, often with no knowledge of their medieval origins.

Here, too, however, contemporary language betrays the past, just as it does when *polis* is translated as "city-state." The word *politics*, derived as it is from the Greek word for "city," denotes an activity that is charged with moral obligation to one's own community – in contrast to *statecraft*, which minimally presupposes a professionalized and bureaucratic state apparatus that is expressly set apart from the people. Politics once referred to the civic responsibilities that all citizens were expected to discharge as ethical beings. In the Middle Ages, citizens committed themselves to undertake these political responsibilities by swearing an ethical oath or pledge of fraternity – a *conjuratio* – which was seen not as a contract but minimally as a moral vow to act in the interests of all who lived and worked in the city. They participated in citizens' assemblies that either formulated civic policies themselves or else annually elected a publicly responsible administrative committee. The city was defended from external threats by a popular militia, while a citizens' guard maintained domestic peace. Any attempt at professionalization of the city's administrative apparatus, even if tentatively undertaken to deal with the dangers of invasion and war, was viewed with deep suspicion.

Thus politics originally did not mean statecraft. In contrast to the self-governing *polis*, the state consists of the institutions by which a privileged and exploitative class imposes itself, by force where necessary, on an oppressed and exploited class. Statecraft is the activity of officials within that professional machinery to control the citizenry in the interests of that privileged class. By contrast, politics is the active participation of free citizens in managing the affairs of the city and defending its freedom. Only after centuries of civic debasement, marked by class formation, conflict, and mutual hatred, was the state produced and politics degraded to the practice of statecraft. With the rise of statecraft, people became disengaged from moral responsibility for their cities; the city was transformed, ultimately along with the nation, into a provider of goods and services. Proactive citizens, filled with a deep moral commitment to their cities, gradually gave way to the passive subjects of rulers and to the constituents of parliamentarians, until today they are, in fact, little more than consumers whose free time is spent in shopping malls and retail stores.

Municipal Freedoms and Autonomy

Communalism is in every way a decidedly *political* body of ideas that seeks to recover the city or commune in accordance with its greatest historical traditions, and to advance its development. It seeks to create popular assemblies as vital decision-making arenas for civic life. It advances a civic ethics predicated on reason, and a municipalized economy.

In advancing these goals, communalism seeks to actualize the traits that potentially make us human. It departs decidedly from Marxist notions of a centralized state, let alone a dictatorial regime ostensibly based on the interests of a single class. At the same time it goes beyond loose anarchist notions of autonomous confederations, collectives, and towns, which ostensibly can "go it on their own" as they choose without due consideration for the society as a whole. These ad hoc, often chaotic and "spontaneous" anarchic escapades in autonomy, even in "temporary autonomous zones," usually express individualistic, indeed egocentric, impulses that in practice lead to demands for the unrestricted rights of sovereign individuals without requiring of them any obligatory duties. Anarchists and their affines often dismiss obligations of any sort as authoritarian or worse. But one of the great maxims of the First International, to which all factions subscribed, was Marx's slogan: "No Rights Without Duties, No Duties Without Rights." In a free society, as revolutionaries of all kinds generally understood, we would enjoy freedoms ("rights"), but we would also have responsibilities ("duties") we would have to exercise. The concept of individual autonomy becomes meaningless when it denies the obligations that every individual owes to society as social responsibilities.

We are all shaped to one degree or another by forces outside our control and, frankly, *beyond* our control. No one can live forever, or do without nutrition; and after a certain age simply keeping oneself in health requires numerous – even onerous – efforts. In the fullness of daily life, long life requires effort and calls for actions that may be painful, annoying, demanding, and disagreeable. We are thus always under some kind of constraint; the real issue is whether a constraint is rational and advances the fulfillment of the good life or whether it is exploitative and irrational. It is the height of hubris to believe that total "autonomy" – including the right to "choose" whatever one wants about anything – can coexist with society.

Communalists seek to create a democratic, collectivist social order. Property, in a communalist society, will be municipalized and its overall management placed in the hands of popular assemblies. In past revolutions efforts at "workers' control" over factories and farms were frequently plagued by parochialism and evolved into forms of collectivistic capitalism. By contrast, communalism calls for the full administrative coordination of all public enterprises by confederal committees, whose members are the responsible voices of the popular assemblies; without the assent of the citizenry as a whole in a confederation-wide vote, no policy-making confederal decision can be valid.

Pragmatically, a communalist polity requires a written constitution and, yes, regulatory laws, to avoid a structurelessness that would yield mindless anarchy. The more defined the rights and duties of citizens are, the more easily can they be upheld as part of the general interest against the intrusion of petty tyrannies. It is not the clarity of definitions that has oppressed humanity; rather, *wrong* definitions have been used cannily to uphold privilege and domination. Indeed, constitutions and laws served to free the ancient bondsman of arbitrary despotism and even women of patriarchal control. From the earliest times oppressed peoples have raised the demand for constitutions and laws; in their absence "barons" (to use Hesiod's term in the seventh century

BCE) arbitrarily inflicted rule and terror on the masses. Anarchist demands to eliminate law as such, without providing for substantive ways to avoid the oppressions of structurelessness and arbitrary behavior, have produced mayhem and tyranny more reliably than liberty and autonomy. Historically, constitutions and laws have indeed been oppressive, often grossly so, but this raises the question of their content, not the fact of their existence. Indeed, only a peculiarly egocentric mentality will assume that a rationally constituted society and a rationally formulated body of laws must necessarily violate personal autonomy and hence social freedom. Nothing more clearly sheds light on the individualistic basis of present-day anarchism and its Proudhonesque origins than this personalistic fear of any limitation on individual behavior. Taking recourse to biologistic "instinct" as a guide to a libertarian lifestyle, rooting freedom in human nature and in prehistory, anarchists inadvertently petrify freedom rather than ensure it.

Communalism's concept of the free municipality (in contrast to the primitivistic, technophobic anarchic image of "autonomy") is, I would argue, a product of reason in history, or what I have called the "legacy of freedom," and indeed the *embodiment* of reason institutionally and legally. It is reason *constituted* in institutions, embodied in the functioning of these institutions – that is, in their constitution and their laws, as well as in citizens, and their personal life-ways, productive activities, and intersubjective relations or "socializations." To reduce constitutions and laws ipso facto to trammels that bind free will is to make a mockery not only of reason but of humaneness – for what remains of the human being, after this reduction, is little more than animality and biology. It thereby negates the historic function of the free city except as a habitation of a peculiar kind, and in the spirit of William Morris (whose utopia *News from Nowhere* is by no means a credit to a rational vision of society), the less we have of it, the better!

Communalism, in effect, declares that each individual should act with full regard for the needs of all, and that democracy decidedly includes the rights of a dissenting minority to freely and fully express itself. Within a confederation over broader regional areas the decisions of individual assemblies merge with those of all the assemblies; thus the popular decisions of the entire confederation are taken as a single assembly.

Assuredly, a failure to deal rationally and humanely with necessity, which cannot be evaded in any aspect of life, is the most certain path to oppression and worse. Pure anarchism, whose crude individualism regards the ego as a natural entity rather than a socially formed subject, tends to negate everything about capitalist society and seek out its opposite without any qualifications, as though a libertarian society is the mere negation of bourgeois society. In its most extreme form, this express individualism demands the *disbanding of society as such*; hence the fascination of so many anarchist writers with primitivism, their technophobic outlook, their aversion to regulation of any kind, and indeed their hatred of necessity. Must even the self-regulatory features of social life really be abolished in favor of reliance on an alleged instinct for mutual aid or, more startling, on custom? Beyond such mechanism, anarchism in fact relies on old socialist tenets, such as workers' control and direct democracy, which it has picked up and, in the best of cases, eagerly embraced as its own.

Communalism demands great advances in theory (not its denigration) as well as permanent activity (in the form of firmly established institutions, deeply rooted in a community and marked by their continuity) – not ad hoc escapades that dissipate after a demonstration, riot, or the establishment of a "temporary autonomous zone." If activism is reduced to demonstrations, riots, and TAZs, then revolution is nothing but a few hours of frolicking, after which the real authority of the state and ruling class takes over. Capitalism has nothing to fear from frolicking; indeed,

its fashion designers and lifestyle specialists are only too eager to turn juvenile expressions of dissent into highly merchandisable commodities.

No less disturbing is the passion that many devotees of pure anarchism exhibit for consensus as a form of decision-making. The veneration of individual autonomy can become so radical that it would permit no majority, no matter how large, to override even "a majority of one," as some anarchist writers have put it. In this extreme fetishization of individualism, the core anarchic concept of the all-sovereign ego stands, in all its splendor, against the wishes of the majority. By permitting the self-sufficient ego, by its merest inclinations, to override the wishes of the community, anarchism becomes untenable. Coordinated political organization become impossible, as it did in Spain in 1933, when part of the Nosotros affinity group, led by Buenaventura Durruti, chose to lead an insurrection in Saragossa (which was doomed), while others like Juan García Oliver, his trusted *compañero*, simply abstained and discouraged others from giving military aid to their comrades in the Aragonese city.

Communalist Organization

The establishment of an organization places certain constraints on the autonomy of its members, but that in itself does not necessarily make it authoritarian. "Libertarian organization" is not a contradiction in terms. In the early twentieth century leading Spanish anarchists had opposed the very formation of the CNT because it was an organization and as such demanded of its members the fulfillment of onerous duties. But organization as such is not authoritarian.

The formation of communalist political institutions depends on the formation of a communalist organization. How can one be established? It would be useful to provide a summary of some measures that will be necessary to create such an organization, as well as briefly describe the role it can be expected to play in a larger libertarian municipalist movement.

To begin with, politically concerned individuals who feel the need to explore communalist ideas and practices may form a study group in a given neighborhood or town. The study groups seek to inform and develop those interested in social and political change into fully competent individuals and leaders. At a time when the knowledge of philosophy, history, and social theory has retreated appallingly, the objects of study may range from immediate political issues to the great intellectual traditions of the past. Minimally, however, the group should give social theory and the history of ideas pronounced attention, particularly insofar as these subjects enlarge members' understanding of a municipalist approach to democracy and social change.

The study groups, whose members are by now composed of individuals who are committed to a serious exploration of ideas, should begin to function within the neighborhood, town, or city in which they are located. They seek to enter and remain in the public domain – to be a continual revolutionary presence by virtue of their ideas, their emphasis on organization, their methods, and their goals. Communalists refuse to withdraw from the public domain in the name of individual sovereignty, artistic expression, or self-absorption. They wear no ski masks, either metaphorically or physically, and do not allow mindless dogmatic assumptions and simplifications to stand in their way. They are always accessible and transparent, involved and responsible. They can be expected to establish a well-informed, carefully structured organization, if possible with neighborhood branches.

The organization's goals should be carefully formulated into a concrete program, based on communalist principles, that consistently demands the formation of policy-making *municipal popular assemblies*. As a component of a minimum program, no issue is too trivial for communalists to ignore, be it transportation, recreation, education, welfare, zoning, environment, housing, public safety, democracy, civil rights, and the like. The primacy that communalists give to the establishment and development of popular assemblies does not mean that they ignore other issues of concern to the citizenry. To the contrary they resolutely fight – both within municipal institutions and outside them – for all steps to improve civic life in their communities and elsewhere. On specific issues, such as globalization, environmental problems, ethnic and gender discrimination, communalist organizations freely enter into coalitions with other organizations to engage in common struggles, but they should never surrender their ideological or organizational independence or their claim to their own independent action. Their identity, ideas, and institutions are their most precious possessions and must never be impugned in the interests of "unity."

Indeed, while working on these issues, they always seek to enlarge them, to reveal through a *transitional* program their deep-seated roots. They *escalate* cries for reforms into radical demands, seeking to expand every civil and political right of the people by creating the institutional power to formulate decision-making policies and see to their execution. The implications of solving these problems is a call for a revolution in social relations – that is, the achievement of a *maximum* program based on the confederation of municipalist assemblies in which property is steadily municipalized and subjected to coordination by confederal administrative bodies.[2]

The communalist organization, while always retaining its identity and program, initiates regular public forums to engage in discursive, face-to-face democratic exploration of ideas – partly to spread its program and basic ideas and partly to create public spaces that provide venues for radical civic debate, until actual popular assemblies can be established. While it will clearly become involved in local issues, its primary focus should be the public domain where real power is vested: municipal elections, which allow for a close association between communalist candidates (for city council**s** or their equivalent**s**) and the people.

The ablest members of the communalist organization should stand in *municipal elections* and call for the changing of city charters so as to legally empower the municipal assemblies. The new communalist organization should expressly seek to be elected to municipal positions with a view to using charter or extralegal changes to significantly shift municipal power from existing state-like and seemingly representative institutions to popular assemblies as embodiments of direct democracy. Where no city charter exists that can be changed electorally, communalists should attempt (both educationally and organizationally) to convene direct democratic assemblies on an *extralegal* basis, exercising *moral* pressure on statist institutions, in the hope that people will, in time, regard them as authentic centers of public power with the expectation that they can thereby gain structural power. Communalism never compromises by advocating delegated or statist institutional structures, and in contrast to organizations such as the Greens, it refuses to exist within the institutional cage of the nation-state or to try to gild it with reforms that ultimately simply make the state more palatable.

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[2] The term "transitional program," coined by Trotsky in the 1930s, could be applied to any socialist program that seeks to escalate "reformist" demands to a revolutionary level. That the phrase was formulated by Trotsky does not trouble me; it is precise and appropriate, and its use does not make one into a Bolshevik.

A communalist group or movement that refuses to run candidates in municipal elections where it can, and thereby removes its focus on the centers of institutionalized municipal power, will shrivel into an ad hoc, rootless, sporadic, polymorphous form of anarchic protest and quickly fade away. It will be communalist in name only, not in content. It is concerned not with the locus of power but with mere defiance at best, which leads nowhere or terminates in frolicking with the system at worst. In the communalist vision, public assemblies in confederation are a means for destroying the state and capitalism, as well as the embodiments of a rational society. To hop from demonstration to demonstration without attempting to recreate power in the form of public assemblies by taking control of city councils (which means practicing politics in opposition to parliamentary statecraft) is to make a mockery of communalism.

Communalists seek to create a fully democratic society, but they never fetishize numbers, be it numbers of members, voters, participants in public assemblies, and the like. In a communalist polity it suffices that the doors of a public assembly are always open to the citizenry. If a majority of a neighborhood, town, or city choose to attend an assembly meeting and **become** participants in making important decisions, all the better, but if only a few are sufficiently interested in the political fate of their community to attend, so be it. The assembly's decisions carry the same weight, regardless of whether the number of people present is a dozen, a hundred, or several thousand. Political decisions should be made by politically involved citizens: Under no circumstances should poor attendance at a public assembly be an excuse to abandon a direct and discursive democracy in favor of anonymous voting at polls, which renders politics impersonal and non-discursive.

Communalist groups call for the popular assemblies – be they legally empowered or only morally empowered – to confederate, with a view toward replacing the state. In effect, communalists aim at establishing a *dual power* of citizen-constituted institutions that will challenge the authority, legitimacy, and policies of existing institutions. Throughout, municipal confederations should hold regular congresses and conferences, plenaries and committee meetings. As need arises, they establish extraordinary commissions to undertake specific tasks. Wherever assemblies elect delegates to coordinate a confederal association, they ensure that the delegates' powers are always mandated by their respective citizens' assemblies and that the delegates themselves are always subject to recall. Emerging libertarian municipalities must be united through the formation of well-organized and socially responsible confederations.

An organization that is more advanced theoretically and programmatically than the broader public movement of which it is part has every right to regard itself as a *vanguard*, just as the French term *avant-garde* denoted that certain artistic, musical, and other schools were more advanced in practice and thought. Obviously, such an acknowledgement does not confer upon a vanguard any special privileges, but it simply recognizes that their ideas and practical contributions can be expected to have a marked, indeed guiding, importance. An advanced, highly conscious political organization should provide leadership, yet always retaining its independence institutionally and functionally. By the same token, not everyone in an organization has the same level of experience, knowledge, wisdom, and leadership ability. Leadership that is not formalized will be informal, but it will not disappear. Many individuals in revolutionary groups were outright leaders, whose views had more significance than others; it is a disservice to perpetuate the deception that they were simply "influential militants." Leadership always exists, however much libertarians try to deny the fact by concealing its existence beneath euphemisms.

A serious libertarian organization would establish not only leaders but also means by which the membership may recall leaders whose views and behavior they oppose, and effectively modify their activities. On the other hand, frivolous opposition to leaders for its own sake should never be tolerated. One of the most scandalous features of anarchist organizations (when they exist) has been the dizzying individualism that permits neurotic personalities to disrupt meetings and activities as expressions of selfhood. Similarly, the use of ad hominem attacks, gossip, and personal rumors to undermine the influence of leaders and subvert serious ideas has done much to prevent anarchists from establishing effective organizations.

Finally, communalism is not simply a vehicle for establishing a communalist polity and the appropriate institutions. It is also an *outlook* that includes a philosophical approach to reality as well as society and toward the natural world as well as human development. It contends that the ongoing crisis in our culture and values stems not from an overabundance of civilization but from an insufficiency of it. It defends technological development, *used rationally and morally*, as reducing labor and creating free time that potentially allows citizens to participate in public affairs, time for creativity, a reasonable abundance in the means of life, and even, in a rational and ecological society, the ability to improve upon the impact of natural forces. Post-scarcity abundance (not to be confused with the mindless consumerism fostered by capitalism) must be wisely tempered and controlled by municipal assemblies and the free confederal institutions that an emancipated society can create.

Above all, communalism stakes out a claim as a continuation of all that is emancipatory in the Enlightenment tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It firmly shares the Enlightenment's conception that freedom constitutes the defining potentiality of humanness: the potentiality for the self-elaboration of reason by rational praxis until humanity finally achieves the actualization of a truly rational society.

This self-actualization of humanity's potentiality for reason, creativity, and self-consciousness is more than a distant ideal; it is the one abiding goal that gives meaning to any effort to change the world. Indeed, the magnificent goal of advancing reason, creativity, and self-consciousness in human affairs is all that gives meaning to the evolution of humanity itself as the potentially creative agent; in its absence the world has no meaning. This goal should hover over *every* transformative project that communalists undertake in their efforts to make an inhuman world into a human one and an irrational society into a rational one – favoring a commitment to truth and innovation, irrespective of what is so misleadingly called realism and adaptation. It is not by any pragmatic map but by this flame, which is fueled by reason's conception of "what should be" as against "what is," that humanity can fulfill its potentiality for reason and self-consciousness, thereby justifying itself in the scheme of things.

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