Rise of Communalism:

The case for Confederated Socialism,

A collection of writings By Murray Bookchin

Edited by Adam Denker

A short Introduction from the editor

This is a collection of selected sections from books and essays by Murray Bookchin that I have collected as a concise description of, and argument for, the ideology of Murray Bookchin which he called at the end of his life: Communalism. These writings are in order of their publish date, as I wish for them to guide the reader down the same path of thinking that Murray Bookchin himself went down as he developed his ideas.

Personally I view Communalism as the synthesis of leftist ideas that the left has needed for so long. It is an end to the partisan puritanism that had plagued the left for a century and a half. I believe that it is also the conclusion that any leftist can reach when they attempt to cut through the various jargon that is thrown around by preachers of every leftist school, and instead look at the ideas and concepts behind the exclusionary wording. Once a person does this, they can see that the differences between the major schools of leftist thought are not as great as most would believe, and are by no means beyond compromise. That compromise I believe to be confederated-socialism, certainly not word for word as Bookchin may describe it, but a system inspired by Bookchin's ideas adapted for each region, community, and people. Much as has been done by the Kurds in Rojava with their "Democratic-Confederalism."

Once we make this ideological step, as a people and as a movement, there is nothing that can stop us. Capitalism and class structure will finally end.

Municipalization
Community Ownership
of the Economy

1986

In my article, "Toward a Libertarian Municipalism[2]," I advanced the view that any counterculture to the prevailing culture must be developed together with counterinstitutions to the prevailing institutions -- a decentralized, confederal, popular power that will acquire the control over social and political life that is being claimed by the centralized, bureaucratic nation-state.

Through much of the nineteenth century and nearly half of the twentieth, the classical center of this popular power was located by most radical ideologies in the factory, the arena for the conflict between wage labor and capital. The factory as the locus of the "power question" rested on the belief that the industrial working class was the "hegemonic" agent for radical social change; that it would be "driven" by its own "class interests" (to use the language of radicalism during that era) to "overthrow" capitalism, generally through armed insurrection and revolutionary general strikes. It would then establish its own system of social administration -- whether in the form of a "workers' state" (Marxism) or confederal shop committees (anarchosyndicalism).

In retrospect we can now see that the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39 was the last historic effort by a seemingly revolutionary European working class to follow this model.[3] In the fifty years that have passed (almost to the very month of this writing), it is apparent that the great revolutionary wave of the late thirties was the climax and the end of the era of proletarian socialism and anarchism, an era that dates back to the first workers' insurrection of history: the uprising by the Parisian artisans and workers of June, 1848, when the barricades were raised under red flags in the capital city of France. In the years that have followed, particularly after the 1930s, the limited attempts to repeat the classical model of proletarian revolution (Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland) have been failures, indeed, tragic echoes of great causes, ideals, and efforts that have faded into history.

Apart from insurrectionary peasant movements in the Third World, no one, aside from some dogmatic sectarians, takes the "models" of June, 1848, the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Spanish Revolution of 1936 seriously -- partly because the type of working class that made those revolutions has been all but demobilized by technological and social change, partly because the

weaponry and barricades that gave these revolutions a modicum of power have become merely symbolic in the face of the immense military armamentorium commanded by the modern nation-state.

There is another tradition, however, that has long been part of European and American radicalism: the development of a libertarian municipal politics, a new politics structured around towns, neighborhoods, cities, and citizens' assemblies, freely confederated into local, regional, and ultimately continental networks. This "model," advanced over a century ago by Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin among others, is more than an ideological tradition: it has surfaced repeatedly as an authentic popular practice by the Comuneros in Spain during the 16th century, the American town meeting movement that swept from New England to Charleston in the 1770s, the Parisian sectional citizens' assemblies of the early 1790s, and repeatedly through the Paris Commune of 1871 to the Madrid Citizens' Movement of the 1960s and early 1970s.

Almost irrepressible whenever the people have gone into motion, libertarian municipalism always reappears as movements from below -- all radical dogmas based on the proletariat notwithstanding to the contrary -- such as the "local socialism" to which people have turned in England today, radical municipal coalitions in the United States, and popular urban movements throughout Western Europe and North America generally. The bases for these movements are no longer the usual strictly class issues that stem from the factory; they consist of broad, indeed challenging issues that range from the environmental, growth, housing, and logistical problems that are besetting all the municipalities of the world. They cut across traditional class lines and have brought people together in councils, assemblies, citizens' initiative movements, often irrespective of their vocational roots and economic interests. More so than any constellation of issues, they have done something which traditional proletarian socialism and anarchism *never* achieved: they have brought together into common movements people of middle-class as well as working class backgrounds, rural as well as urban places of residence, professional as well as unskilled individuals, indeed, so vast a diversity of people from conservative as well as liberal and radical traditions that one can truly speak of the potential for a genuine people's movement, not merely a class-oriented movement of which industrial workers have always been a minority of the population.[4] Implicitly, this kind of movement restores once again the reality of "the people" on which the great democratic revolutions rested ideologically until they became fragmented into class and group interests. History, in effect, seems to be rebuilding in the real world what was once a tentative and fleeting ideal of the Enlightenment from which stemmed the American and French revolutions of the eighteenth century. For once, it is possible of conceiving of majoritarian forces for major social change, not the minoritarian movements that existed over the past two centuries of proletarian socialism and anarchism.

Radical ideologues tend to view these extraordinary municipal movements with skepticism and try, when they can, to bring them into captivity to traditional class programs and analyses. The Madrid Citizens' Movement of the 1960s was virtually destroyed by radicals of all parts of the political spectrum because they tried to manipulate a truly popular municipal effort which sought to democratize Spain and

give a new cooperative and ethical meaning to human urban association. The MCM became a terrain for strengthening the political aspirations for the Socialists, Communists, and other Marxist-Leninist groups until it was all but subverted for special party interests.

    That libertarian municipal movements form the only potential challenge to the nation-state, today, and constitute a major realm for the formation of an active citizenry and a new politics -- grassroots, face-to-face, and authentically popular in character -- has been explored in other works written by this writer and do not have to be examined, here.[5] For the present, it is necessary to ask a very important question: is libertarian municipalism merely a political "model," however generously we define the word "politics," or does it include economic life as well?

    That a libertarian municipalist perspective is incompatible with the "nationalization of the economy," which simply reinforces the juridicial power of the nation-state with economic power, is too obvious to belabor. Nor can the word "libertarian" be appropriated by propertarians, the acolytes of Ayn Rand and the like, to justify private property and a "free market" Marx, to his credit, clearly demonstrated that the "free market inevitably yields the oligarchic and monopolistic corporate market with entrepreneurial manipulations that in every way parallel and ultimately converge with state controls.[6]

    But what of the syndicalist ideal of "collectivized" self-managed enterprises that are coordinated by like occupations on a national level and coordinated geographically by .collectives" on a local level? Here, the traditional socialist criticism of this syndicalist form of economic management is not without its point: the corporate or private capitalist,"worker-controlled" or not -- ironically, a technique in the repertoire of industrial management that is coming very much into vogue today as "workplace democracy" and "employee ownership" and constitutes no threat whatever to private property and capitalism. The Spanish anarchosyndicalist collectives of 1936-37 were actually union-controlled and proved to be highly vulnerable to the centralization and bureaucratization that appears in many well-meaning cooperatives generally after a sufficient lapse of time. By mid-1937, union-management had already replaced workers' management on the shop floor, all claims of CNT apologists to the contrary notwithstanding. Under the pressure of "anarchist" ministers like Abad de Santillan in the Catalan government, they began to approximate the nationalized economy advocated by Marxist elements in the Spanish "Left."

    In any case, "economic democracy" has not simply meant "workplace democracy" and "employee ownership." Many workers, in fact, would like to get away from their factories if they could and find more creative artisanal types of work, not simply "participate" in "planning" their own misery. What "economic democracy" meant in its profoundest sense was free, "democratic" access to the means of life, the counterpart of political democracy, that is, the guarantee of freedom from material want. It is a dirty bourgeois trick, in which many radicals unknowingly participate, that "economic democracy" has been re-interpreted as "employee ownership" and "workplace democracy" and has come to mean workers'

"participation" in profit sharing and industrial management rather than freedom from the tyranny of the factory, rationalized labor, and "planned production," which is usually exploitative production with the complicity of the workers.

Libertarian municipalism scores a significant advance over all of these conceptions by calling for the municipalization of the economy -- and its management by the community as part of a *politics* of public self management. Whereas the syndicalist alternative *re-privatizes* the economy into "self-managed" collectives and opens the way to their degeneration into traditional forms of private property -- whether "collectively" owned or not - libertarian municipalism politicizes the economy and *dissolves* it into the civic domain. Neither factory or land appear as separate interests within the communal collective. Nor can workers, farmers, technicians, engineers, professionals, and the like perpetuate their vocational indentities as separate interests that exist apart from the citizen body in face-to-face assemblies. "Property" is integrated into the coummune as a material constituent of its libertarian institutional framework, indeed as a part of a larger whole that is controlled by the citizen body in assembly as *citizens* -- not as vocationally oriented interest groups.

What is equally important, the "antithesis" between town and country, so crucial in radical theory and social history, is transcended by the "township," a traditional New England jurisdiction, in which an urban entity is the nucleus of its agricultural and village environs -- not as an urban entity that stands opposed to them.[7] The township, in effect is a small region within still larger ones, such as the county and the "bioregion."

So conceived, the municipalization of the economy must be distinguished from "nationalization" and "collectivization" -- the former leading to bureaucratic and top-down control, the latter to the likely emergence of a privatized economy in a collectivized form and the perpetuation of class or caste identities. Municipalization, in effect, brings the economy from a private or separate sphere into the public sphere where economic policy is formulated by the *entire* community -- notably, its citizens in face-to-face relationships working to achieve a *general* "interest" that surmounts separate, vocationally defined specific interests. The economy ceases to be merely an economy in the strict sense of -the word -- whether as "business," "market," capitalist, "worker-controlled" enterprises. It becomes a truly *political* economy: the economy of the *polis* or the commune. In this sense, the economy is genuinely communized as well as politicized. The municipality, more precisely, the citizen body in face-to-face assembly absorbs the economy as an aspect of public business, divesting it of an identity that can become privatized into a self-serving enterprise.

What can prevent the municipality from becoming a parochial city-state of the kind that appeared in the late Middle Ages? Anyone who is looking for "guaranteed" solutions to the problems raised, here, will not find them apart from the guiding role of consciousness and ethics in human affairs. But if we are looking for counter*tendencies*, there is an answer that can advanced. The most important single factor that gave rise to the late medieval city-state was its stratification from within -- not only as a result of

differences in wealth but also in status positions, partly originating in lineage but also in vocational differentials. Indeed, to the extent that the city lost its sense of collective unity and divided its affairs into private and public business, public life itself became privatized and segmented into the "blue nails" or plebians who dyed cloth in cities like Florence and the more arrogant artisan strata, who produced quality goods. Wealth, too, factored heavily in a privatized economy where material differentials could expand and foster a variety of hierarchical differences.

The municipalization of the economy absorbs not only the vocational distinctions that could militate against a publically controlled economy; it also absorbs the material means of life into communal forms of distribution. From each according to his ability and to each according his needs" is institutionalized as part of the *public* sphere, not ideologically as a communal credo. It is not only a goal; it is a way of *functioning politically* -- one that becomes structurally embodied by the municipality through its assemblies and agencies.

Moreover, no community can hope to achieve economic autarchy, nor should it try to do so unless it wishes to become self-enclosed and parochial, not only "self-sufficient." Hence the confederation of communes -- the Commune of communes -- is reworked economically as well as politically into a shared universe of publicly managed resources. The management of the economy, precisely because it is a public activity, does not degenerate into privatized interactions between enterprises; rather it develops into confederalized interactions between municipalities. That is to say, the very *elements* of societal interaction are expanded from real or potential privatized components to institutionally real *public* components. Confederation becomes a public project by definition, not only because of shared needs and resources. If there is any way to avoid the emergence of the city-state, not to speak of self-serving bourgeois "cooperatives," it is through a municipalization of political life that is so complete that politics embraces not only what we call the public sphere but material means of life as well.

It is not "utopian" to seek the municipalization of the economy. Quite to the contrary, it is practical and realizable if only we will think as freely in our minds as we try to achieve freedom in our lives. Our locality is not only the arena in which we live out our everyday lives; it is also the authentic economic arena in which we work and its natural environs are the authentic environmental arena that challenges us to live in harmony with nature. Here we can begin to evolve not only the ethical ties that will link us together in a genuine ecocommunity but also the material ties that can make us into competent, empowered, and self-sustaining - if not "self-sufficient" -- human beings. To the extent that a municipality or a local confederation of municipalities is *politically* united, it is still a fairly fragile form of association. To the extent that it has control over its own material life, although not in a parochial sense that turns it into a privatized city-state, it has economic power, a decisive reinforcement of its political power.

Notes

1. Portions of this article have been selected from the new and supplemented edition of Murray Bookchin's The *Limits of the City* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 3981 Ste.-Laurent Blvd., Montreal H2W IY5, Quebec, Canada; 1986).

2. *Our Generation* (Vol. 16, Nos. 3-4, Spring-Summer 1985, pp.9-22), available from Our Generation, 3981 Ste.- Laurent Blvd., Montreal H2W IY5, Quebec, Canada

3. For an overview of the Spanish Civil War after fifty years, see my articles "On Spanish Anarchism," *Our Generation* (1986) and "The Spanish Civil War: After Fifty Years" in *New Politics* (Vol. 1, No. 1, New Series; Spring, 1986), available from New Politics, 328 Clinton St., Brooklyn NY 11231. For background on the subject, see *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Period* by this writer, formerly a Harper & Row book, currently distributed by Comment Publishing Project, P. 0. Box 158, Burlington VT 05402.

4. This has always been the greatest defect of revolutionary working-class movements and accounts for the bitter civil wars which they produced in the few cases where they were particularly successful.

5. See "The Greening of Politics: Toward a New Kind of Political Practice," *Green Perspectives,* No. 1, January 1986 and "Popular Politics vs. Party Politics," Green Program Project Discussion Paper No. 2, both available from the Green Program Project, P. 0. Box 111, Burlington VT 05402. Also see the new supplemented edition of *The Limits of the City* cited in note 1 above.

6. The absurdity that we can persuade or reform the large corporations -- to "moralize" greed and profit as it were -is a typical example of liberal naivete which a thousand years of Catholicism failed to achieve. Movies like "The Formula" tell us more about corporate "morality" and "efficiency" than the flood of books and articles generated by many reform-minded periodicals.

7. See Lewis Mumford's excellent discussion of the New England township in the *City in History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World; 1961, pp. 331-33). Mumford, unfortunately, deals with the township form as a thing of the past. My interest in the subject comes from yew of study in my own state, Vermont, where, despite many changes, the integration of town and country is still institutionalized territorially and legally around town meetings. Although this political form is waning in much of New England today, its workability and value is a matter of historical record, not of theoretical speculation.

Libertarian Municipalism: The New Municipal Agenda

1987

Any agenda that tries to restore and amplify the classical meaning of politics and citizenship must clearly indicate what they are not, if only because of the confusion that surrounds the two words. . . . Politics is not statecraft, and citizens are not "constituents" or "taxpayers." Statecraft consists of operations that engage the state: the exercise of its monopoly of violence, its control of the entire regulative apparatus of society in the form of legal and ordinance-making bodies, and its governance of society by means of professional legislators, armies, police forces, and bureaucracies. Statecraft takes on a political patina when so-called "political parties" attempt, in various power plays, to occupy the offices that make state policy and execute it. This kind of "politics" has an almost tedious typicality. A "political party" is normally a structured hierarchy, fleshed out by a membership that functions in a top-down manner. It is a miniature state, and in some countries, such as the former Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, a party actually constituted the state itself.

The Soviet and Nazi examples of the party qua state were the logical extension of the party into the state. Indeed, every party has its roots in the state, not in the citizenry. The conventional party is hitched to the state like a garment to a mannikin. However varied the garment and its design may be, it is not part of the body politic; it merely drapes it. There is nothing authentically political about this phenomenon: it is meant precisely to contain the body politic, to control it and to manipulate it, not to express its will--or even permit it to develop a will. In no sense is a conventional "political" party derivative of the body politic or constituted by it. Leaving metaphors aside, "political" parties are replications of the state when they are out of power and are often synonymous with the state when they are in power. They are formed to mobilize, to command, to acquire power, and to rule. Thus they are as inorganic as the state itself--an excrescence of society that has no real roots in it, no responsiveness to it beyond the needs of faction, power, and mobilization.

Politics, by contrast, is an organic phenomenon. It is organic in the very real sense that it is the activity of a public body--a community, if you will--just as the process of flowering is an organic activity of a plant. Politics, conceived as an activity, involves rational discourse, public empowerment, the

exercise of practical reason, and its realization in a shared, indeed participatory, activity. It is the sphere of societal life beyond the family and the personal needs of the individual that still retains the intimacy, involvement, and sense of responsibility enjoyed in private arenas of life. Groups may form to advance specific political views and programs, but these views and programs are no better than their capacity to answer to the needs of an active public body. . . .

By contrast, political movements, in their authentic sense, emerge out of the body politic itself, and although their programs are formulated by theorists, they also emerge from the lived experiences and traditions of the public itself. The populist movements that swept out of agrarian America and tsarist Russia or the anarcho-syndicalist and peasant movements of Spain and Mexico articulated deeply felt, albeit often unconscious, public desires and needs. At their best, genuine political movements bring to consciousness the subterranean aspirations of discontented people and eventually turn this consciousness into political cultures that give coherence to inchoate and formless public desires. . . .

The immediate goal of a libertarian municipalist agenda is not to exercise sudden and massive control by representatives and their bureaucratic agents over the existing economy; its immediate goal is to reopen a public sphere in flat opposition to statism, one that allows for maximum democracy in the literal sense of the term, and to create in embryonic form the institutions that can give power to a people generally. If this perspective can be initially achieved only by morally empowered assemblies on a limited scale, at least it will be a form of popular power that can, in time, expand locally and grow over wide regions. That its future is unforeseeable does not alter the fact that it development depends upon the growing consciousness of the people, not upon the growing power of the state--and how that consciousness, concretized in high democratic institutions, will develop may be an open issue but it will surely be a political adventure.

. . . The recovery and development of politics must, I submit, take its point of departure from the citizen and his or her immediate environment beyond the familial and private arenas of life. There can be no politics without community. And by community I mean a municipal association of people reinforced by its own economic power, its own institutionalization of the grass roots, and the confederal support of nearby communities organized into a territorial network on a local and regional scale. Parties that do not intertwine with these grassroots forms of popular organization are not political in the classical sense of the term. In fact, they are bureaucratic and antithetical to the development of a participatory politics and participating citizens. The authentic unit of political life, in effect, is the municipality, whether as a whole, if it is humanly scaled, or in its various subdivisions, notably the neighborhood. . . .

A new political agenda can be a municipal agenda only if we are to take our commitments to democracy seriously. Otherwise we will be entangled with one or another variant of statecraft, a bureaucratic structure that is demonstrably inimical to a vibrant public life. The living cell that forms the basic unit of political life is the municipality, from which everything--such as citizenship,

interdependence, confederation, and freedom--emerges. There is no way to piece together any politics unless we begin with its most elementary forms: the villages, towns, neighborhoods, and cities in which people live on the most intimate level of political interdependence beyond private life. It is on this level that they can begin to gain a familiarity with the political process, a process that involves a good deal more than voting and information. It is on this level, too, that they can go beyond the private insularity of family life--a life that is currently celebrated for its inwardness and seclusion--and improvise those public institutions that make for broad community participation and consociation.

In short, it is through the municipality that people can reconstitute themselves from isolated monads into an innovative body politic and create an existentially vital, indeed protoplasmic civic life that has continuity and institutional form as well as civic content. I refer here to the block organizations, neighborhood assemblies, town meetings, civic confederations, and the public arenas for discourse that go beyond such episodic, single-issue demonstrations and campaigns, valuable as they may be to redress to redress social injustices. But protest alone is not enough; indeed, it is usually defined by what protestors oppose, not by the social changes they may wish to institute. To ignore the irreducible civic unit of politics and democracy is to play chess without a chessboard, for it is on this civic plane that the long-range endeavor of social renewal must eventually be played out. . . .

All statist objections aside, the problem of restoring municipal assemblies seems formidable if it is cast in strictly structural and spatial terms. New York City and London have no way of "assembling" if they try to emulate ancient Athens, with its comparatively small citizen body. Both cities, in fact, are no longer cities in the classical sense of the term and hardly rate as municipalities even by nineteenth-century standards of urbanism. Viewed in strictly macroscopic terms, they are sprawling urban belts that suck up millions of people daily from communities at a substantial distance from their commercial centers.

But they are also made up of neighborhoods--that is to say, of smaller communities that have a certain measure of identity, whether defined by a shared cultural heritage, economic interests, a commonality of social views, or even an aesthetic tradition such as Greenwich Village in New York or Camden Town in London. However much their administration as logistical, sanitary, and commercial artifacts requires a high degree of coordination by experts and their aides, they are potentially open to political and, in time, physical decentralization. Popular, even block assemblies can be formed irrespective of the size of a city, provided its cultural components are identified and their uniqueness fostered.

At the same time I should emphasize that the libertarian municipalist (or equivalently, communalist) views I propound here are meant to be a changing and formative perspective--a concept of politics and citizenship to ultimately transform cities and urban megalopolises ethically as well as spatially, and politically as well as economically. Insofar as these views gain public acceptance, they can be expected not only to enlarge their vision and embrace confederations of neighborhoods but also to

advance a goal of physically decentralizing urban centers. To the extent that mere electoral "constituents" are transformed by education and experience into active citizens, the issue of humanly scaled communities can hardly be avoided as the "next step" toward a stable and viable form of city life. It would be foolhardy to try to predict in any detail a series of such "next steps" or the pace at which they will occur. Suffice it to say that as a perspective, libertarian municipalism is meant to be an ever-developing, creative, and reconstructive agenda as well as an alternative to the centralized nation-state and to an economy based on profit, competition, and mindless growth.

Minimally then, attempts to initiate assemblies can begin with populations that range anywhere from a modest residential neighborhood to a dozen neighborhoods or more. They can be coordinated by strictly mandated delegates who are rotatable, recallable, and above all, rigorously instructed in written form to either support or oppose whatever issue that appears on the agenda of local confederal councils composed of delegates from several neighborhood assemblies.

There is no mystery involved in this form of organization. The historical evidence for their efficacy and their continual reappearance in times of rapid social change is considerable and persuasive. The Parisian sections of 1793, despite the size of Paris (between 500,000 and 600,000) and the logistical difficulties of the era (a time when nothing moved faster than a horse) functioned with a great deal of success on their own, coordinated by sectional delegates in the Paris Commune. They were notable not only for their effectiveness in dealing with political issues based on a face-to-face democratic structure; they also played a major role in provisioning the city, in preventing the hoarding of food, and in suppressing speculation, supervising the maximum for fixed prices, and carrying out many other complex administrative tasks. Thus, from a minimal standpoint, no city need be considered so large that popular assemblies cannot start, least of all one that has definable neighborhoods that might interlink with each other on ever-broader confederations.

The real difficulty is largely administrative: how to provide for the material amenities of city life, support complex logistical and traffic burdens, or maintain a sanitary environment. This issue is often obscured by a serious confusion between the formulation of policy and its administration. For a community to decide in a participatory manner what specific course of action it should take in dealing with a technical problem does not oblige all its citizens to execute that policy. The decision to build a road, for example, does not mean that everyone must know how to design and construct one. That is a job for engineers, who can offer alternative designs--a very important political function of experts, to be sure, but one whose soundness the people in assembly can be free to decide. To design and construct a road is strictly an administrative responsibility, albeit one that always open to public scrutiny.

If the distinction between policy making and administration is kept clearly in mind, the role of popular assemblies and the people who administer their decisions easily distinguishes logistical problems from political ones, which are ordinarily entangled with each other in discussions on decentralistic politics. Superficially, the assembly system is "referendum" politics: it is based on a "social contract" to

share decision making with the population at large, and abide by the rule of the majority in dealing with problems that confront a municipality, a regional confederation of municipalities, or for that matter, a national entity. . . .

That a municipality can be as parochial as a tribe is fairly obvious--and is no less true today than it has been in the past. Hence any municipal movement that is not confederal--that is to say, that does not enter into a network of mutual obligations to towns and cities in its own region--can no more be regarded as a truly political entity in any traditional sense than a neighborhood that does not work with other neighborhoods in the city in which it is located. Confederation--based on shared responsibilities, full accountability of confederal delegates to their communities, the right to recall, and firmly mandated representatives--forms an indispensable part of a new politics. To demand that existing towns and cities replicate the nation-state on a local level is to surrender any commitment to social change as such. . . .

What is confederalism as conceived in the libertarian municipalist framework, and as it would function in a free ecological society? It would above all be a network of councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities. These confederal councils would become the means for interlinking villages, towns, neighborhoods, and cities into confederal networks. Power thus would flow from the bottom up instead of from the top down, and in confederations the flow of power from the bottom up would diminish with the scope of the federal council, ranging territorially from localities to regions and from regions to ever-broader territorial areas.

The members of these confederal councils would be strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to the assemblies that choose them for the purpose of coordinating and administering the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves. The functions of the councils would be purely administrative and practical, unlike representatives in republican systems of government, who have policy-making powers. Indeed, the confederation would make the same distinction that is made on the municipal level, between policy-making and administration. Policy-making would remain exclusively the right of the popular community assemblies based on the practices of participatory democracy. Administration--the coordination and execution of adopted policies--would be the responsibility of the confederal councils. Wherever policy-making slips from the hands of the people, it is devoured by its delegates, who quickly become bureaucrats.

A crucial element in giving reality to confederalism is the interdependence of communities for an authentic mutualism based on shared resources, produce, and policy-making. While a reasonable measure of self-sufficiency is desirable for each locality and region, confederalism is a means for avoiding local parochialism on the one hand and an extravagant national and global division of labor on the other. Unless a community is obliged to count on others generally to satisfy important material needs and realize common political goals, interlinking it to a greater whole, exclusivity and parochialism become a genuine

possibilities. Only insofar as confederation is an extension of participatory administration--by means of confederal networks--can decentralization and localism prevent the communities that compose larger bodies of association from parochially withdrawing into themselves at the expense of wider areas of human consociation.

Confederalism is thus a way of perpetuating interdependence among communities and regions--indeed, it is a way of democratizing that interdependence without surrendering the principle of local control. Through confederation, a community can retain its identity and roundedness while participating in a sharing way with the larger whole that makes up a balanced ecological society. . . .

Thus libertarian municipalism is not an effort simply to "take over" city councils to construct a more "environmentally friendly" city government. These adherents--or opponents--of libertarian municipalism, in effect, look at the civic structures that exist before their eyes now and essentially (all rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding) take them as they exist. Libertarian municipalism, by contrast, is an effort to transform and democratize city governments, to root them in popular assemblies, to knit them together along confederal lines, to appropriate a regional economy along confederal and municipal lines.

In fact, libertarian municipalism gains its life and its integrity precisely from the dialectical tension it proposes between the nation-state and the municipal confederation. Its "law of life," to use an old Marxian term, consists precisely in its struggle with the State. Then tension between municipal confederations and the State must be clear and uncompromising. Since these confederations would exist primarily in opposition to statecraft, they cannot be compromised by the State, provincial or national elections, much less achieved by these means. Libertarian municipalism is formed by its struggle with the State, strengthened by this struggle, indeed, defined by this struggle. Divested of this dialectical tension with the State, of this duality of power that must ultimately be actualized in a free "Commune of communes," libertarian municipalism becomes little more than sewer socialism.

Why is the assembly crucial to self-governance? Is it not enough to use the referendum, as the Swiss do today, and resolve the problem of democratic procedure in a simple and seemingly uncomplicated way? Why can't policy decisions be made electronically at home--as "Third Wave" enthusiasts have suggested--by "autonomous" individuals, each listening to debates and voting in the privacy of his or her home?

A number of vital issues, involving the nature of citizenship and the recovery of an enhanced classical vision of politics, must be considered in answering these questions. The "autonomous" individual qua "voter" who, in liberal theory, forms the irreducible unit of the referendum process is a fiction. Left to his or her own private destiny in the name of "autonomy" and "independence," the individual becomes an isolated being whose very freedom is denuded of the living social and political matrix from which his or her individuality acquires its flesh and blood. . . . The notion of independence, which is often confused with independent thinking and freedom, has been so marbled by pure bourgeois

egoism that we tend to forget that our individuality depends heavily on community support systems and solidarity. It is not by childishly subordinating ourselves to the community on the one hand or by detaching ourselves from it on the other that we become mature human beings. What distinguishes us as social beings, hopefully with rational institutions, from solitary beings who lack any serious affiliations, is our capacities for solidarity with one another, for mutually enhancing our self-development and creativity and attaining freedom within a socially creative and institutionally rich collectivity.

"Citizenship" apart from community can be as debasing to our political selfhood as "citizenship" in a totalitarian state. In both cases, we are thrust back to the condition of dependence that characterizes infancy and childhood. We are rendered dangerously vulnerable to manipulation, whether by powerful personalities in private life or by the state and by corporations in economic life. In neither case do we attain individuality or community. Both, in fact, are dissolved by removing the communal ground on which genuine individuality depends. Rather, it is interdependence within an institutionally rich and rounded community--which no electronic media can produce--that fleshes out the individual with the rationality, solidarity, sense of justice, and ultimately the reality of freedom that makes for a creative and concerned citizen.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the authentic elements of a rational and free society are communal, not individual. Conceived in more institutional terms, the municipality is not only the basis for a free society; it is the irreducible ground for genuine individuality as well. The significance of the municipality is all the greater because it constitutes the discursive arena in which people can intellectually and emotionally confront one another, indeed, experience one another through dialogue, body language, personal intimacy, and face-to-face modes of expression in the course of making collective decisions. I speak, here, of the all-important process of communizing, of the ongoing intercourse of many levels of life, that makes for solidarity, not only the "neighborliness" so indispensable for truly organic interpersonal relationships.

The referendum, conducted in the privacy of one's voting booth or, as some "Third Wave" enthusiasts would have it, in the electronic isolation of one's home, privatizes democracy and thereby subverts it. Voting, like registering one's preferences for a particular soap or detergent in a opinion poll, is the total quantification of citizenship, politics, individuality, and the very formation of ideas as a mutually informative process. The mere vote reflects a preformulated "percentage" of our perceptions and values, not their full expression. It is the technical debasing of views into mere preferences, of ideals into mere taste, of overall comprehension into quantification such that human aspirations and beliefs can be reduced to numerical digits.

Finally, the "autonomous individual," lacking any community context, support systems, and organic intercourse, is disengaged from the character-building process--the paideia--that the ancient Athenians assigned to politics as one of its most important educational functions. True citizenship and politics entail the ongoing formation of personality, education, and a growing sense of public

responsibility and commitment that render communizing and an active body politic meaningful, indeed that give it existential substance. It is not in the privacy of the school, any more than in the privacy of the voting booth, that these vital personal and political attributes are formed. They require a public presence, embodied by vocal and thinking individuals, a responsive and discursive public sphere, to achieve reality. "Patriotism," as the etymology of the word indicates, is the nation-state's conception of the citizen as a child, the obedient creature of the nation-state conceived as a paterfamilias or stern father, who orchestrates belief and commands devotion. To the extent that we are the "sons" and "daughters" of a "fatherland," we place ourselves in an infantile relationship to the state.

Solidarity or philia, by contrast, implies a sense of commitment. It is created by knowledge, training, experience, and reason--in short, by a political education developed during the course of political participation. Philia is the result of the educational and self-formative process that paedeia is meant to achieve. In the absence of a humanly scaled, comprehensible, and institutionally accessible municipality, this all-important function of politics and its embodiment in citizenship is simply impossible to achieve. In the absence of philia or the means to create it, we gauge "political involvement" by the "percentage" of "voters" who "participate" in the "political process"--a degradation of words that totally denatures their authentic meaning and eviscerates their ethical content. . . .

Be they large or small, the initial assemblies and the movement that seeks to foster them in civic elections remain the only real school for citizenship we have. There is no civic "curriculum" other than a living and creative political realm that can give rise to people who take management of public affairs seriously. What we must clearly do in an era of commodification, rivalry, anomie, and egoism is to consciously create a public sphere that will inculcate the values of humanism, cooperation, community, and public service in the everyday practice of civic life. Grassroots citizenship goes hand in hand with grassroots politics.

The Athenian polis, for all its many shortcomings, offers us remarkable examples of how a high sense of citizenship can be reinforced not only by systematic education but by an etiquette of civic behavior and an artistic culture that adorns ideals of civic service with the realities of civic practice. Deference to opponents in debates, the use of language to achieve consensus, ongoing public discussion in the agora in which even the most prominent of the polis's figures were expected to debate public issues with the least known, the use of wealth not only to meet personal needs but to adorn the polis itself (thus placing a high premium on the disaccumulation rather than the accumulation of wealth), a multitude of public festivals, dramas, and satires largely centered on civic affairs and the need to foster civic solidarity--all of these and many other aspects of Athens's political culture created the civic solidarity and responsibility that made for actively involved citizens with a deep sense of civic mission.

For our part, we can do no less--and hopefully, in time, considerably more. The development of citizenship must become an art, not merely an education--and a creative art in the aesthetic sense that

appeals to the deeply human desire for self-expression in a meaningful political community. It must be a personal art in which every citizen is fully aware of the fact that his or her community entrusts its destiny to his or her moral probity and rationality. If the ideological authority of state power and statecraft today rests on the assumption that the "citizen" is an incompetent being, the municipalist conception of citizenship rests on precisely the opposite. Every citizen would be regarded as competent to participate directly in the "affairs of state"--indeed, what is more important, he or she would be encouraged to do so.

Every means would be provided, whether aesthetic or institutional, to foster participation in full as an educative and ethical process that turns the citizen's latent competence into an actual reality. Social and political life would be consciously orchestrated to foster a profound sensitivity, indeed an active sense of concern for the adjudication of differences without denying the need for vigorous dispute when it is needed. Public service would be seen as a uniquely human attribute, not a "gift" that a citizen confers on the community or an onerous task that he or she must fulfill. Cooperation and civic responsibility would become expressions of acts of sociability and philia, not ordinances that the citizen is expected to honor in the breach and evade where he or she can do so.

Put bluntly and clearly, the municipality would become a theater in which life in its most meaningful public form is the plot, a political drama whose grandeur imparts nobility and grandeur to the citizenry that forms the cast. By contrast, our modern cities have become in large part agglomerations of bedroom apartments in which men and women spiritually wither away and their personalities become trivialized by the petty concerns of amusement, consumption, and small talk.

The last and one of the most intractable problems we face is economic. Today, economic issues tend to center on "who owns what," "who owns more than whom," and, above all, how disparities in wealth are to be reconciled with a sense of civic commonality. Nearly all municipalities have been fragmented by differences in economic status, pitting poor, middle, and wealthy classes against each other often to the ruin of municipal freedom itself, as the bloody history of Italy's medieval and Renaissance cities so clearly demonstrates.

These problems have not disappeared in recent times. Indeed, in many cases they are as severe as they have ever been. But what is unique about our own time--a fact so little understood by many liberals and radicals in North America and Europe--is that entirely new transclass issues have emerged that concern environment, growth, transportation, cultural degradation, and the quality of urban life generally--issues that have been produced by urbanization, not by citification. Cutting across conflicting class interests are such transclass issues as the massive dangers of thermonuclear war, growing state authoritarianism, and ultimately global ecological breakdown. To an extent unparalleled in American history, an enormous variety of citizens' groups have brought people of all class backgrounds into common projects around problems, often very local in character, that concern the destiny and welfare of their community as a whole.

Issues such as the siting of nuclear reactors or nuclear waste dumps, the dangers of acid rain, and the presence of toxic dumps, to cite only a few of the many problems that beleaguer innumerable American and British municipalities, have united an astonishing variety of people into movements with shared concerns that render a ritualistic class analysis of their motives a matter of secondary importance. Carried still further, the absorption of small communities by larger ones, of cities by urban belts, and urban belts by "standard metropolitan statistical areas" or conurbations has given rise to militant demands for communal integrity and self-government, an issue that surmounts strictly class and economic interests. The literature on the emergence of these transclass movements, so secondary to internecine struggles within cities of earlier times, is so immense that to merely list the sources would require a sizable volume.

I have given this brief overview of an emerging general social interest over old particularistic interests to demonstrate that a new politics could easily come into being--indeed one that would be concerned not only with restructuring the political landscape on a municipal level but the economic landscape as well. The old debates between "private property" and "nationalized property," are becoming threadbare. Not that these different kinds of ownership and the forms of exploitation they imply have disappeared; rather, they are being increasingly overshadowed by new realities and concerns. Private property, in the traditional sense, with its case for perpetuating the citizen as an economically self-sufficient and politically self-empowered individual, is fading away. It is disappearing not because "creeping socialism" is devouring "free enterprise" but because "creeping corporatism" is devouring everyone--ironically, in the name of "free enterprise." The Greek ideal of the politically sovereign citizen who can make a rational judgment in public affairs because he is free from material need or clientage has been reduced to a mockery. The oligarchical character of economic life threatens democracy, such as it is, not only on a national level but also on a municipal level, where it still preserves a certain degree of intimacy and leeway.

We come here to a breakthrough approach to a municipalist economics that innovatively dissolves the mystical aura surrounding corporatized property and nationalized property, indeed workplace elitism and "workplace democracy." I refer to the municipalization of property, as opposed to its corporatization or its nationalization. . . . Libertarian municipalism proposes that land and enterprises be placed increasingly in the custody of the community--more precisely, the custody of citizens in free assemblies and their deputies in confederal councils. . . . In such a municipal economy--confederal, interdependent, and rational by ecological, not simply technological, standards--we would expect that the special interests that divide people today into workers, professionals, managers, and the like would be melded into a general interest in which people see themselves as citizens guided strictly by the needs of their community and region rather than by personal proclivities and vocational concerns. Here, citizenship would come into its own, and rational as well as ecological interpretations of the public good would supplant class and hierarchical interests.

As for the workplace, public democracy would be substituted for the traditional images of productive management and operation, "economic democracy" and "economic collectivization." Significantly, "economic democracy" in the workplace is no longer incompatible with a corporatized or nationalized economy. Quite to the contrary: the effective use of "workers' participation" in production, even the outright handing over of industrial operations to the workers who perform them, has become another form of time-studied, assembly-line rationalization, another systematic abuse of labor, by bringing labor itself into complicity with its own exploitation.

Many workers, in fact, would like to get away from their workplaces and find more creative types of work, not simply participate in planning their own misery. What "economic democracy" meant in its profoundest sense was free, democratic access to the means of life, the guarantee of freedom from material want--not simply the involvement of workers in onerous productive activities that could better be turned over to machines. It is a blatant bourgeois trick, in which many radicals unknowingly participate, that "economic democracy" has been reinterpreted to mean "employee ownership" or that "workplace democracy" has come to mean workers' "participation" in industrial management rather than freedom from the tyranny of the factory, rationalized labor, and planned production.

A municipal politics, based on communalist principles, scores a significant advance over all of these conceptions by calling for the municipalization of the economy--and its management by the community as part of a politics of self-management. Syndicalist demands for the "collectivization" of industry and "workers' control" of individual industrial units are based on contractual and exchange relationships between all collectivized enterprises, thereby indirectly reprivatizing the economy and opening it to traditional forms of private property--even if each enterprise is collectively owned. By contrast, libertarian municipalism literally politicizes the economy by dissolving economic decision-making into the civic domain. Neither factory nor land becomes a separate or potentially competitive unit within a seemingly communal collective.

Nor do workers, farmers, technicians, engineers, professionals, and the like perpetuate their vocational identities as separate interests that exist apart from the citizen body in face-to-face assemblies. "Property" is integrated into the municipality as the material component of a civic framework, indeed as part of a larger whole that is controlled by the citizen body in assembly as citizens--not as workers, farmers, professionals, or any other vocationally oriented special-interest groups.

What is equally important, the famous "contradiction" or "antagonism" between town and country, so crucial in social theory and history, is transcended by the township, the traditional New England jurisdiction, in which an urban entity is the nucleus of its agricultural and village environs--not a domineering urban entity that stands opposed to them. A township, in effect, is a small region within still larger ones, such as the county and larger political jurisdictions.

So conceived, the municipalization of the economy should be distinguished not only from corporatization but also from seemingly more "radical" demands such as nationalization and

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collectivization. Nationalization of the economy invariably has led to bureaucratic and top-down economic control; collectivization, in turn, could easily lead to a privatized economy in a collectivized form with the perpetuation of class or caste identities. By contrast, municipalization would bring the economy as a whole into the orbit of the public sphere, where economic policy could be formulated by the entire community--notably its citizens in face-to-face relationships working to achieve a general interest that surmounts separate, vocationally defined specific interests. The economy would cease to be merely an economy in the conventional sense of the term, composed of capitalistic, nationalized, or "worker-controlled" enterprises. It would become the economy of the polis or the municipality. The municipality, more precisely, the citizen body in face-to-face assembly, would absorb the economy into its public business, divesting it of a separate identity that can become privatized into a self-serving enterprise.

. . . The municipalization of the economy would not only absorb the vocational differences that could militate against a publicly controlled economy; it would also absorb the material means of life into communal forms of distribution. "From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs"--the famous demand of various nineteenth-century socialisms--would be institutionalized as part of the public sphere. This traditional maxim, which is meant to assure that people will have access to the means of life irrespective of the work they are capable of performing, would cease to be merely a precarious credo: it would become a practice, a way of functioning politically--one that is structurally built into the community as a way of existing as a political entity.

Moreover, the enormous growth of the productive forces, rationally and ecologically employed for social rather than private ends, has rendered the age-old problem of material scarcity a moot issue. Potentially, all the basic means for living in comfort and security are available to the populations of the world, notwithstanding the dire--and often fallacious--claims of present-day misanthropes and antihumanists such as Garrett Hardin, Paul Ehrlich, and regrettably, advocates of "simple living," who can barely be parted from their computers even as they deride technological developments of almost any kind. It is easily forgotten that only a few generations ago, famine was no less a plague than deadly infectious diseases like the Black Death, and that the life-span of most people at the turn of the last century in the United States and Europe seldom reached fifty years of age.

No community can hope to achieve economic autarky, nor should it try to do so. Economically, the wide range of resources that are needed to make many of our widely used goods preclude self-enclosed insularity and parochialism. Far from being a liability, this interdependence among communities and regions can well be regarded as an asset--culturally as well as politically. Interdependence among communities is no less important than interdependence among individuals. Divested of the cultural cross-fertilization that is often a product of economic intercourse, the municipality tends to shrink into itself and disappear into its own civic privatism. Shared needs and

resources imply the existence of sharing and, with sharing, communication, rejuvenation by new ideas, and a wider social horizon that yields a wider sensibility to new experiences.

The recent emphasis in environmental theory on "self-sufficiency," if it does not mean a greater degree of prudence in dealing with material resources, is regressive. Localism should never be interpreted to mean parochialism; nor should decentralism ever be interpreted to mean that smallness is a virtue in itself. Small is not necessarily beautiful. The concept of human scale, by far the more preferable expression for a truly ecological policy, is meant to make it possible for people to completely grasp their political environment, not to parochially bury themselves in it to the exclusion of cultural stimuli from outside their community's boundaries.

Given these coordinates, it is possible to envision a new political culture with a new revival of citizenship, popular civic institutions, a new kind of economy, and a countervailing dual power, confederally networked, that could arrest and hopefully reverse the growing centralization of the state and corporate enterprises. Moreover, it is also possible to envision an eminently practical point of departure for going beyond the town and city as we have known them up to now and for developing future forms of habitation as communities that seek to achieve a new harmonization between people and between humanity and the natural world. I have emphasized its practicality because it is now clear that any attempt to tailor a human community to a natural "ecosystem" in which it is located cuts completely against the grain of centralized power, be it state or corporate. Centralized power invariably reproduces itself in centralized forms at all levels of social, political, and economic life. It not only is big; it thinks big. Indeed, this way of being and thinking is a condition for its survival, not only its growth.

As for the technological bases for decentralized communities, we are now witnessing a revolution that would have seemed hopelessly utopian only a few decades ago. Until recently, smaller-scale ecotechnologies were used mainly by individuals, and their efficiency barely compared with that of conventional energy sources, such as fossil fuels and nuclear power plants. This situation has changed dramatically in the past fifteen to twenty years. In the United States, wind turbines have been developed and are currently in use that generate electric power at a cost of 7 to 9 cents per kilowatt-hour, compared with 20 cents only a decade earlier. This figure is very close to the 4-to-6-cent cost of power plants fueled by natural gas or coal. These comparisons, which can be expected to improve in favor of wind power in the years to come, have fostered the expansion of this nonfossil-fuel source throughout the entire world, particularly in India, where there has been "a major wind boom" in 1994, according to the Worldwatch Institute.[1]

A similar "boom" seems to be in the making in a variety of solar power devices. New solar collectors have been designed that increasingly approximate the costs of conventional energy sources, particularly in heating water for domestic uses. Photovoltaic cells, in which silicon is used to convert solar energy into electrons, have been developed to a point where "thousands of villagers in the developing

world [are] using photovoltaic cells to power lights, televisions, and water pumps, needs that are otherwise met with kerosene lamps, lead-acid batteries, or diesel engines." In fact, more than 200,000 homes in Mexico, Indonesia, South Africa, and some 2,000 in the Dominican Republic have been "solarized," probably with a good many more to come.[2] It can be said with reasonable confidence that this increasingly sophisticated technology will become one of the most important--if not the most important--sources of electrical energy in the years to come, yet one that is eminently suitable for humanly scaled communities.

To view technological advances as intrinsically harmful, particularly nonpolluting sources of energy and automated machinery that can free human beings of mindless toil in a rational society, is as shortsighted as it is arrogant. Understandably, people today will not accept a diet of pious moral platitudes that call for "simple means" that presumably will give them "rich ends," whatever these may be, especially if these platitudes are delivered by well-paid academics and privileged Euro-Americans who have no serious quarrel with the present social order apart from whether it affords them access to "wilderness" theme parks.

For the majority of humanity, toil and needless shortages of food are an everyday reality. To expect them to become active citizens in a vital political, ecologically oriented community while engaging in arduous work for most of their lives, often on empty bellies, is an unfeeling middle-class presumption. Unless they can enjoy a decent sufficiency in the means of life and freedom from mindless, often involuntary toil, it is the height of arrogance to degrade their humanity by calling them "mouths," as many demographers do, or "consumers," as certain very comfortable environmentalists do.

Indeed, it is the height of elitism and privilege to deny them the opportunity and the means for choosing the kind of lifeways they want to pursue. Nor have the well-to-do strata of Euro-American society deprived themselves of that very freedom of choice--a choice, in fact, that they take for granted as a matter of course. Without fostering promising advances in technology that can free humanity as a whole from its subservience to the present, irrational--and, let me emphasize, anti-ecological--social order, we will almost certainly never achieve the free society whose existence is a precondition for harmony between human and human and between humanity and the natural world.

Which is not to say that we can ignore the need for a visionary ethical ideal. Ironically, it has been the Right's shrewd emphasis on ethics and matters of spirit in an increasingly meaningless world that has given it a considerable edge over the forces of progress. Nazism achieved much of its success among the German people a half century ago not because of any economic panaceas it offered but because of its mythic ideal of nationhood, community, and moral regeneration. In recent times, reactionary movements in America have won millions to their cause on such values as the integrity of the family, religious belief, the renewal of patriotism, and the right to life--a message, I may add, that has been construed not only as

a justification for anti-abortion legislation but as a hypostatization of the individual's sacredness, unborn as well as born.

Characteristically, liberal and radical causes are still mired in exclusively economistic and productivistic approaches to political issues. Their moral message, once a heightened plea for social justice, has given way increasingly to strictly material demands. Far more than the Right, which practices egoism and class war against the poor even as it emphasizes community virtues, the political middle ground and the Left take up the eminently practical issue of bread on the table and money in the bank but offer few values that are socially inspirational. Having emphasized the need to resolve the problems of material scarcity, it is equally necessary to emphasize the need to address the moral emptiness that a market society produces among large numbers of people today.

Morality and ethics, let me add, cannot be reduced to mere rhetoric to match the claims of reactionaries but must be the felt spiritual underpinnings of a new social outlook. They must be viewed not as a patronizing sermon but as a living practice that people can incorporate into their personal lives and their communities. The vacuity and triviality of life today must be replaced precisely by radical ideals of solidarity and freedom that sustain the human side of life as well as its material side, or else the ideals by which a rational future should be guided will disappear in the commodity-oriented world we call the "marketplace of ideas."

The most indecent aspect of this "marketplace" is that ideals tend to become artifacts--mere commodities--that lack even the value of the material things we need to sustain us. They become the ideological ornaments to garnish an inherently antihuman and anti-ecological society, one that threatens to undermine moral integrity as such and the simple social amenities that foster human intercourse.

Thus a municipal agenda that is meant to countervail urbanization and the nation-state must be more than a mere electoral platform, such as we expect from conventional parties. It must also be a message, comparable to the great manifestos advanced by various socialist movements in the last century, which called for moral as well as material and institutional reconstruction. Today's electoral platforms, whether "green" or "red," radical or liberal, are generally shopping lists of demands, precisely suited for that "marketplace of ideas" we have misnamed "politics."

Nor can a municipal agenda be a means for effacing serious differences in outlook. The need for thinking out ideas and struggling vigorously to give them coherence, which alone renders an agenda for a new municipal politics intelligible, is often sacrificed to ideological confusion in the name of achieving a specious "unity." A cranky pluralism is replacing an appreciation of focused thinking; a shallow relativism is replacing a sense of continuity and meaningful values; a confused eclecticism is replacing wholeness, clarity, and consistency. Many promising movements for basic social change in the recent past were plagued by a pluralism in which totally contradictory views were never worked out or followed to their logical conclusions, a problem that has grown even worse today due to the cultural illiteracy that plagues contemporary society. . . .

A serious political movement that seeks to advance a libertarian municipalist agenda, in turn, must be patient--just as the Russian populists of the last century (one of whom is cited in the dedication to this book) were. The 1960s upsurge, with all its generous ideals, fell apart because young radicals demanded immediate gratification and sensational successes. The protracted efforts that are so direly needed for building a serious movement--perhaps one whose goals cannot be realized within a single lifetime--were woefully absent. Many of the radicals of thirty years ago, burning with fervor for fundamental change, have since withdrawn into the university system they once denounced, the parliamentary positions they formerly disdained, and the business enterprises they furiously attacked.

A libertarian municipalist movement, in particular, would not--and should not--achieve sudden success and wide public accolades. The present period of political malaise at best and outright reaction at worst renders any sensational successes impossible. If such a libertarian municipalist movement runs candidate for municipal councils with demands for the institution of public assemblies, it will more likely lose electoral races today rather than win even slight successes. Depending upon the political climate at any give time or place, years may pass before it wins even the most modest success.

In any very real sense, however, this protracted development is a desideratum. With rapid success, many naïve members of a municipal electorate expect rapid changes--which no minority, however substantial, can ever hope to achieve at once. For an unpredictable amount of time, electoral activity will primarily be an educational activity, an endeavor to enter the public sphere, however small and contained it may be on the local level, and to educate and interact with ever larger numbers of people.

Even where a measure of electoral success on the local level can be achieved, the prospect of implementing a radically democratic policy is likely to be obstructed by the opposition of the nation-state and the weak position of municipalities in modern "democratic" nation-states. Although it is highly doubtful that even civic authorities would allow a neighborhood assembly to acquire the legal power to make civic policy, still less state and national authorities, let me emphasize that assemblies that have no legal power can exercise enormous moral power. A popular assembly that sternly voices its views on many issues can cause considerable disquiet among local authorities and generate a widespread public reaction in its favor over a large region, indeed even on a national scale.

An interesting case in point is the nuclear freeze resolution that was adopted by more than a hundred town meetings in Vermont a decade ago. Not only did this resolution resonate throughout the entire United States, leading to ad hoc "town meetings" in regions of the country that had never seen them, it affected national policy on this issue and culminated in a demonstration of approximately a million people in New York City. Yet none of the town meetings had the "legal" authority to enforce a nuclear freeze, nor did the issue fall within the purview of a typical New England town meeting's agenda. Historically, in fact, few civic projects that resemble libertarian municipalism began with a view toward establishing a radical democracy of any sort.

The forty-eight Parisian sections of 1793 actually derived from the sixty Parisian electoral districts of 1789. These districts were initially established through a complicated process (deliberately designed to exclude the poorer people of Paris) to choose the Parisian members of the Third Estate when the king convoked the Estates General at Versailles. Thereafter the districts, having chosen their deputies, were expected to disband. In fact, the sixty districts refused to desist from meeting regularly, despite their lack of legal status, and a year later became an integral part of the city's government. With the radicalization of the French Revolution, the fearful city and national authorities tried to weaken the power of the districts by reducing their number of forty-eight--hence, the mutation of the old districts into sections. Finally, the sections opened their doors to everyone, some including women, without any property or status qualifications. This most radical of civic structures, which produced the most democratic assemblies theretofore seen in history, thus slowly elbowed its way into authority, initially without any legal authority whatever and in flat defiance of the nation-state. For all their limitations, the Parisian sections remain an abiding example of how a seemingly nonlegal assembly system can be transformed into a network of revolutionary popular institutions around which a new society can be structured. . . .

What is of immense practical importance is that prestatist institutions, traditions, and sentiments remain alive in varying degrees throughout most of the world. Resistance to the encroachment of oppressive states has been nourished by village, neighborhood, and town community networks, witness such struggles in South Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. The tremors that are now shaking Soviet Russia are due not solely to demands for greater freedom but to movements for regional and local autonomy that challenge its very existence as a centralized nation-state. To ignore the communal basis of this movement would be as myopic as to ignore the latent instability of every nation-state; worse would be to take the nation-state as it is for granted and deal with it merely on its own terms. Indeed, whether a state remains "more" of a state or "less"--no trifling matter to radical theorists as disparate as Bakunin and Marx--depends heavily upon the power of local, confederal, and community movements to countervail it and hopefully to establish a dual power that will replace it. The major role that the Madrid Citizens' Movement played nearly three decades ago in weakening the Franco regime would require a major study to do it justice.

The problem of dealing with the growing power of nation-states and of centralized corporations, property ownership, production, and the like is precisely a question of power--that is to say, who shall have it or who shall be denied any power at all. Michel Foucault has done our age no service by making power an evil as such. Foucauldian postmodernist views notwithstanding, the broad mass of people in the world today lack what they need most--the power to challenge the nation-state and arrest the centralization of economic resources, lest future generations see all the gains of humanity dissipated and freedom disappear from social discourse.

Minimally, if power is to be socially redistributed so that the ordinary people who do the real work of the world can effectively speak back to those run social and economic affairs, a movement is vitally needed to educate, mobilize, and, using the wisdom of ordinary and extraordinary people alike, initiate local steps to regain power in its most popular and democratic forms. Power of this kind must be collected, if we are to take democracy seriously, in newly developed institutions such as assemblies that allow for the direct participation of citizens in public affairs. Without a movement to work toward such a democratic end, including educators who are prepared, in turn, to be educated, and intellectually sophisticated people who can develop and popularize this project, efforts to challenge power as it is now constituted will simply sputter out in escapades, riots, adventures, and protests. . . .

Power that is not retained by the people is power that is given over to the state. Conversely, whatever power the people gain is power that must be taken away from the state. There can be no institutional vacuum where power exists: it is either invested in the people or it is invested in the state. Where the two "share" power, this condition is extremely precarious and often temporary. Sooner or later, the control of society and its destiny will either shift toward the people and their communities at its base or toward the professional practitioners of statecraft at its summit. Only if the whole existing pyramidal social structure is dismembered and radically democratized will the issue of domination as such disappear and be completely replaced by participation and the principle of complementarity.

Power, however, must be conceived as real, indeed solid and tangible, not only as spiritual and psychological. To ignore the fact that power is a muscular fact of life is to drift from the visionary into the ethereal and mislead the public as to its crucial significance in affecting society's destiny.

What this means is that if power is to be regained by the people from the state, the management of society must be deprofessionalized as much as possible. That is to say, it must be simplified and rendered transparent, indeed, clear, accessible, and manageable such that most of its affairs can be run by ordinary citizens. This emphasis on amateurism as distinguished from professionalism is not new. It formed the basis of Athenian democratic practice for generations. Indeed, it was so ably practiced that sortition rather than election formed the basis of the polis's democracy. It resurfaced repeatedly, for example, in early medieval city charters and confederations, and in the great democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century.

Power is also a solid and tangible fact to be reckoned with militarily, notably in the ubiquitous truth that the power of the state or the people eventually reposes in force. Whether the state has power ultimately depends upon whether it exercises a monopoly of violence. By the same token, whether the people have power ultimately depend upon whether they are armed and create their own grassroots militia, to guard not only themselves from criminals or invaders but their own power and freedom from the ever-encroaching power of the state itself. Here, too, the Athenian, British, and American yeomen knew only too well that a professional military was a threat to liberty and the state was a vehicle for disarming the people.

A true civicism that tries to create a genuine politics, an empowered citizenry, and a municipalized economy would be a vulnerable project indeed if it failed to replace the police and the professional army with a popular militia--more specifically, a civic guard, composed of rotating patrols for police purposes and well-trained citizen military contingents for dealing with external dangers to freedom. Greek democracy would never have survived the repeated assaults of the Greek aristocracy without its militia of citizen hoplites, those foot soldiers who could answer the call to arms with their own weapons and elected commanders. The tragic history of the state's ascendancy over free municipalities, even the rise of oligarchy within free cities of the past, is the story of armed professionals who commandeered power from unarmed peoples or disarmed them presumably (as so many liberals would have it today) from the "hazards" of domestic and neighborhood "shootouts." Typically, this is the cowboy or "gunslinger" image of the "American Dream," often cynically imposed on its more traditional yeoman face.

Beyond the municipal agenda that I have presented thus far lies another, more long-range, one: the vision of a political world in which the state as such would finally be replaced completely by a confederal network of municipal assemblies; all socially important forms of property would be absorbed into a truly political economy in which municipalities, interacting with each other economically as well as politically, would resolve their material problems as citizens in open assemblies, not simply as professionals, farmers, and blue- or white-collar workers; and humanly scaled and physically decentralized municipalities.

Not only would people then be able to transform themselves from occupational beings into communally oriented citizens; they would create a world in which all weapons could indeed be beaten into plowshares. Ultimately, it would be possible for new networks of communities to emerge that would be exquisitely tailored--psychologically and spiritually as well as technologically, architecturally, and structurally--to the natural environments in which they exist.

This agenda for a more distant future embodies the "ultimate" vision I have elaborated in greater detail in my previous writings. Its achievement can no longer be seen as a sudden "revolution" that within a brief span of time will replace the present society with a radically new one. Actually, such revolutions never really happened in history. Even the French Revolution, which radicals have long regarded as a paradigm of sudden social change, was generations in making and did not come to its definitive end until a century later, when the last of the sans culottes were virtually exterminated on the barricades of the Paris Commune of 1871.

Nor can we afford today the myth today that barricades are more than a symbol. What links my minimal agenda to my ultimate one is a process, an admittedly long development in which the existing institutions and traditions of freedom are slowly enlarged and expanded. For the present, we must try increasingly to democratize the republic, a call that consists of preserving--and expanding--freedoms we

have earned centuries ago, together with the institutions that give them reality. For the future it means that we must radicalize the democracy we create, imparting an even more creative content to the democratic institutions we have rescued and tried to develop.

Admittedly, at that later point we will have moved from a countervailing position that tries to play our democratic institutions against the state into a militant attempt to replace the state with municipally based confederal structures. It is to be devoutly hoped that by that time, too, the state power itself will have been hollowed out institutionally by local or civic structures, indeed that its very legitimacy, not to speak of its authority as a coercive force, will simply lead to its collapse in any period of confrontation. If the great revolutions of the past provide us with examples of how so major a shift is possible, it would be well to remember that seemingly all-powerful monarchies that the republics replaced two centuries ago were so denuded of power that they crumbled rather than "fell," much as a mummified corpse turns to dust after it has been suddenly exposed to air.

Another future prospect also faces us, a chilling one, in which urbanization so completely devours the city and the countryside that community becomes an archaism; in which a market society filters into the most private recesses of our lives as individuals and effaces all sense of personality, let alone individuality; in which a state renders politics and citizenship not only a mockery but a maw that absorbs the very notion of freedom itself.

This prospect is still sufficiently removed from our most immediate experience that its realization can be arrested by those countervailing forces--that dual power--that I have outlined. Given the persistent destructuring of the natural world as well as the social, more than human freedom is in the balance. The rise of reactionary nationalisms and proliferation of nuclear weapons are only two reminders that we may be reaching a point of cosmic finality in our affairs on the planet. Thus the recovery of a classical concept of politics and citizenship is not only a precondition for a free society; it is also a precondition for our survival as a species. Looming before us is the image of a completely destructured and simplified natural world as well as a completely destructured and simplified urban world--a natural and social world so divested of its variety that we, like all other complex life-forms, will be unable to exist as viable beings.

Notes

This article consists of excerpts from *From Urbanization to Cities* (1987; London: Cassell, 1995), with revisions.

1. Lester Brown et al., *State of the World*: 1995 (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1995), pp. 60-70.

2. Ibid., p. 67.

The Meaning of Confederalism

1989

Few arguments have been used more effectively to challenge the case for face-to-face participatory democracy than the claim that we live in a "complex society." Modern population centers, we are told, are too large and too concentrated to allow for direct decision-making at a grassroots level. And our economy is too "global," presumably, to unravel the intricacies of production and commerce. In our present transnational, often highly centralized social system, it is better to enhance representation in the state, to increase the efficiency of bureaucratic institutions, we are advised, than to advance utopian "localist" schemes of popular control over political and economic life.

After all, such arguments often run, centralists are all really "localists" in the sense that they believe in "more power to the people" - or at least, to their representatives. And surely a good representative is always eager to know the wishes of his or her "constituents" (to use another of those arrogant substitutes for "citizens").

But face-to-face democracy? Forget the dream that in our "complex" modern world we can have any democratic alternative to the nation-state! Many pragmatic people, including socialists, often dismiss arguments for that kind of "localism" as otherworldly - with good-natured condescension at best and outright derision at worst. Indeed, some years back, in 1972, I was challenged in the periodical *Root and Branch* by Jeremy Brecher, a democratic socialist, to explain how the decentralist views I expressed in Post-Scarcity Anarchism would prevent, say, Troy, New York, from dumping its untreated wastes into the Hudson River, from which downstream cities like Perth Amboy draw their drinking water.

On the surface of things, arguments like Brecher's for centralized government seem rather compelling. A structure that is "democratic," to be sure, but still largely top-down is assumed as necessary to prevent one locality from afflicting another ecologically. But conventional economic and political arguments against decentralization, ranging from the fate of Perth Amboy's drinking water to our alleged "addiction" to petroleum, rest on a number of very problematical assumptions. Most disturbingly, they rest on an unconscious acceptance of the economic status quo.

Decentralism and Self-Sustainability

The assumption that what currently exists must necessarily exist is the acid that corrodes all visionary thinking (as witness the recent tendency of radicals to espouse "market socialism" rather than deal with the failings of the market economy as well as state socialism). Doubtless we will have to import coffee for those people who need a morning fix at the breakfast table or exotic metals for people who want their wares to be more lasting than the junk produced by a consciously engineered throwaway economy. But aside from the utter irrationality of crowding tens of millions of people into congested, indeed suffocating urban belts, must the present-day extravagant international division of labor necessarily exist in order to satisfy human needs? Or has it been created to provide extravagant profits for multinational corporations? Are we to ignore the ecological consequences of plundering the Third World of its resources, insanely interlocking modern economic life with petroleum-rich areas whose ultimate products include air pollutants and petroleum-derived carcinogens? To ignore the fact that our "global economy" is the result of burgeoning industrial bureaucracies and a competitive grow-or-die market economy is incredibly myopic.

It is hardly necessary to explore the sound ecological reasons for achieving a certain measure of self-sustainability. Most environmentally oriented people are aware that a massive national and international division of labor is extremely wasteful in the literal sense of that term. Not only does an excessive division of labor make for overorganization in the form of huge bureaucracies and tremendous expenditures of resources in transporting materials over great distances; it reduces the possibilities of effectively recycling wastes, avoiding pollution that may have its source in highly concentrated industrial and population centers, and making sound use of local or regional raw materials.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that *relatively* self-sustaining communities in which crafts, agriculture, and industries serve definable networks of confederally organized communities enrich the opportunities and stimuli to which individuals are exposed and make for more rounded personalities with a rich sense of selfhood and competence. The Greek ideal of the rounded citizen in a rounded environment - one that reappeared in Charles Fourier's utopian works - was long cherished by the anarchists and socialists of the last century.

The opportunity of the individual to devote his or her productive activity to many different tasks over an attenuated work week (or in Fourier's ideal society, over a given day) was seen as a vital factor in overcoming the division between manual and intellectual activity, in transcending status differences that this major division of work created, and in enhancing the wealth of experiences that came with a free movement from industry through crafts to food cultivation. Hence self-sustainability made for a richer self, one strengthened by variegated experiences, competencies, and assurances. Alas, this vision has been

lost by leftists and many environmentalists today, with their shift toward a pragmatic liberalism and the radical movement's tragic ignorance of its own visionary past.

We should not, I believe, lose sight of what it means to live an ecological way of life, not merely follow sound ecological practices. The multitude of handbooks that teach us how to conserve, invest, eat, and buy in an "ecologically responsible" manner are a travesty of the more basic need to reflect on what it means to think - yes, to reason - and to live ecologically in the full meaning of the term. Thus, I would hold that to garden organically is more than a good form of husbandry and a good source of nutrients; it is above all a way to place oneself directly in the food web by personally cultivating the very substances one consumes to live and by returning to one's environment what one elicits from it.

Food thus becomes more than a form of material nutririent. The soil one tills, the living things one cultivates and consumes, the compost one prepares all unite in an ecological continuum to feed the spirit as well as the body, sharpening one's sensitivity to the nonhuman and human world around us. I am often amused by zealous "spiritualists," many of whom are either passive viewers of seemingly "natural" landscapes or devotees of rituals, magic, and pagan deities (or all of these) who fail to realize that one of the most eminently human activities - namely, food cultivation - can do more to foster an ecological sensibility (and spirituality, if you please) than all the incantations and mantras devised in the name of ecological spiritualism.

Such monumental changes as the dissolution of the nation-state and its substitution by a participatory democracy, then, do not occur in a psychological vacuum where the political structure alone is changed. I argued against Jeremy Brecher that in a society that was radically veering toward decentralistic, participatory democracy, guided by communitarian and ecological principles, it is only reasonable to suppose that people would not choose such an irresponsible social dispensation as would allow the waters of the Hudson to be so polluted. Decentralism, a face-to-face participatory democracy, and a localist emphasis on community values should be viewed as all of one piece - they most assuredly have been so in the vision I have been advocating for more than thirty years. This "one piece" involves not only a new politics but a new political culture that embraces new ways of thinking and feeling, and new human interrelationships, including the ways we experience the natural world. Words like"politics" and "citizenship" would be redefined by the rich meanings they acquired in the past, and enlarged for the present.

It is not very difficult to show - item by item - how the international division of labor can be greatly attenuated by using local and regional resources, implementing ecotechnologies, resealing human consumption along rational (indeed, healthful) lines, and emphasizing quality production that provides lasting (instead of throwaway) means of life. It is unfortunate that the very considerable inventory of these possibilities, which I partly assembled and evaluated in my 1965 essay "Toward a Liberatory Technology," suffers from the burden of having been written too long ago to be accessible to the present generation of ecologically oriented people. Indeed, in that essay I also argued for regional integration and

the need to interlink resources among ecocommunities. For decentralized communities are inevitably interdependent upon one another.

Problems of Decentralism

If many pragmatic people are blind to the importance of decentralism, many in the ecology movement tend to ignore very real problems with "localism" - problems that are no less troubling than the problems raised by a globalism that fosters a total interlocking of economic and political life on a worldwide basis. Without such wholistic cultural and political changes as I have advocated, notions of decentralism that emphasize localist isolation and a degree of self- sufficiency may lead to cultural parochialism and chauvinism. Parochialism can lead to problems that are as serious as a "global" mentality that overlooks the uniqueness of cultures, the peculiarities of ecosystems and ecoregions, and the need for a humanly scaled community life that makes a participatory democracy possible. This is no minor issue today, in an ecology movement that tends to swing toward very well-meaning but rather naive extremes. I cannot repeat too emphatically that we must find a way of sharing the world with other humans and with nonhuman forms of life, a view that is often difficult to attain in overly "self-sufficient" communities.

Much as I respect the intentions of those who advocate local self-reliance and self-sustainabilty, these concepts can be highly misleading. I can certainly agree with David Morris of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, for example, that if a community can produce the things it needs, it should probably do so. But self-sustaining communities cannot produce all the things they need - unless it involves a return to a back-breaking way of village life that historically often prematurely aged its men and women with hard work and allowed them very little time for political life beyond the immediate confines of the community itself.

I regret to say that there are people in the ecology movement who do, in fact, advocate a return to a highly labor-intensive economy, not to speak of Stone Age deities. Clearly, we must give the ideals of localism, decentralism, and self-sustainability greater and fuller meaning.

Today we can produce the basic means of life - and a good deal more - in an ecological society that is focused on the production of high-quality useful goods. Yet still others in the ecology movement too often end up advocating a kind of "collective" capitalism, in which one community functions like a single entrepreneur, with a sense of proprietorship toward its resources. Such a system of cooperatives once again marks the beginnings of a market system of distribution, as cooperatives become entangled in the web of "bourgeois rights" - that is, in contracts and bookkeeping that focus on the exact amounts a community will receive in "exchange" for what it delivers to others. This deterioration occurred among some of the worker-controlled enterprises that functioned like capitalistic enterprises in Barcelona after

the workers expropriated them in July 1936 - a practice that the anarcho-syndicalist CNT fought early in the Spanish Revolution.

It is a troubling fact that neither decentralization nor self-sufficiency in itself is necessarily democratic. Plato's ideal city in the Republic was indeed designed to be self-sufficient, but its self-sufficiency was meant to maintain a warrior as well as a philosophical elite. Indeed, its capacity to preserve its self-sufficiency depended upon its ability, like Sparta, to resist the seemingly "corruptive" influence of outside cultures (a characteristic, I may say, that still appears in many closed societies in the East). Similarly, decentralization in itself provides no assurance that we will have an ecological society. A decentralized society can easily co-exist with extremely rigid hierarchies. A striking example is European and Oriental feudalism, a social order in which princely, ducal, and baronial hierarchies were based on highly decentralized communities. With all due respect to Fritz Schumacher, small is not necessarily beautiful.

Nor does it follow that humanly scaled communities and "appropriate technologies" in themselves constitute guarantees against domineering societies. In fact, for centuries humanity lived in villages and small towns, often with tightly organized social ties and even communistic forms of property. But these provided the material basis for highly despotic imperial states. Considered on economic and property terms, they might earn a high place in the "no-growth" outlook of economists like Herman Daly, but they were the hard bricks that were used to build the most awesome Oriental despotisms in India and China. What these self-sufficient, decentralized communities feared almost as much as the armies that ravaged them were the imperial tax-gatherers that plundered them.

If we extol such communities because of the extent to which they were decentralized, self-sufficient, or small, or employed "appropriate technologies," we would be obliged to ignore the extent to which they were also culturally stagnant and easily dominated by exogenous elites. Their seemingly organic but tradition-bound division of labor may very well have formed the bases for highly oppressive and degrading caste systems in different parts of the world-caste systems that plague the social life of India to this very day.

At the risk of seeming contrary, I feel obliged to emphasize that decentralization, localism, self-sufficiency, and even confederation each taken singly - do not constitute a guarantee that we will achieve a rational ecological society. In fact, all of them have at one time or another supported parochial communities, oligarchies, and even despotic regimes. To be sure, without the institutional structures that cluster around our use of these terms and without taking them in combination with each other, we cannot hope to achieve a free ecologically oriented society.

Confederalism and Interdependence

Decentralism and self-sustainability must involve a much broader principle of social organization than mere localism. Together with decentralization, approximations to self-sufficiency, humanly scaled communities, ecotechnologies, and the like, there is a compelling need for democratic and truly communitarian forms of interdependence - in short, for libertarian forms of confederalism.

I have detailed at length in many articles and books (particularly *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship*) the history of confederal structures from ancient and medieval to modern confederations such as the *Comuneros* in Spain during the early sixteenth century through the Parisian sectional movement of 1793 and more recent attempts at confederation, particularly by the Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution of the 1930s. Today, what often leads to serious misunderstandings among decentralists is their failure in all too many cases to see the need for confederation - which at least tends to counteract the tendency of decentralized communities to drift toward exclusivity and parochialism. If we lack a clear understanding of what confederalism means - indeed, the fact that it forms a key principle and gives fuller meaning to decentralism - the agenda of a libertarian municipalism can easily become vacuous at best or be used for highly parochial ends at worst.

What, then, is confederalism? It is above all a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities. The members of these confederal councils are strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to the assemblies that choose them for the purpose of coordinating and administering the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves. Their function is thus a purely administrative and practical one, not a policy making one like the function of representatives in republican systems of government.

A confederalist view involves a clear distinction between policymaking and the coordination and execution of adopted policies. Policymaking is exclusively the right of popular community assemblies based on the practices of participatory democracy. Administratiom and coordination are the responsibility of confederal councils, which become the means for interlinking villages, towns, neighborhoods, and cities into confederal networks. Power thus flows from the bottom up instead of from the top down, and in confederations, the flow of power from the bottom up diminishes with the scope of the federal council ranging territorially from localities to regions and from regions to ever-broader territorial areas.

A crucial element in giving reality to confederalism is the interdependence of communities for an authentic mutualism based on shared resources, produce, and policymaking. If one community is not obliged to count on another or others generally to satisfy important material needs and realize common political goals in such a way that it is interlinked to a greater whole, exclusivity and parochialism are genuine possibilities. Only insofar as we recognize that confederation must be conceived as an extension of a form of participatory administration - by means of confederal networks - can decentralization and

localism prevent the communities that compose larger bodies of association from parochially withdrawing into themselves at the expense of wider areas of human consociation.

Confederalism is thus a way of perpetuating the interdependence that should exist among communities and regions - indeed, it is a way of democratizing that interdependence without surrendering the principle of local control. While a reasonable measure of self-sufficiency is desirable for every locality and region, confederalism is a means for avoiding local parochialism on the one hand and an extravagant national and global division of labor on the other. In short, it is a way in which a community can retain its identity and roundedness while participating in a sharing way with the larger whole that makes up a balanced ecological society.

Confederalism as a principle of social organization reaches its fullest development when the economy itself is confederalized by placing local farms, factories, and other needed enterprises in local municipal hands - that is, when a community, however large or small, begins to manage its own economic resources in an interlinked network with other communities. To force a choice between either self-sufficiency on the one hand or a market system of exchange on the other is a simplistic and unnecessary dichotomy. I would like to think that a confederal ecological society would be a sharing one, one based on the pleasure that is felt in distributing among communities according to their needs, not one in which "cooperative" capitalistic communities mire themselves in the quid pro quo of exchange relationships.

Impossible? Unless we are to believe that nationalized property (which reinforces the political power of the centralized state with economic power) or a private market economy (whose law of "grow or die" threatens to undermine the ecological stability of the entire planet) is more workable, I fail to see what viable alternative we have to the confederated municipalization of the economy. At any rate, for once it will no longer be privileged state bureaucrats or grasping bourgeois entrepreneurs - or even "collective" capitalists in so-called workers-controlled enterprises - all with their special to promote who are faced with a community's problems, but citizens, irrespective of their occupations or workplaces. For once, it will be necessary to transcend the traditional special interests of work, workplace, status, and property relations, and create a general interest based on shared community problems.

Confederation is thus the ensemble of decentralization, localism, self-sufficiency, interdependence - and more. This more is the indispensable moral education and character building - what the Greeks called *paideia* - that makes for rational active citizenship in a participatory democracy, unlike the passive constituents and consumers that we have today. In the end, there is no substitute for a conscious reconstruction of our relationship to each other and the natural world.

To argue that the remaking of society and our relationship with the natural world can be achieved only by decentralization or localism or self-sustainabilty leaves us with an incomplete collection of solutions. Whatever we omit among these presuppositions for a society based on confederated municipalities, to be sure, would leave a yawning hole in the entire social fabric we hope to create. That

hole would grow and eventually destroy the fabric itself - just as a market economy, cojoined with "socialism," "anarchism," or whatever concept one has of the good society, would eventually dominate the society as a whole. Nor can we omit the distinction between policy making and administration, for once policy making slips from the hands of the people, it is devoured by its delegates, who quickly become bureaucrats.

Confederalism, in effect, must be conceived as a whole: a consciously formed body of interdependencies that unites participatory democracy in municipalities with a scrupulously supervised system of coordination. It involves the dialectical development of independence and dependence into a more richly articulated form of interdependence, just as the individual in a free society grows from dependence in childhood to independence in youth, only to sublate the two into a conscious form of interdependence between individuals and between the individual and society.

Confederalism is thus a fluid and ever-developing kind of social metabolism in which the identity of an ecological society is preserved through its differences and by virtue of its potential for ever-greater differentiation. Confederalism, in fact, does not mark a closure of social history (as the "end of history" ideologists of recent years would have us believe about liberal capitalism) but rather the point of departure for a new eco-social history marked by a participatory evolution within society and between society and the natural world.

Confederation as Dual Power

Above all, I have tried to show in my previous writings how confederation on a municipal basis has existed in sharp tension with the centralized state generally, and the nation-state of recent times. Confederalism, I have tried to emphasize, is not simply a unique societal, particularly civic or municipal, form of administration. It is a vibrant tradition in the affairs of humanity, one that has a centuries-long history behind it. Confederations for generations tried to countervail a nearly equally long historical tendency toward centralization and the creation of the nation-state.

If the two - confederalism and statism - are not seen as being in tension with each other, a tension in which the nation-state has used a variety of intermediaries like provincial governments in Canada and state governments in the United States to create the illusion of "local control," then the concept of confederation loses all meaning. Provincial autonomy in Canada and states' rights in the United States are no more confederal than "soviets" or councils were the medium for popular control that existed in tension with Stalin's totalitarian state. The Russian soviets were taken over by the Bolsheviks, who supplanted them with their party within a year or two of the October Revolution. To weaken the role of confederal municipalities as a countervailing power to the nation-state by opportunistically running "confederalist" candidates for state government - or, more nightmarishly, for governorship in seemingly democratic states (as some U.S. Greens have proposed) is to blur the importance of the need for tension between

confederations and nation-states - indeed, they obscure the fact that the two cannot co-exist over the long term.

In describing confederalism as a whole - as a structure for decentralization, participatory democracy, and localism - and as a potentiality for an ever- greater differentiation along new lines of development, I would like to emphasize that this same concept of wholeness that applies to the interdependencies between municipalities also applies to the muncipality itself. The municipality, as I pointed out in earlier writings, is the most immediate political arena of the individual, the world that is literally a doorstep beyond the privacy of the family and the intimacy of personal friendships. In that primary political arena, where politics should be conceived in the Hellenic sense of literally managing the polls or community, the individual can be transformed from a mere person into an active citizen, from a private being into a public being. Given this crucial arena that literally renders the citizen a functional being who can participate directly in the future of society, we are dealing with a level of human interaction that is more basic (apart from the family itself) than any level that is expressed in representative forms of governance, where collective power is literally transmuted into power embodied by one or a few individuals. The municipality is thus the most authentic arena of public life, however much it may have been distorted over the course of history.

By contrast, delegated or authoritarian levels of "politics" presuppose the abdication of municipal and citizen power to one degree or another. The municipality must always be understood as this truly authentic public world. To compare even executive positions like a mayor with a govemor in representative realms of power is to grossly misunderstand the basic political nature of civic life itself, all its malformations notwithstanding. Thus, for Greens to contend in a purely formal and analytical manner - as modern logic instructs that terms like "executive" make the two positions interchangeable is to totally remove the notion of executive power from its context, to reify it, to make it into a mere lifeless category because of the extemal trappings we attach to the word. If the city is to be seen as a whole, and its potentialities for creating a participatory democracy are to be fully recognized, so provincial governments and state governments in Canada and the United States must be seen as clearly established small republics organized entirely around representation at best and oligarchical rule at worst. They provide the channels of expression for the nation-state - and constitute obstacles to the development of a genuine public realm.

To run a Green for a mayor on a libertarian municipalist program, in short, is qualitatively different from running a provincial or state governor on a presumably libertarian muncipalist program. It amounts to decontextualizing the institutions that exist in a municipality, in a province or state, and in the nation-state itself, thereby placing all three of these executive positions under a purely formal rubric. One might with equal imprecision say that because human beings and dinosaurs both have spinal cords, that they belong to the same species or even to the same genus. In each such case, an institution - be it a mayoral, councillor, or selectperson - must be seen in a municipal context as a whole, just as a president, prime minister, congressperson, or member of parliament, in turn, must be seen in the state context as a

whole. From this standpoint, for Greens to run mayors is fundamentally different from running provincial and state offices. One can go into endless detailed reasons why the powers of a mayor are far more controlled and under closer public purview than those of state and provincial office-holders.

At the risk of repetition, let me say that to ignore this fact is to simply abandon any sense of contextuality and the environment in which issues like policy, administration, participation, and representation must be placed. Simply, a city hall in a town or city is not a capital in a province, state, or nation-state.

Unquestionably, there are now cities that are so large that they verge on being quasi-republics in their own right. One thinks for example of such megalopolitan areas as New York City and Los Angeles. In such cases, the minimal program of a Green movement can demand that confederations be established within the urban area - namely, among neighborhoods or definable districts - not only among the urban areas themselves. In a very real sense, these highly populated, sprawling, and oversized entities must ultimately be broken down institutionally into authentic muncipalities that are scaled to human dimensions and that lend themselves to participatory democracy. These entities are not yet fully formed state powers, either institutionally or in reality, such as we find even in sparsely populated American states. The mayor is not yet a governor, with the enormous coercive powers that a govemor has, nor is the city council a parliament or statehouse that can literally legislate the death penalty into existence, such as is occurring in the United States today.

In cities that are transforming themselves into quasi-states, there is still a good deal of leeway in which politics can be conducted along libertarian lines. Already, the executive branches of these urban entities constitute a highly precarious ground - burdened by enormous bureaucracies, police powers, tax powers, and juridical systems that raise serious problems for a libertarian municipal approach. We must always ask ourselves in all frankness what form the concrete situation takes. Where city councils and mayoral offices in large cities provide an arena for battling the concentration of power in an increasingly s trong state or provincial executive, and even worse, in regional jurisdictions that may cut across many such cities (Los Angeles is a notable example), to run candidates for the city council may be the only recourse we have, in fact, for arresting the development of increasingly authoritarian state institutions and helping to restore an institutionally decentralized democracy.

It will no doubt take a long time to physically decentralize an urban entity such as New York City into authentic municipalities and ultimately communes. Such an effort is part of the maximum program of a Green movement. But there is no reason why an urban entity of such a huge magnitude cannot be slowly decentralized institutionally. The distinction between physical decentralization and institutional decentralization must always be kept in mind. Time and again excellent proposals have been advanced by radicals and even city planners to localize democracy in such huge urban entities and literally give greater power to the people, only to be cynically shot down by centralists who invoke physical impediments to such an endeavor.

It confuses the arguments of advocates for decentralization to make institutional decentralization congruent with the physical breakup of such a large entity. There is a certain treachery on the part of centralists in making these two very distinct lines of development identical or entangling them with each other. Libertarian municipalists must always keep the distinction between institutional and physical decentralization clearly in mind, and recognize that the former is entirely achievable even while the latter may take years to attain.

Libertarian Municipalism:

An Overview

1991

Perhaps the greatest single failing of movements for social reconstruction -- I refer particularly to the Left, to radical ecology groups, and to organizations that profess to speak for the oppressed -- is their lack of a politics that will carry people beyond the limits established by the status quo.

Politics today means duels between top-down bureaucratic parties for electoral office, that offer vacuous programs for "social justice" to attract a nondescript "electorate." Once in office, their programs usually turn into a bouquet of "compromises " In this respect, many Green parties in Europe have been only marginally different from conventional parliamentary parties. Nor have socialist parties, with all their various labels, exhibited any basic differences from their capitalist counter parts. To be sure, the indifference of the Euro-American public -- its "apoliticism" -- is understandably depressing. Given their low expectations, when people do vote, they normally turn to established parties if only because, as centers of power, they cart produce results of sorts in practical matters. If one bothers to vote, most people reason, why waste a vote on a new marginal organization that has all the characteristics of the major ones and that will eventually become corrupted if it succeeds? Witness the German Greens, whose internal and public life increasingly approximates that of other parties in the new Reich.

That this "political process" has lingered on with almost no basic alteration for decades now is due in great part to the inertia of the process itself. Time wears expectations thin, and hopes are often reduced to habits as one disappointment is followed by another. Talk of a "new politics," of upsetting tradition, which is as old as politics itself, is becoming unconvincing. For decades, at least, the changes that have occurred in radical politics are largely changes in *rhetoric* rather than *structure*. The German Greens are only the most recent of a succession of "nonparty parties" (to use their original way of describing their organization) that have turned from an attempt to practice grassroots politics -- ironically, in the Bundestag, of all places! -- into a typical parliamentary party. The Social Democratic Party in Germany, the Labor Party in Britain, the New Democratic Party in Canada, the Socialist Party in France, and others, despite their original emancipatory visions, barely qualify today as even liberal parties in which a Franklin D. Roosevelt or a Harry Truman would have found a comfortable home. Whatever social ideals

these parties may have had generations ago have been eclipsed by the pragmatics of gaining, holding, and extending their power in their respective parliamentary and ministerial bodies.

It is precisely such parliamentary and ministerial objectives that we call "politics" today. To the modern political imagination, "politics" is precisely a body of *techniques* for holding power in representative bodies -- notably the legislative and executive arenas -- not a *moral* calling based on rationality, community, and freedom.

A Civic Ethics

Libertarian municipalism represents a serious, indeed a historically fundamental project, to render politics ethical in character and grassroots in organization. It is structurally and morally different from other grassroots efforts, not merely rhetorically different. It seeks to reclaim the public sphere for the exercise of authentic citizenship while breaking away from the bleak cycle of parliamentarism and its mystification of the "party" mechanism as a means for public representation. In these respects, libertarian municipalism is not merely a "political strategy." It is an effort to work from latent or incipient democratic possibilities toward a radically new configuration of society itself-a communitarian society oriented toward meeting human needs, responding to ecological imperatives, and developing a new ethics based on sharing and cooperation. That it involves a consistently independent form of politics is a truism. More important, it involves a redefinition of politics, a return to the word's original Greek meaning as the management of the community or *polis* by means of direct face-to-face assemblies of the people in the formulation of public policy and based on an ethics of complementarily and solidarity.

In this respect, libertarian municipalism is not one of many pluralistic techniques that is intended to achieve a vague and undefined social goal. Democratic to its core and nonhierarchical in its structure, it is a kind of human destiny, not merely one of an assortment of political tools or strategies that can be adopted and discarded with the aim of achieving power. Libertarian municipalism, in effect, seeks to define the institutional contours of a new society even as it advances the practical message of a radically new politics for our day.

Means and Ends

Here, means and ends meet in a rational unity. The word *politics* now expresses direct popular control of society by its citizens through achieving and sustaining a true democracy in municipal assemblies -- this, as distinguished from republican systems of representation that preempt the right of the citizen to formulate community and regional policies. Such politics is radically distinct from statecraft and the state a professional body composed of bureaucrats, police, military, legislators, and the like, that exists as a coercive apparatus, clearly distinct from and above the people. The libertarian municipalist approach distinguishes statecraft -- which we usually characterize as "politics" today -- and politics as it once existed in precapitalist democratic communities.

Moreover, libertarian municipalism also involves a clear delineation of the social realm -- as well as the political realm -- in the strict meaning of the term *social*: notably, the arena in which we live our private lives and engage in production. As such, the social realm is to be distinguished from both the political and the statist realms. Enormous mischief has been caused by the interchangeable use of these terms -- social, political, and the state. Indeed, the tendency has been to identify them with one another in our thinking and in the reality of everyday life. But the state is a completely alien formation, a thorn in the side of human development, an exogenous entity that has incessantly encroached on the social and political realms. Often, in fact, the state has been an end in itself, as witness the rise of Asian empires, ancient imperial Rome, and the totalitarian state of modern times. More than this, it has steadily invaded the political domain, which, for all its past shortcomings, had empowered communities, social groupings, and individuals.

Such invasions have not gone unchallenged. Indeed, the conflict between the state on the one hand and the political and social realms on the other has been an ongoing subterranean civil war for centuries. It has often broken out into the open -- in modern times in the conflict of the Castilian cities (comuneros) against the Spanish monarchy in the 1520s, in the struggle of the Parisian sections against the centralist Jacobin Convention of 1793, and in endless other clashes both before and after these encounters.

Today, with the increasing centralization and concentration of power in the nation-state, a "new politics" -- one that is genuinely new -- must be structured institutionally around the restoration of power by municipalities. This is not only necessary but possible even in such gigantic urban areas as New York City, Montreal, London, and Paris. Such urban agglomerations are not, strictly speaking, cities or municipalities in the traditional sense of those terms, despite being designated as such by sociologists. It is only if we think that they *are* cities that we become mystified by problems of size and logistics. Even before we confront the ecological imperative of *physical* decentralization (a necessity anticipated by Frederick Engels and Peter Kropotkin alike), we need feel no problems about decentralizing them *institutionally*. When Francois Mitterand tried to decentralize Paris with local city halls a few years ago, his reasons were strictly tactical (he wanted to weaken the authority of the capital's right-wing mayor). Nonetheless, he failed not because restructuring the Large metropolis was impossible but because the majority of the affluent Parisians supported the mayor.

Clearly, institutional changes do not occur in a social vacuum. Nor do they guarantee that a decentralized municipality, even if it is structurally democratic. will necessarily be humane, rational, and ecological in dealing with public affairs. Libertarian municipalism is premised on the struggle to achieve a rational and ecological society, a struggle that depends on education and organization. From the beginning, it presupposes a genuinely democratic desire by people to arrest the growing powers of the nation-state and reclaim them for their community and their region. Unless there is a movement -- hopefully an effective Left Green movement -- to foster these aims, decentralization can lead to local parochialism as easily as it can lead to ecological humanist communities.

But when have basic social changes ever been without risk? The case that Marx's commitment to a centralized state and planned economy would inevitably yield bureaucratic totalitarianism could have been better made than the case that decentralized libertarian municipalities will inevitably be authoritarian and have exclusionary and parochial traits Economic interdependence is a fact of life today, and capitalism itself has made parochial autarchies a chimera. While municipalities and regions can seek to attain a considerable measure of self-aufficiency, we have long left the era when self-auffcient communities that can indulge their prejudices are possible.

Confederalism

Equally important is the need for *confederation* -- the interlinking of communities with one another through recallable deputies mandated by municipal citizens' assemblies and whose sole functions are coordinative and administrative. Confederation has a long history of its own that dates back to antiquity and that surfaced as a major alternative to the nation state. From the American Revolution through the French Revolution and the Spanish Revolution of 1936, confederalism constituted a major challenge to state centralism. Nor has it disappeared in our own time, when the breakup of existing twentieth-century empires raises the issue of enforced state centralism or the relatively autonomous nation. Libertarian municipalism adds a radically democratic dimension to the contemporary discussions of confederation (as, for example, in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia) by calling for confederations not of nation-states but of *municipalities* and of the neighborhoods of giant megalopolitan areas as well as towns and villages. In the case of libertarian municipalism' parochialism can thus be checked not only by the compelling realities of economic interdependence but by the commitment of municipal minorities to defer to the majority wishes of participating communities. Do these interdependencies and majority decisions guarantee us that a majority decision will be a correct one? Certainly not -- but our *chances* for a rational and ecological society are much better in this approach than in those that ride on centralized entities and bureaucratic apparatuses. I cannot help but marvel that no municipal network has been emergent among the German Greens, who have hundreds of representatives in city councils around Germany but who carry on a local politics that is completely conventional and self enclosed within particular towns and cities. Many arguments against libertarian municipalism -- even with its strong confederal emphasis derive from a failure to understand its distinction between policy-making and administration. This distinction is fundamental to libertarian municipalism and must always be kept in mind. *Policy* is made by a community or neighborhood assembly of free citizens; *administration* is performed by confederal councils composed of mandated, recallable deputies of wards, towns, and villages. If particular communities or neighborhoods -- or a minority grouping of them choose to go their own way to a point where human rights are violated or where ecological mayhem is permitted, the majority in a local or regional confederation has every right to prevent such malfeasances through its confederal council. This is not a denial of democracy but the assertion of a shared agreement by all to recognize civil rights and

maintain the ecological integrity of a region. These rights and needs are not asserted so much by a confederal council as by the majority of the popular assemblies conceived as one large community that expresses its wishes through its confederal deputies. Thus policy-making still remains local, but its administration is vested in the confederal network *as a whole*. The confederation in effect is a Community of communities based on distinct human rights and ecological imperatives.

If libertarian municipalism is not to be totally warped of its form and divested of its meaning, it is a desideratum that must be *fought* for. It speaks to a time -- hopefully, one that will yet come when people feel disempowered and actively seek empowerment. Existing in growing tension with the nation-state, it is a process as well as a destiny, a struggle to be fulfilled, not a bequest granted by the summits of the state. It is a *dual* power that contests the legitimacy of the existing *state* power. Such a movement can be expected to begin slowly, perhaps sporadically, in communities here and there that initially may demand only the *moral* authority to alter the structuring of society before enough interlinked confederations exist to demand the outright institutional power to replace the state. The growing tension created by the emergence of municipal confederations represents a confrontation between the state and the political realms. This confrontation can be resolved only after libertarian municipalism forms the new politics of a popular movement and ultimately captures the imagination of millions.

Certain points, however, should be obvious. The people who initially enter into the duel between confederalism and statism will not be the same human beings as those who eventually achieve libertarian municipalism. The movement that tries to educate them and the struggles that give libertarian municipalist principles reality will turn them into *active* citizens, rather than passive 'constituents." No one who participates in a struggle for social restructuring emerges from that struggle with the prejudices, habits, and sensibilities with which he or she entered it. Hopefully, then, such prejudices -- like parochialism -- will increasingly be replaced by a generous sense of cooperation and a caring sense of interdependence.

Municipalizing the Economy

It remains to emphasize that libertarian municipalism is not merely an evocation of all traditional antistatist notions of politics. Just as it redefines politics to include face-to-face municipal democracies graduated to confederal levels, so it includes a municipalist and confederal approach to economics. Minimally, a libertarian municipalist economics calls for the municipalization of the economy, not its centralization into state-owned "nationalized" enterprises on the one hand or its reduction to "worker-controlled" forms of collectivistic capitalism on the other. Trade-union control of "worker controlled" enterprises (that is, syndicalism) has had its day. This should be evident to anyone who examines the bureaucracies that even revolutionary trade unions spawned during the Spanish Civil War of 1936. Today, corporate capitalism too is increasingly eager to bring the worker into complicity with his or her own exploitation by means of "workplace democracy." Nor was the revolution in Spain or in other countries spared the existence of competition among worker-controlled enterprises for raw materials,

markets, and profits. Even more recently, many Israeli kibbutzim have been failures as examples of nonexploitative, need-oriented enterprises, despite the high ideals with which they were initially founded. Libertarian municipalism proposes a radically different form of economy one that is neither nationalized *nor* collectivized according to syndicalist precepts. It proposes that land and enterprises be placed increasingly in the custody of the community more precisely, the custody of citizens in free assemblies and their deputies in confederal councils. How work should be planned, what technologies should be used, how goods should be distributed are questions that can only be resolved in practice. The maxim "from each according to his or her ability, to each according to his or her needs" would seem a bedrock guide for an economically rational society, provided to be sure that goods are of the highest durability and quality, that needs are guided by rational and ecological standards, and that the ancient notions of limit and balance replace the bourgeois marketplace imperative of "grow or die."

In such a municipal economy -- confederal, interdependent, and rational by ecological, not simply technological, standards -- we would expect that the special interests that divide people today into workers, professionals, managers, and the like would be melded into a general interest in which people see themselves as *citizens* guided strictly by the needs of their community and region rather than by personal proclivities and vocational concerns. Here, citizenship would come into its own, and rational as well as ecological interpretations of the public good would supplant class and hierarchical interests.

This is the moral basis of a moral economy for moral communities. But of overarching importance is the general social interest that potentially underpins all moral communities, an interest that must ultimately cut across class, gender, ethnic, and status lines if humanity is to continue to exist as a viable species. This interest is the one created in our times by ecological catastrophe. Capitalism's "grow or die" imperative stands radically at odds with ecology's imperative of interdependence and limit The two imperatives can no longer coexist with each other -- nor can any society founded on the myth that they can be reconciled hope to survive. Either we will establish an ecological society, or society will go under for *everyone*, irrespective of his or her status.

Will this ecological society be authoritarian, or possibly even totalitarian, a hierarchial dispensation that is implicit in the image of the planet as a "spaceship" Or will it be democratic? If history is any guide, the development of a democratic ecological society, as distinguished from a commend ecological society, must follow its own logic. One cannot resolve this historical dilemma without getting to its roots. Without a searching analysis of our ecological problems and their social sources, the pernicious institutions that we now have will lead to increased centralization and further ecological catastrophe. In a democratic ecological society, those roots are literally the grass roots that libertarian municipalism seeks to foster.

For those who rightly call for a new technology, new sources of energy, new means of transportation, and new ecological lifeways, can a new society be anything less than a Community of communities based on confederation rather than statism? We already live in a world in which the economy is "overglobalized," overcentralized, and overbureaucratized. Much that can be done locally and regionally is now being done

largely for profit, military needs, and imperial appetites -- on a global scale with a seeming complexity that can actually be easily diminished.

If this seems too "utopian" for our time, then so must the present flood of literature that asks for radically sweeping shifts in energy policies, far-reaching reductions in air and water pollution, and the formulation of worldwide plans to arrest global warming and the destruction of the ozone layer be seen as "utopian."

Is it too much, it is fair to ask, to take such demands one step further and call for institutional and economic changes that are no less drastic and that in fact are based on traditions that are deeply sedimented in American -- indeed, the world's -- noblest democratic and political traditions?

Nor are we obliged to expect these changes to occur immediately. The Left long worked with minimum and maximum programs for change, in which immediate steps that can be taken now were linked by transitional advances and intermediate areas that would eventually yield ultimate goals. Minimal steps that can be taken now include initiating Left Green municipalist movements that propose popular neighborhood and town assemblies -- even if they have only moral functions at first -- and electing town and city councilors that advance the cause of these assemblies and other popular institutions. These minimal steps can lead step-by-step to the formation of confederal bodies and the increasing legitimation of truly democratic bodies. Civic banks to fund municipal enterprises and land purchases; the fostering of new ecologically oriented enterprises that are owned by the community; and the creation of grassroots networks in many fields of endeavor and the public weal -- all these can be developed at a pace appropriate to changes that are being made in political life.

That capital will likely "migrate" from communities and confederations that are moving toward libertarian municipalism is a problem that every community, every nation, whose political life has become radicalized has faced. Capital, in fact, *normally* "migrates" to areas where it can acquire high profits, irrespective of political considerations. Overwhelmed by fears of capital migration, a good case could be established for not rocking the political boat at *any* time. Far more to the point are that municipally owned enterprises and farms could provide new ecologically valuable and health-nourishing products to a public that is becoming increasingly aware of the low-quality goods and staples that are being foisted on it now. Libertarian municipalism is a politics that can excite the public imagination, appropriate for a movement that is direly in need of a sense of direction and purpose. The papers that appear in this collection offer ideas, ways, and means not only to undo the present social order but to remake it drastically -- expanding its residual democratic traditions into a rational and ecological society.

ADDENDUM

This addendum seems to be necessary because some of the opponents of libertarian municipalism -- and, regrettably, some of its acolyte -- misunderstand what libertarian municipalism seeks to achieve indeed, misunderstand its very nature.

For some of its instrumental acolytes, libertarian municipalism is becoming a tactical device to gain entry into so called independent movements and new third parties that call for "grassroots politics," such as those proposed by NOW and certain Labor leaders In the name of "libertarian municipalism," some radical acolytes of the view are prepared to blur the tension that they should *cultivate* between the civic realm and the state -- presumably to gain greater public attention in electoral campaigns for gubernatorial, congressional, and other state offices. These radicals regrettably warp libertarian municipalism into a mere "tactic" or "strategy" and drain it of its revolutionary content.

But those who propose to use tenets of libertarian municipalism for "tactical" reasons as a means to enter another reformist party or function as its "left wing" have little in common with the idea. Libertarian municipalism is not a product of the formal logic that has such deep roots in left-wing "analyses" and "strategies" today, despite the claims of many radicals that "dialectics" is their "method." The struggle toward creating new civic institutions out of old ones (or replacing the old ones altogether) and creating civic confederations is a self formative one, a creative dynamic formed from the tension of social conflict. The effort to work along these lines is as much a part of the end as the process of maturing from the child to the adult -- from the relatively undifferentiated to the fully differentiated -- with all its difficulties. The very *fight* for a municipal confederation, for municipal control of "property," and for the actual achievement of worldwide municipal confederation is directed toward achieving a new ethos of citizenship and community, not simply to gain victories in largely reformist conflicts.

Thus, libertarian municipalism is not merely an effort simply to "take over" city councils to construct a more "environmentally friendly" city government. These adherents or opponents of libertarian municipalism, in effect, look at the civic structures that exist before their eyes now and essentially (all rhetoric to the contrary aside) take them as they exist. Libertarian municipalism, by contrast, is an effort to transform and democratize city governments, to root them in popular assemblies, to knit them together along confederal lines, to appropriate a regional economy along confederal and municipal lines.

In fact, libertarian municipalism *gains its life and its integrity precisely from the dialectical tension it proposes between the nation-state and the municipal confederation. Its "law of life," to use an old Marxian term, consists precisely in its struggle with the state*. The *tension* between municipal confederations and the state must be *clear and uncompromising*. Since these confederations would exist primarily in *opposition* to statecraft, they cannot be compromised by state, provincial, or national elections, much less achieved by these means. Libertarian municipalism is *formed* by its struggle with the state, *strengthened* by this struggle, indeed *defined* by this struggle. Divested of this dialectical tension

with the state, of this duality of power that must ultimately be actualized in a free "Commune of communes," libertarian municipalism becomes little more than "sewer socialism."

Many heroic comrades who are prepared to do battle (one day) with the cosmic forces of capitalism find that libertarian municipalism is too thorny, irrelevant, or vague to deal with and opt for what is basically a form of political particularism. Our spray-can or ' alternative cafe" radicals may choose to brush libertarian municipalism aside as "a ludicrous tactic," but it never ceases to amaze me that well-meaning radicals who are committed to the "overthrow" of capitalism (no less!) find it too difficult to function politically -- and, yes, electorally -- in their own neighborhoods for a new politics based on a genuine democracy. If they cannot provide a transformative politics for their own neighborhood relatively modest task -- or diligently work at doing so with the constancy that used to mark the more mature left movements of the past, I find it very hard to believe that they will ever do much harm to the present social system. Indeed, by creating cultural centers, parks, and good housing, they may well be improving the system by giving capitalism a human face without diminishing its under lying unfreedom as a hierarchical and class society.

A bouquet of struggles for "identity" has often fractured rising radical movements since SDS in the 1960s, ranging from foreign to domestic nationalisms. Because these identity struggles are so popular today, some of the critics of libertarian municipalism invoke "public opinion" against it. But when has it been the task of revolutionaries to surrender to "public opinion" not even the "public opinion" of the oppressed, whose views can often be very reactionary? Truth has its own life -- regardless of whether the oppressed masses perceive or agree on what is true. Nor is it "elitist" to invoke truth, in contradiction to even radical public opinion, when that opinion essentially seeks a march backward into the politics of particularism and even racism. It is very easy to drop to all fours these days, but as radicals our most important need is to stand on two feet -- that is, to be as fully human as possible -- and to challenge the existing society in behalf of our shared common humanity, not on the basis of gender, race, age, and the like.

Critics of libertarian municipalism even dispute the very possibility of a "general interest." If, for such critics, the face-to-face democracy advocated by libertarian municipalism and the need to extend the premises of democracy beyond mere justice to complete freedom do not suffice as a "general interest," it would seem to me that the need to repair our relationship with the natural world is certainly a "general interest" that is beyond dispute -- and, indeed, it remains the "general interest" advanced by social ecology. It may be possible to coopt many dissatisfied elements in the present society, but nature is not cooptable. Indeed, the only politics that remains for the Left is one based on the premise that there is a "general interest" in democratizing society and preserving the planet Now that traditional forces such as the workers' movement have ebbed from the historical scene, it can be said with almost complete certainty that without libertarian municipalism, the left will have no politics whatever.

A dialectical view of the relationship of confederalism to the nation-state, an understanding of the narrowness, introverted character, and parochialism of identity-movements. and a recognition that the

workers' movement is essentially dead all illustrate that if a new politics is going to develop today, it must be unflinchingly public, in contrast to the alternative-cafe "politics" advanced by many radicals today. It must be electoral on a municipal basis, confederal in its vision, and revolutionary in its character. Indeed, in my view, libertarian municipalism, with its emphasis on confederalism, is precisely the "Commune of communes" for which anarchists have fought over the past two centuries. Today, it is the "red button" that must be pushed if a radical movement is to open the door to the public sphere. To leave that red button untouched and slip back into the worst habits of the post-1968 New Left, when the notion of "power" was divested of utopian or imaginative qualities, is to reduce radicalism to yet another subculture that will probably live more on heroic memories than on the hopes of a rational future.

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What is Communalism?

The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism

1994

Seldom have socially important words become more confused and divested of their historic meaning than they are at present. Two centuries ago, it is often forgotten, "democracy" was deprecated by monarchists and republicans alike as "mob rule." Today, democracy is hailed as "representative democracy," an oxymoron that refers to little more than a republican oligarchy of the chosen few who ostensibly speak for the powerless many.

"Communism," for its part, once referred to a cooperative society that would be based morally on mutual respect and on an economy in which each contributed to the social labor fund according to his or her ability and received the means of life according to his or her needs. Today, "communism" is associated with the Stalinist gulag and wholly rejected as totalitarian. Its cousin, "socialism" -- which once denoted a politically free society based on various forms of collectivism and equitable material returns for labor -- is currently interchangeable with a somewhat humanistic bourgeois liberalism.

During the 1980s and 1990s, as the entire social and political spectrum has shifted ideologically to the right, "anarchism" itself has not been immune to redefinition. In the Anglo-American sphere, anarchism is being divested of its social ideal by an emphasis on personal autonomy, an emphasis that is draining it of its historic vitality. A Stirnerite individualism -- marked by an advocacy of lifestyle changes, the cultivation of behavioral idiosyncrasies and even an embrace of outright mysticism -- has become increasingly prominent. This personalistic "lifestyle anarchism" is steadily eroding the socialistic core of anarchist concepts of freedom.

Let me stress that in the British and American social tradition, autonomy and freedom are not equivalent terms. By insisting the need to eliminate personal domination, autonomy focuses on the individual as the

formative component and locus of society. By contrast, freedom, despite its looser usages, denotes the absence of domination in society, of which the individual is part. This contrast becomes very important when individualist anarchists equate collectivism as such with the tyranny of the community over its members.

Today, if an anarchist theorist like L. Susan Brown can assert that "a group is a collection of individuals, no more and no less," rooting anarchism in the abstract individual, we have reason to be concerned. Not that this view is entirely new to anarchism; various anarchist historians have described it as implicit in the libertarian outlook. Thus the individual appears ab novo, endowed with natural rights and bereft of roots in society or historical development.1

But whence does this "autonomous" individual derive? What is the basis for its "natural rights," beyond a priori premises and hazy intuitions? What role does historical development play in its formation? What social premises give birth to it, sustain it, indeed nourish it? How can a "collection of individuals" institutionalize itself such as to give rise to something more than an autonomy that consists merely in refusing to impair the "liberties" of others -- or "negative liberty," as Isaiah Berlin called it in contradistinction to "positive liberty," which is substantive freedom, in our case constructed along socialistic lines?

In the history of ideas, "autonomy," referring to strictly personal "self-rule," found its ancient apogee in the imperial Roman cult of libertas. During the rule of the Julian-Claudian Caesars, the Roman citizen enjoyed a great deal of autonomy to indulge his own desires -- and lusts -- without reproval from any authority, provided that he did not interfere with the business and the needs of the state. In the more theoretically developed liberal tradition of John Locke and John Stuart Mill, autonomy acquired a more expansive sense that was opposed ideologically to excessive state authority. During the nineteenth century, if there was any single subject that gained the interest of classical liberals, it was political economy, which they often conceived not only as the study of goods and services, but also as a system of morality. Indeed, liberal thought generally reduced the social to the economic. Excessive state authority was opposed in favor of a presumed economic autonomy. Ironically, liberals often invoked the word freedom, in the sense of "autonomy," as they do to the present day.2

Despite their assertions of autonomy and distrust of state authority, however, these classical liberal thinkers did not in the last instance hold to the notion that the individual is completely free from lawful guidance. Indeed, their interpretation of autonomy actually presupposed quite definite arrangements beyond the individual -- notably, the laws of the marketplace. Individual autonomy to the contrary, these laws constitute a social organizing system in which all "collections of individuals" are held under the

sway of the famous "invisible hand" of competition. Paradoxically, the laws of the marketplace override the exercise of "free will" by the same sovereign individuals who otherwise constitute the "collection of individuals."

No rationally formed society can exist without institutions and if a society as a "collection of individuals, no more and no less" were ever to emerge, it would simply dissolve. Such a dissolution, to be sure, would never happen in reality. The liberals, nonetheless, can cling to the notion of a "free market" and "free competition" guided by the "inexorable laws" of political economy.

Alternatively, freedom, a word that shares etymological roots with the German Freiheit (for which there is no equivalent in Romance languages), takes its point of departure not from the individual but from the community or, more broadly, from society. In the last century and early in the present one, as the great socialist theorists further sophisticated ideas of freedom, the individual and his or her development were consciously intertwined with social evolution -- specifically, the institutions that distinguish society from mere animal aggregations.

What made their focus uniquely ethical was the fact that as social revolutionaries they asked the key question -- What constitutes a rational society? -- a question that abolishes the centrality of economics in a free society. Where liberal thought generally reduced the social to the economic, various socialisms (apart from Marxism), among which Kropotkin denoted anarchism the "left wing," dissolved the economic into the social.3

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Enlightenment thought and its derivatives brought the idea of the mutability of institutions to the foreground of social thought, the individual, too, came to be seen as mutable. To the socialistic thinkers of the period, a "collection" was a totally alien way of denoting society; they properly considered individual freedom to be congruent with social freedom and, very significantly, they defined freedom as such as an evolving, as well as a unifying, concept.

In short, both society and the individual were historicized in the best sense of this term: as an ever-developing, self-generative and creative process in which each existed within and through the other. Hopefully, this historicization would be accompanied by ever-expanding new rights and duties. The slogan of the First International, in fact, was the demand, "No rights without duties, no duties without rights" -- a demand that later appeared on the mastheads of anarchosyndicalist periodicals in Spain and elsewhere well into the present century.

Thus, for classical socialist thinkers, to conceive of the individual without society was as meaningless as

to conceive of society without individuals. They sought to realize both in rational institutional frameworks that fostered the greatest degree of free expression in every aspect of social life.

II

Individualism, as conceived by classical liberalism, rested on a fiction to begin with. Its very presupposition of a social "lawfulness" maintained by marketplace competition was far removed from its myth of the totally sovereign, "autonomous" individual. With even fewer presuppositions to support itself, the woefully undertheorized work of Max Stirner shared a similar disjunction: the ideological disjunction between the ego and society.

The pivotal issue that reveals this disjunction -- indeed, this contradiction -- is the question of democracy. By democracy, of course, I do not mean "representative government" in any form, but rather face-to-face democracy. With regard to its origins in classical Athens, democracy as I use it is the idea of the direct management of the polis by its citizenry in popular assemblies -- which is not to downplay the fact that Athenian democracy was scarred by patriarchy, slavery, class rule and the restriction of citizenship to males of putative Athenian birth. What I am referring to is an evolving tradition of institutional structures, not a social "model."4 Democracy generically defined, then, is the direct management of society in face-to-face assemblies -- in which policy is formulated by the resident citizenry and administration is executed by mandated and delegated councils.

Libertarians commonly consider democracy, even in this sense, as a form of "rule" -- since in making decisions, a majority view prevails and thus "rules" over a minority. As such, democracy is said to be inconsistent with a truly libertarian ideal. Even so knowledgeable a historian of anarchism as Peter Marshall observes that, for anarchists, "the majority has no more right to dictate to the minority, even a minority of one, than the minority to the majority."5 Scores of libertarians have echoed this idea time and again.

What is striking about assertions like Marshall's is their highly pejorative language. Majorities, it would seem, neither "decide" nor "debate": rather, they "rule," "dictate," "command," "coerce" and the like. In a free society that not only permitted, but fostered the fullest degree of dissent, whose podiums at assemblies and whose media were open to the fullest expression of all views, whose institutions were truly forums for discussion -- one may reasonably ask whether such a society would actually "dictate" to anyone when it had to arrive at a decision that concerned the public welfare.

How, then, would society make dynamic collective decisions about public affairs, aside from mere

individual contracts? The only collective alternative to majority voting as a means of decision-making that is commonly presented is the practice of consensus. Indeed, consensus has even been mystified by avowed "anarcho-primitivists," who consider Ice Age and contemporary "primitive" or "primal" peoples to constitute the apogee of human social and psychic attainment. I do not deny that consensus may be an appropriate form of decision-making in small groups of people who are thoroughly familiar with one another. But to examine consensus in practical terms, my own experience has shown me that when larger groups try to make decisions by consensus, it usually obliges them to arrive at the lowest common intellectual denominator in their decision-making: the least controversial or even the most mediocre decision that a sizable assembly of people can attain is adopted -- precisely because everyone must agree with it or else withdraw from voting on that issue. More disturbingly, I have found that it permits an insidious authoritarianism and gross manipulations -- even when used in the name of autonomy or freedom.

To take a very striking case in point: the largest consensus-based movement (involving thousands of participants) in recent memory in the United States was the Clamshell Alliance, which was formed to oppose the Seabrook nuclear reactor in the mid-1970s in New Hampshire. In her recent study of the movement, Barbara Epstein has called the Clamshell the "first effort in American history to base a mass movement on nonviolent direct action" other than the 1960s civil rights movement. As a result of its apparent organizational success, many other regional alliances against nuclear reactors were formed throughout the United States.

I can personally attest to the fact that within the Clamshell Alliance, consensus was fostered by often cynical Quakers and by members of a dubiously "anarchic" commune that was located in Montague, Massachusetts. This small, tightly knit faction, unified by its own hidden agendas, was able to manipulate many Clamshell members into subordinating their goodwill and idealistic commitments to those opportunistic agendas. The de facto leaders of the Clamshell overrode the rights and ideals of the innumerable individuals who entered it and undermined their morale and will.

In order for that clique to create full consensus on a decision, minority dissenters were often subtly urged or psychologically coerced to decline to vote on a troubling issue, inasmuch as their dissent would essentially amount to a one-person veto. This practice, called "standing aside" in American consensus processes, all too often involved intimidation of the dissenters, to the point that they completely withdrew from the decision-making process, rather than make an honorable and continuing expression of their dissent by voting, even as a minority, in accordance with their views. Having withdrawn, they ceased to be political beings -- so that a "decision" could be made. More than one "decision" in the Clamshell Alliance was made by pressuring dissenters into silence and, through a chain of such intimidations,

"consensus" was ultimately achieved only after dissenting members nullified themselves as participants in the process.

On a more theoretical level, consensus silenced that most vital aspect of all dialogue, dissensus. The ongoing dissent, the passionate dialogue that still persists even after a minority accedes temporarily to a majority decision, was replaced in the Clamshell by dull monologues -- and the uncontroverted and deadening tone of consensus. In majority decision-making, the defeated minority can resolve to overturn a decision on which they have been defeated -- they are free to openly and persistently articulate reasoned and potentially persuasive disagreements. Consensus, for its part, honors no minorities, but mutes them in favor of the metaphysical "one" of the "consensus" group.

The creative role of dissent, valuable as an ongoing democratic phenomenon, tends to fade away in the gray uniformity required by consensus. Any libertarian body of ideas that seeks to dissolve hierarchy, classes, domination and exploitation by allowing even Marshall's "minority of one" to block decision-making by the majority of a community, indeed, of regional and nationwide confederations, would essentially mutate into a Rousseauean "general will" with a nightmare world of intellectual and psychic conformity. In more gripping times, it could easily "force people to be free," as Rousseau put it -- and as the Jacobins practiced it in 1793-94.

The de facto leaders of the Clamshell were able to get away with their behavior precisely because the Clamshell was not sufficiently organized and democratically structured, such that it could countervail the manipulation of a well-organized few. The de facto leaders were subject to few structures of accountability for their actions. The ease with which they cannily used consensus decision-making for their own ends has been only partly told,6 but consensus practices finally shipwrecked this large and exciting organization with its Rousseauean "republic of virtue." It was also ruined, I may add, by an organizational laxity that permitted mere passersby to participate in decision-making, thereby destructuring the organization to the point of invertebracy. It was for good reason that I and many young anarchists from Vermont who had actively participated in the Alliance for some few years came to view consensus as anathema.

If consensus could be achieved without compulsion of dissenters, a process that is feasible in small groups, who could possibly oppose it as a decision-making process? But to reduce a libertarian ideal to the unconditional right of a minority -- let alone a "minority of one" -- to abort a decision by a "collection of individuals" is to stifle the dialectic of ideas that thrives on opposition, confrontation and, yes, decisions with which everyone need not agree and should not agree, lest society become an ideological cemetery. Which is not to deny dissenters every opportunity to reverse majority decisions by unimpaired

discussion and advocacy.

III

I have dwelled on consensus at some length because it constitutes the usual individualistic alternative to democracy, so commonly counterposed as "no rule" -- or a free-floating form of personal autonomy -- against majority "rule." Inasmuch as libertarian ideas in the United States and Britain are increasingly drifting toward affirmations of personal autonomy, the chasm between individualism and antistatist collectivism is becoming unbridgeable, in my view. A personalistic anarchism has taken deep root among young people today. Moreover, they increasingly use the word "anarchy" to express not only a personalistic stance, but also an antirational, mystical, antitechnological and anticivilizational body of views that makes it impossible for anarchists who anchor their ideas in socialism to apply the word "anarchist" to themselves without a qualifying adjective. Howard Ehrlich, one of our ablest and most concerned American comrades, uses the phrase "social anarchism" as the title of his magazine, apparently to distinguish his views from an anarchism that is ideologically anchored in liberalism and possibly worse.

I would like to suggest that far more than a qualifying adjective is needed if we are to elaborate our notion of freedom more expansively. It would be unfortunate indeed if libertarians today had to literally explain that they believe in a society, not a mere collection of individuals! A century ago, this belief was presupposed; today, so much has been stripped away from the collectivistic flesh of classical anarchism that it is on the verge of becoming a personal life-stage for adolescents and a fad for their middle-aged mentors, a route to "self-realization" and the seemingly "radical" equivalent of encounter groups.

Today, there must be a place on the political spectrum where a body of anti-authoritarian thought that advances humanity's bitter struggle to arrive at the realization of its authentic social life -- the famous "Commune of communes" -- can be clearly articulated institutionally as well as ideologically. There must be a means by which socially concerned anti-authoritarians can develop a program and a practice for attempting to change the world, not merely their psyches. There must be an arena of struggle that can mobilize people, help them to educate themselves and develop an anti-authoritarian politics, to use this word in its classical meaning, indeed that pits a new public sphere against the State and capitalism.

In short, we must recover not only the socialist dimension of anarchism but its political dimension: democracy. Bereft of its democratic dimension and its communal or municipal public sphere, anarchism may indeed denote little more than a "collection of individuals, no more and no less." Even anarcho-communism, although it is by far the most preferable of adjectival modifications of the

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libertarian ideal, nonetheless retains a structural vagueness that tells us nothing about the institutions necessary to expedite a communistic distribution of goods. It spells out a broad goal, a desideratum -- one, alas, terribly tarnished by the association of "communism" with Bolshevism and the state -- but its public sphere and forms of institutional association remain unclear at best and susceptible to a totalitarian onus at worst.

I wish to propose that the democratic and potentially practicable dimension of the libertarian goal be expressed as Communalism, a term that, unlike political terms that once stood unequivocally for radical social change, has not been historically sullied by abuse. Even ordinary dictionary definitions of Communalism, I submit, capture to a great degree the vision of a "Commune of communes" that is being lost by current Anglo-American trends that celebrate anarchy variously as "chaos," as a mystical "oneness" with "nature," as self-fulfillment or as "ecstasy," but above all as personalistic.7

Communalism is defined as "a theory or system of government [sic!] in which virtually autonomous [sic!] local communities are loosely in a federation."8 No English dictionary is very sophisticated politically. This use of the terms "government" and "autonomous" does not commit us to an acceptance of the State and parochialism, let alone individualism. Further, federation is often synonymous with confederation, the term I regard as more consistent with the libertarian tradition. What is remarkable about this (as yet) unsullied term is its extraordinary proximity to libertarian municipalism, the political dimension of social ecology that I have advanced at length elsewhere.

In Communalism, libertarians have an available word that they can enrich as much by experience as by theory. Most significantly, the word can express not only what we are against, but also what we are for, namely the democratic dimension of libertarian thought and a libertarian form of society. It is a word that is meant for a practice that can tear down the ghetto walls that are increasingly imprisoning anarchism in cultural exotica and psychological introversion. It stands in explicit opposition to the suffocating individualism that sits so comfortably side-by-side with bourgeois self-centeredness and a moral relativism that renders any social action irrelevant, indeed, institutionally meaningless.

It is important to emphasize that libertarian municipalism--or Communalism, as I have called it here--is a developing outlook, a politics that seeks ultimately to achieve the "Commune of communes." As such, it tries to provide a directly democratic confederal alternative to the state and to a centralized bureaucratic society. To challenge the validity of libertarian municipalism, as many liberals and ecosocialists have, on the premise that the size of existing urban entities raises an insurmountable logistical obstacles to its successful practice is to turn it into a chess "strategy" and freeze it within the given conditions of society, then tally up debits and credits to determine its potential for "success," "effectiveness," "high levels of

participation," and the like. Libertarian municipalism is not a form of social bookkeeping for conditions as they are but rather a transformative process that starts with what can be changed within present conditions as a valid point of departure for achieving what should be in a rational society.

Libertarian municipalism is above all a politics, to use this word in its original Hellenic sense, that is engaged in the process of remaking what are now called "electoral constituents" or "taxpayers" into active citizens, and of remaking what are now urban conglomerations into genuine communities related to each other through confederations that would countervail and ultimately challenge the existence of the state. To see it otherwise is to reduce this multifaceted, processual development to a caricature. Nor is libertarian municipalism intended as a substitute for association as such--for the familial and economic aspects of life--without which human existence is impossible in any society.9 It is rather an outlook and a developing practice for recovering and enlarging on an unprecedented scale what is now a declining public sphere, one that the state has invaded and in many cases virtually eliminated.10 If the large size of municipal entities and the decline of the public sphere are accepted as unalterable givens, then we are left with no hope but to work with the given in every sphere of human activity--in which case, anarchists might as well join with social-democrats (as quite a few have, for all practical purposes) to work with and merely modify the state apparatus, the market, and a commodity system of relationships. Indeed, on the basis of such commonsensical reasoning, a far stronger argument could be made for preserving the state, the market, the use of money, and global corporations than could be made merely for decentralizing urban agglomerations. In fact, many urban agglomerations are already groaning physically and logistically under the burden of their size and are reconstituting themselves into satellite cities before our very eyes, even though their populations and physical jurisdictions are still grouped under the name of a single metropolis.

Strangely, many life-style anarchists, who, like New Age visionaries, have a remarkable ability to imagine changing everything tend to raise strong objections when they are asked to actually change anything in the existing society--except to cultivate greater "self-expression," have more mystical reveries, and turn their anarchism into an art form, retreating into social quietism. When critics of libertarian municipalism bemoan the prohibitively large number of people who are likely to attend municipal assemblies or function as active participants in them--and question how "practical" such assemblies could be--in large cities like New York, Mexico City, and Tokyo, may I suggest that a Communalist approach raises the issue of whether we can indeed change the existing society at all and achieve the "Commune of communes."

If such a Communalist approach seems terribly formidable, I can only suspect that for life-style anarchists the battle is already lost. For my part, if anarchy came to mean little more than an aesthetics of

"self-cultivation," an titillating riot, spraycan graffiti, or the heroics of personalistic acts nourished by a self-indulgent "imaginary," I would have little in common with it. Theatrical personalism became too much in style when the sixties counterculture turned into the seventies New Age culture--and became a model for bourgeois fashion designers and boutiques.

IV

Anarchism is on the retreat today. If we fail to elaborate the democratic dimension of anarchism, we will miss the opportunity not only to form a vital movement, but to prepare people for a revolutionary social praxis in the future. Alas, we are witnessing the appalling desiccation of a great tradition, such that neo-Situationists, nihilists, primitivists, antirationalists, anticivilizationists and avowed "chaotics" are closeting themselves in their egos, reducing anything resembling public political activity to juvenile antics.

None of which is to deny the importance of a libertarian culture, one that is aesthetic, playful, and broadly imaginative. The anarchists of the last century and part of the present one justifiably took pride in the fact that many innovative artists, particularly painters and novelists, aligned themselves with anarchic views of reality and morality. But behavior that verges on a mystification of criminality, asociality, intellectual incoherence, anti-intellectualism and disorder for its own sake is simply lumpen. It feeds on the dregs of capitalism itself. However much such behavior invokes the "rights" of the ego as it dissolves the political into the personal or inflates the personal into a transcendental category, it is a priori in the sense that has no origins outside the mind to even potentially support it. As Bakunin and Kropotkin argued repeatedly, individuality has never existed apart from society and the individual's own evolution has been coextensive with social evolution. To speak of "The Individual" apart from its social roots and social involvements is as meaningless as to speak of a society that contains no people or institutions.

Merely to exist, institutions must have form, as I argued some thirty years ago in my essay "The Forms of Freedom," lest freedom itself -- individual as well as social -- lose its definability. Institutions must be rendered functional, not abstracted into Kantian categories that float in a rarefied academic air. They must have the tangibility of structure, however offensive a term like structure may be to individualist libertarians: concretely, they must have the means, policies and experimental praxis to arrive at decisions. Unless everyone is to be so psychologically homogeneous and society's interests so uniform in character that dissent is simply meaningless, there must be room for conflicting proposals, discussion, rational explication and majority decisions -- in short, democracy.

Like it or not, such a democracy, if it is libertarian, will be Communalist and institutionalized in such a

way that it is face-to-face, direct, and grassroots, a democracy that advances our ideas beyond negative liberty to positive liberty. A Communalist democracy obliges us to develop a public sphere -- and in the Athenian meaning of the term, a politics -- that grows in tension and ultimately in a decisive conflict with the State.

Confederal, antihierarchical, and collectivist, based on the municipal management of the means of life rather than their control by vested interests (such as workers' control, private control, and more dangerously, State control), it may justly be regarded as the processual actualization of the libertarian ideal as a daily praxis.9

The fact that a Communalist politics entails participation in municipal elections -- based, to be sure, on an unyielding program that demands the formation of popular assemblies and their confederation -- does not mean that entry into existing village, town and city councils involves participation in state organs, any more than establishing an anarchosyndicalist union in a privately owned factory involves participation in capitalist forms of production. One need only turn to the French Revolution of 1789-94 to see how seemingly state institutions, like the municipal "districts" established under the monarchy in 1789 to expedite elections to the Estates General, were transformed four years later into largely revolutionary bodies, or "sections," that nearly gave rise to the "Commune of communes." Their movement for a sectional democracy was defeated during the insurrection of June 2, 1793 -- not at the hands of the monarchy, but by the treachery of the Jacobins.

Capitalism will not generously provide us the popular democratic institutions we need. Its control over society today is ubiquitous, not only in what little remains of the public sphere, but in the minds of many self-styled radicals. A revolutionary people must either assert their control over institutions that are basic to their public lives -- which Bakunin correctly perceived to be their municipal councils -- or else they will have no choice but to withdraw into their private lives, as is already happening on an epidemic scale today.10 It would be ironic, indeed, if an individualist anarchism and its various mutations, from the academic and transcendentally moral to the chaotic and the lumpen, in the course of rejecting democracy even for "a minority of one," were to further raise the walls of dogma that are steadily growing around the libertarian ideal, and if, wittingly or not, anarchism were to turn into another narcissistic cult that snugly fits into an alienated, commodified, introverted and egocentric society.

-- September 18, 1994

1: L. Susan Brown: The Politics of Individualism (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1993), p. 12. I do not question the sincerity of Brown's libertarian views; she regards herself as an anarcho-communist, as do I.

But she makes no direct attempt to reconcile her individualistic views with communism in any form. Both Bakunin and Kropotkin would have strongly disagreed with her formulation of what constitutes "a group," while Margaret Thatcher, clearly for reasons of her own, might be rather pleased with it, since it is so akin to the former British prime minister's notorious statement that there is no such thing as society -- there are only individuals. Certainly Brown is not a Thatcherite, nor Thatcher an anarchist, but however different they may be in other respects, both have ideological filiations with classical liberalism that make their shared affirmations of the "autonomy" of the individual possible. I cannot ignore the fact, however, that neither Bakunin's, Kropotkin's nor my own views are treated with any depth in Brown's book (pp. 156-62), and her account of them is filled with serious inaccuracies.

2: Liberals were not always in accord with each other nor did they hold notably coherent doctrines. Mill, a free-thinking humanitarian and utilitarian, in fact exhibited a measure of sympathy for socialism. I am not singling out here any particular liberal theorist, be he Mill, Adam Smith or Friedrich Hayek. Each had or has his or her individual eccentricity or personal line of thought. I am speaking of traditional liberalism as a whole, whose general features involve a belief in the "laws" of the marketplace and "free" competition. Marx was by no means free of this influence: he, too, unrelentingly tried to discover "laws" of society, as did many socialists during the last century, including utopians like Charles Fourier.

3: See Kropotkin's "Anarchism," the famous Encyclopaedia Britannica article that became one of his most widely read works. Republished in Roger N. Baldwin, ed., Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets: A Collection of Writings by Peter Kropotkin (Vanguard Press, 1927; reprinted by Dover, 1970).

4: I have never regarded the classical Athenian democracy as a "model" or an "ideal" to be restored in a rational society. I have long cited Athens with admiration for one reason: the polis around Periclean times provides us with striking evidence that certain structures can exist -- policy-making by an assembly, rotation and limitation of public offices and defense by a nonprofessional armed citizenry. The Mediterranean world of the fifth century B.C.E. was largely based on monarchical authority and repressive custom. That all Mediterranean societies of that time required or employed patriarchy, slavery and the State (usually in an absolutist form) makes the Athenian experience all the more remarkable for what it uniquely introduced into social life, including an unprecedented degree of free expression. It would be naive to suppose that Athens could have risen above the most basic attributes of ancient society in its day, which, from a distance of 2,400 years we now have the privilege of judging as ugly and inhuman. Regrettably, no small number of people today are willing to judge the past by the present.

5: Peter Marshall, Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 22.

6: Barbara Epstein, Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Non-Violent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), especially pp. 59, 78, 89, 94-95, 167-68, 177. Although I disagree with some of the facts and conclusions in Epstein's book -- based on my personal as well as general knowledge of the Clamshell Alliance -- she vividly portrays the failure of consensus in this movement.

7: The association of "chaos," "nomadism," and "cultural terrorism" with "ontological anarchy" (as though the bourgeoisie had not turned such antics into an "ecstasy industry" in the United States) is fully explicated in Hakim Bey's (aka Peter Lamborn Wilson) T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone (New York: Autonomedia, 1985). The Yuppie Whole Earth Review celebrates this pamphlet as the most influential and widely read "manifesto" of America's countercultural youth, noting with approval that it is happily free of conventional anarchist attacks upon capitalism. This kind of detritus from the 1960s is echoed in one form or another by most American anarchist newssheets that pander to youth who have not yet "had their fun before it is time to grow up" (a comment I heard years later from Parisian student activists of '68) and become real estate agents and accountants.

For an "ecstatic experience," visitors to New York's Lower East Side (near St. Mark's Place) can dine, I am told, at Anarchy Café. This establishment offers fine dining from an expensive menu, a reproduction of the famous mural The Fourth Estate on the wall, perhaps to aid in digestion, and a maitre d' to greet Yuppie customers. I cannot attest to whether the writings of Guy Debord, Raoul Vaneigem, Fredy Perlman and Hakim Bey are on sale there or whether copies of Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed, The Fifth Estate or Demolition Derby are available for perusal, but happily there are enough exotic bookstores nearby to buy them.

8: Quoted from The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1978).

9: History provides no "model" for libertarian municipalism, be it Periclean Athens, or a tribe, village, town, or city--or a hippie commune or Buddhist ashram. Nor is the "affinity group" a model--the Spanish anarchists used this word interchangeably with "action group" to refer to an organizational unit for the FAI, not to the institutional basis for a libertarian society.

10: A detailed discussion of the differences between the social domain, which includes the ways in which we associate for personal and economic ends; the public sphere or political domain; and the state in all its phases and forms of development can be found in my book Urbanization Without Cities (1987; Montreal:

Black Rose Books, 1992).

11: I should emphasize that I am not counterposing a Communalist democracy to such enterprises as cooperatives, people's clinics, communes, and the like. But there should be no illusions that such enterprises are more than exercises in popular control and ways of bringing people together in a highly atomized society. No food cooperative can replace giant retail food markets under capitalism and no clinic can replace hospital complexes, any more than a craft shop can replace factories or plants. I should observe that the Spanish anarchists, almost from their inception, took full note of the limits of the cooperativist movement in the 1880s, when such movements were in fact more feasible than they are today, and they significantly separated themselves from cooperativism programmatically.

12: For Bakunin, the people "have a healthy, practical common sense when it comes to communal affairs. They are fairly well informed and know how to select from their midst the most capable officials. This is why municipal elections always best reflect the real attitude and will of the people." Bakunin on Anarchy, Sam Dolgoff, ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972; republished by Black Rose Books: Montreal), p. 223. I have omitted the queasy interpolations that Dolgoff inserted to "modify" Bakunin's meaning. It may be well to note that anarchism in the last century was more plastic and flexible than it is today.