

A POLITICS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Thank you for the privilege of addressing your conference on libertarian municipalism, if only by means of a videotape. Unfortunately, I am incapable of attending the conference because of my physical infirmities and the general weariness that comes with age. However much I dislike electronic means of engaging in what should optimally be face-to-face discussions, I must yield to the unavoidable need to present my views less directly than I would have liked. I hope you will not regard this as a justification on my part of "electronic democracy," a notion that is so much in vogue today. With this apology, allow me to make some observations about the meaning of libertarian municipalism and respond to some of the criticisms that have been made of the theory and practice it advances.

I

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

Where most anarchist communists in the past have regarded the Federation of communes as an ideal to be achieved after an insurrection, libertarian municipalists, I

contend, regard the Federation or Confederation of communes as a political practice that can be developed, at least partly, prior to an outright revolutionary confrontation with the State--a confrontation which, in my view, cannot be avoided and, if anything, should be encouraged by increasing the tension between the state and federations of municipalities. In fact, libertarian municipalism is a communalist practice for creating a revolutionary culture, and for bringing revolutionary change into complete conformity with the goals of anarchist communism.

In the last case, it unifies practice and ideal into a single and coherent means-and-ends approach for initiating a libertarian communist society, without any disjunction between the strategy for achieving such a society and the society itself. Nor does libertarian municipalism cultivate the illusion that the state and bourgeoisie will allow such a continuum to find fulfillment without open struggle, as some advocates of so-called confederal municipalism and localist politics have argued.

It would be helpful to place libertarian municipalism in a broad historical perspective, all the more to understand its revolutionary character in human affairs generally as well as its place in the repertoire of anti-statist practices. The commune, the town or city, or more broadly, the municipality, is not merely a "space" created by a given density of human habitations. In terms of its history as a civilizing tendency in humanity's development, the municipality is integrally part of the sweeping process whereby human beings began to dissolve biologically conditioned social relations based on real or fictitious blood ties, with their primordial hostility to "strangers," and slowly replace them by largely social and rational institutions, rights, and duties that increasingly encompassed all residents of an urban space, irrespective of consanguinity and biological facts. The town, city, municipality, or commune (the equivalent word, in Latin countries, for "municipality") was the emerging civic substitute, based on residence and social interests, for the tribal blood group, which had been based on myths of a common ancestry. The municipality, however slowly and incompletely, formed the necessary condition for human association based on rational discourse, material interest, and a secular culture, irrespective of and often in conflict with ancestral roots and blood ties. Indeed, the fact that we can meet here peacefully in Lisbon, even discuss and share creatively in the exchange of ideas without any hostility or suspicion, despite our disparate ethnic, linguistic, and national backgrounds, is a grand historic achievement of

civilization, one that is the work of centuries involving a painful discarding of primordial definitions of ancestry, and the replacement of these archaic definitions by reason, knowledge, and a growing sense of our status as members of a common humanity.

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

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

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

I do not presume to claim that a confederation of libertarian municipalities--a Commune of communes--has ever existed in the past. Yet no matter how frequently I disclaim the existence of any historical "models" and "paradigms" for libertarian

municipalities, my critics still try to saddle me with the many social defects of Athens, revolutionary New England towns, and the like, as somehow an integral part of my "ideals." This criticism is cynical demagogic and beneath contempt. I privilege no single city or group of cities--be they classical Athens, the free cities of the medieval world, the town meetings of the American Revolution, the sections of the Great French Revolution, or the anarchosyndicalist collectives that emerged in the Spanish Revolution--as the full actualization, still less the comprehensive "models" or "paradigms," of the libertarian municipalist vision.

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

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

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

By this I do not mean only an assembly, where citizens discuss and gird themselves to fight for specific policies; I also mean the neighborhood as the center of a town, where citizens may gather as a large group to share their views and give public expression to their policies. This was the function of the Athenian agora, for example,

and the town squares in the Middle Ages. The spaces for political life may be multiple, but they are generally highly specific and definable, not random or ad hoc.

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

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

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

II.

A problem exists in anarchist communist theory: namely that a political sphere, distinguishable from the state and potentially libertarian in its possibilities, must be acknowledged, and its potentialities for a truly libertarian politics must be explored. We cannot simply content ourselves with simplistically dividing civilization into a workaday world of everyday life that is properly **social,** as I call it, in which we reproduce the conditions of our individual existence at work, in the home, and among our friends, and, of course, the **state,** which reduces us at best to docile observers of the activities of professionals who administer our civic and national affairs. Between these two worlds is still another world, the realm of the **political,** where our ancestors in the past, at

various times and places historically, exercised varying, sometimes complete control over the commune and the confederation to which it belonged.

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

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

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

Indeed, let us also acknowledge that the state itself underwent a process of development and differentiation, at times developing no further than a loose, almost minimal system of coercion; extending further at other times into an ever-growing apparatus; finally, in this century in particular, acquiring totalitarian control over every aspect of human existence--an apparatus that was only too familiar thousands of years ago in Asia and even in Indian America in pre-Columbian times. The classical Athenian state was only partially statist; it constituted a fraternity, often riven by class conflicts, of select citizens who collectively oppressed slaves, women, and even foreign residents. The medieval state was often a much looser state formation than, say, the Roman imperial state, and at various times in history (one thinks of the comuneros in Spain during the sixteenth century and the sections in France during the eighteenth), the state almost completely collapsed and direct democracies based on communalist political principles played a hegemonic role in social affairs.

Libertarian municipalism is concerned with the political sphere, including aspects of basic civic importance, such as the economic. It does not draw strict impenetrable barriers between the two to the point where they are implacably set against each other. Claims that I believe it does are a canard that opponents of libertarian municipalism have propagated--as though such barriers were even possible. Libertarian municipalism calls for the municipalization of the economy and, where material interests between communities overlap, the confederalization of the economy. I am certain that these dimensions of libertarian municipalism will be explored more ably and comprehensively by speakers at the conference than I can hope to do in this short text.

Nor are libertarian municipalists indifferent to the many cultural factors that must play a role in the formation of true citizens, indeed, rounded human beings. I do not hesitate to point out that I was the author of "Desire and Need" some thirty years ago, and of accounts of citizenship, **paideia,** and a lived practice in free public spheres. But at the same time, let us not reduce every cultural desideratum to the social sphere--to create the myth that the municipality can be reduced to a family--and ignore its overlap with the political. The distinctions between them will only be lost in that poststructural homogenization of everything, making their unique identities almost completely meaningless and potentially, in fact, totalitarian.

Thus the libertarian municipalist arena may be a school for educating its youth and its mature citizens; but what makes it particularly significant, especially at this time, is that it is a sphere of *power* relations that must be crystallized against capitalism, the marketplace, the forces for ecological destruction, and the state. Indeed, without a movement that keeps this need completely in mind, libertarian municipalism can easily degenerate in this age of academic cretinism into another subject in a classroom curriculum.

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

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

Our program should be flexible in the special sense that it poses minimum demands that we seek to achieve at once, given the political sophistication of the

community in which we function. But such demands would easily degenerate into reformism and even possibilism if they did not escalate into a body of transitional demands that would ultimately lead to our maximum demands for a libertarian communist society.

Nor can we give up our seemingly utopian vision that the great metropolitan areas can be structurally decentralized. Cities on the scale of New York, London, and Paris, not to speak of Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Bombay, and the like, *must* ultimately be parceled into smaller cities and decentralized to a point where they are once again humanly scaled communities, not huge and incomprehensible urban belts. Libertarian municipalism takes its immediate point of departure from the existing facts of urban life, many of which are beyond the comprehension of its residents. But it always strives to physically and well as politically fragment the great cities, until it achieves the great anarchist communist and even Marxian goal of scaling all cities to human dimensions.

III

The ideas I have presented so summarily up to now will no doubt be explored by the conference in all their details. I would like to close this presentation with a refutation of some of the criticisms that have been leveled against libertarian municipalism by certain Marxists and lifestyle anarchists.

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

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

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

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

Even after an uprising is successful, it takes time for a substantial majority of the people to fully participate in the revolutionary process, commonly as crowds in demonstrations, more rarely as participants in revolutionary institutions.

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

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

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

Nor it is likely, however desirable it may be, that after a successful insurrection the great majority of the people or even the oppressed will personally participate in

revolutionizing society. Following the success of a revolution, the majority of people tend to withdraw into the localities in which they live, however large or small, where the problems of everyday life have their most visible impact on the masses. These localities may be residential and/or occupational neighborhoods in large cities, the environs of villages and hamlets, or even at some distance from the center of a city or region, fairly dispersed localities in which people live and work.

No, I do not think the large size of modern cities constitutes an insuperable obstacle to the formation of a neighborhood assembly movement. The doors of the neighborhood assemblies should always be open to whoever lives in the neighborhood. Politically less aware individuals may choose not to attend their neighborhood assembly, and they should not be obliged to attend. The assemblies, regardless of their size, will have problems enough, without having to deal with indifferent bystanders and passersby. What counts is that the doors of the assemblies remain open for all who wish to attend and participate, for therein lies the true democratic nature of neighborhood assemblies.

IV.

Another criticism that I have heard against libertarian municipalism is that a large crowd, such as numerous citizens at an assembly meeting, may be manipulated by a forceful speaker or faction. This philistine criticism could be directed against **any** democratic institution, be it a large assembly, a small committee, an ad hoc conference or meeting, or even an "affinity" (read: encounter) group. In my view, such a transparent effort to inflict bruises on **any** attempt to create a popular organization hardly deserves discussion. The size of the group is not a factor here--some very abusive i.yrannies appear in very small groups, where one or two intimidating figures can completely dominate everyone else.

What the critics might well ask--but seldom do--is how we are to prevent persuasive individuals from making demagogic attempts to control any popular assembly, regardless of size. In my view the only obstacle to such attempts is the existence of an organized body of revolutionaries--yes, even a faction--that is committed to seeking truth, exercising rationality, and advancing an ethics of public responsibility.

Such a faction or organization will be needed, in my view, not only before and during a revolution but also after one, when the constructive problem of creating stable, enduring, and educational democratic institutions becomes the order of the day.

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

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

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

We cannot ignore the compelling fact that capitalism has changed since the end of the Second World War; that it has transformed the very social fiber of the great majority of people, both attitudinally and occupationally, in Western Europe and the United States; that it will wreak even further changes in the decades that lie ahead, with

dazzling rapidity, especially as automation is further developed and as new resources, techniques, and products replace those that seem so dominant today.

No revolutionary movement can ignore the problems that capitalism is likely to generate in the years that lie ahead, especially in terms of capital's profound effects on both society and the environment. The futility of syndicalism today lies in the fact that it is still trying to address the problems generated by the old industrial revolution, and in the context of the social setting that gave these problems meaning in the first half of the twentieth century. If we have historically exhausted the syndicalist alternative, it is because the industrial proletariat is everywhere destined, by virtue of technological innovation, to become a small minority of the population. It will not do to try to theoretically fabricate a "proletariat" out of clerical, service, and professional "workers" who, in many if not most cases, will not acquire the class consciousness that identified and gave a historical standing to the authentic proletarian.

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

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

Hence, more than ever, any revolutionary libertarian communist movement must, in my view, recognize the importance of the municipality as the locus of new,

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

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

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

raises, including the one-sided economic development of the South, often at the expense of workers in the North, and the enhancement of corporate power to the point of threatening the stability, indeed the very safety, of the planet.

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

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

The Proudhonist myth that small associations of producers--as opposed to a genuinely socialistic or libertarian communistic endeavor--can slowly eat away at capitalism should finally be dispelled. Sadly, these generally failed illusions are still promoted by liberals such as Harry Boyte and by naive lifestyle anarchists such as the

journalistic ruffians at "Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed," and pure academics such as John Clark and his associates. Either municipalized enterprises controlled by citizens' assemblies will try to take over the economy, or capitalism will prevail in this sphere of life with a forcefulness that no mere rhetoric can diminish.

Capitalist society has effects not only on economic and social relations but on ideas and intellectual traditions as well, indeed, on all of history, fragmenting them until knowledge, discourse, and even reality become blurred, divested of any distinctions, specificity, and articulation. The culture that promotes this celebration of diffuseness and fragmentation--a culture that is epidemic in American colleges and universities--goes under the name of poststructuralism or, more commonly, postmodernism. Given its corrosive precepts, the postmodernist worldview is able to level or homogenize everything that is unique or distinctive, dissolving it into a low common denominator of ideas.

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

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

abstract "community" is to ultimately negate their wealth of evolutionary forms and particularly their differentiation as sophisticated aspects of human freedom.

V.

The constraints of time, of my physical infirmities, and your patience urge me to conclude this presentation, yet I cannot do so without at least briefly mentioning the many other issues that I would have liked to discuss. Given the opportunity, I would explore with you why libertarian municipalism must be conceived as a process, a patient practice that will almost have only limited success at the present time, and even then only in select areas that can at best provide examples of the possibilities it could hold if and when it is adopted on a large scale. We will not create a libertarian municipalist society overnight, and in this era of counterrevolution, we must be prepared to endure more failures than successes. Patience and commitment are traits that revolutionaries of the past cultivated assiduously; alas, today in our fast consumerist society, the demand for immediate gratification, for fast food and fast living, inculcates a demand for fast politics. Individuals who are prone to adopt a fast lifestyle over one that acknowledges the need for slow growth, with all its disappointments, would do well to learn the art of throwing bricks and painting graffiti rather than commit themselves to the educational responsibilities required by a libertarian municipalist movement. What should count for us is whether libertarian municipalism is a rational means for achieving the rational culmination of human development, not whether it is suitable as a quick fix for present social problems.

We must learn to be flexible without allowing our basic principles to be replaced by a postmodernist quagmire of ad hoc, ever-changeable opinions. For example, if we have no choice but to use electronic means, such as to establish popular participation in relatively large citizens' assemblies, then so be it. But we should, I would argue, do so only when it is unavoidable and for only as long as it is necessary. By the same token, if certain measures involve a degree of centralization, then we should adopt them--without sacrificing, let me insist, the right to immediate recall. But here, too, we should endure such organizational measures for only as long as they are necessary and no longer. Our basic principles in such cases must always be our guide: we remain committed to a direct face-to-face democracy and a well-coordinated, confederal, but decentralized society.

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

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

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

and constitutions are inherently anti-anarchistic, but whether they are rational, mutable, secular, and restrictive only in the sense that they prohibit the abuse of power. We must, I believe, free ourselves of the fetishes born of remote polemics with authoritarians, fetishes that have pushed many anarchist communists into unreflective one-sided positions that are more like dogmas than reasoned theoretical ideas.

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

Finally, we must assert the historic right of speculative reason, resting on the real potentialities of human beings as we know them from the past as well as the present, to project itself beyond the immediate environment in which we live, indeed, to claim that the present irrational society is not the *actual*--or "real"--that is-worthy of the human condition. Despite its prevalence--and, to many people, its permanence--it is untrue to the project of fulfilling humanity's potentiality for freedom and self-consciousness, and hence it is unreal in the sense that it is a betrayal of the claims of humanity's greatest qualities, the capacity for reason and innovation.

If our attempts to think, fight for, educate people about, and rise in battle for a libertarian communist society based on the Commune of communes are evidence of "Bakuninist will," for which present-day mystics such as John Clark (aka "Max Cafard" or "C") have criticized me, then I can only reply that I find all the more flattering this association with Bakunin, who would have denounced Clark's Taoist notions of passivity and "going with the flow" as a fundamental accommodation to the status quo.

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

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

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

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

I do not believe that social change can be achieved without taking risks, allowing for uncertainties, and recognizing the possibility of failure. If we are to have any effect on the fossilization of public life--to the extent that the present period is marked in any sense by a genuine public life--history too must move with us. On this score, I am much too old to make worthwhile predictions about how the course of events will unfold, except to say that the present, whether for good or ill, will hardly be recognizable to the generation that will come of age in fifty years from now, so rapidly are things likely to change in the coming century.

But where change exists, so too do possibilities. The times cannot remain as they are--any more than the world can be frozen into immobility. What we can hope to do is to preserve the thread of rationality that distinguishes true civilization from barbarism--and barbarism would indeed be the outcome of a world that is permitted to tumble into a future without rational activity or guidance. If this endeavor be evidence of "Bakuninist will," then so much the better for those who will a world of freedom and self-consciousness, as distinguished from those who, in the name of organic thought, reduce themselves to bystanders, their behavior guided by the Taoist doctrine of "wu-wei," that is, the "virtues" of nonaction or "going with the flow."