

# **An Anarchist FAQ (10/17)**

The Anarchist FAQ Editorial Collective

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# Contents

<b>Section I: What would an anarchist society look like?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>I.1 Isn't libertarian socialism an oxymoron?</b>	<b>13</b>
I.1.1 Is socialism impossible? . . . . .	18
I.1.2 Is libertarian communism impossible? . . . . .	28
I.1.3 What is wrong with markets anyway? . . . . .	40
I.1.4 If capitalism is exploitative, then isn't socialism as well? . . . . .	46
I.1.5 Does capitalism efficiently allocate resources? . . . . .	49
<b>I.2 Is this a blueprint for an anarchist society?</b>	<b>63</b>
I.2.1 Why discuss what an anarchist society would be like at all? . . . . .	67
I.2.2 Will it be possible to go straight to an anarchist society from capitalism? . . . . .	69
I.2.3 How is the framework of an anarchist society created? . . . . .	73
<b>I.3 What could the economic structure of anarchy look like?</b>	<b>81</b>
I.3.1 What is a "syndicate"? . . . . .	85
I.3.2 What is workers' self-management? . . . . .	92
I.3.3 What does socialisation mean? . . . . .	98
I.3.4 What relations would exist between individual syndicates? . . . . .	104
I.3.5 What would confederations of syndicates do? . . . . .	108
I.3.6 What about competition between syndicates? . . . . .	115
I.3.7 What about people who do not want to join a syndicate? . . . . .	120
I.3.8 Do anarchists seek " <i>small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production</i> "? . . . . .	121
<b>I.4 How could an anarchist economy function?</b>	<b>126</b>
I.4.1 What is the point of economic activity in anarchy? . . . . .	130
I.4.2 Why do anarchists desire to abolish work? . . . . .	132
I.4.3 How do anarchists intend to abolish work? . . . . .	138
I.4.4 What economic decision making criteria could be used in anarchy? . . . . .	143
I.4.5 What about " <i>supply and demand</i> "? . . . . .	148
I.4.6 Surely anarchist-communism would just lead to demand exceeding supply? . . . . .	155
I.4.7 What will stop producers ignoring consumers? . . . . .	157
I.4.8 What about investment decisions? . . . . .	161
I.4.9 Should technological advance be seen as anti-anarchistic? . . . . .	165
I.4.10 What would be the advantage of a wide basis of surplus distribution? . . . . .	170
I.4.11 If libertarian socialism eliminates the profit motive, won't creativity and performance suffer? . . . . .	175

I.4.12	Won't there be a tendency for capitalist enterprise to reappear in any socialist society? . . . . .	179
I.4.13	Who will do the "dirty" or unpleasant work? . . . . .	182
I.4.14	What about the person who will not work? . . . . .	186
I.4.15	What will the workplace of tomorrow look like? . . . . .	188
I.4.16	Won't a libertarian communist society be inefficient? . . . . .	190
<b>I.5</b>	<b>What could the social structure of anarchy look like?</b>	<b>192</b>
I.5.1	What are participatory communities? . . . . .	195
I.5.2	Why are confederations of participatory communities needed? . . . . .	200
I.5.3	What will be the scales and levels of confederation? . . . . .	204
I.5.4	How will anything ever be decided by all these meetings? . . . . .	207
I.5.5	Aren't participatory communities and confederations just new states? . . . . .	210
I.5.6	Won't there be a danger of a "tyranny of the majority" under libertarian socialism? . . . . .	213
I.5.7	What if I don't want to join a commune? . . . . .	217
I.5.8	What about crime? . . . . .	220
I.5.9	What about Freedom of Speech under Anarchism? . . . . .	224
I.5.10	What about political parties? . . . . .	226
I.5.11	What about interest groups and other associations? . . . . .	227
I.5.12	Would an anarchist society provide health care and other public services? . . . . .	228
I.5.13	Won't an anarchist society be vulnerable to the power hungry? . . . . .	233
I.5.14	How could an anarchist society defend itself? . . . . .	236
<b>I.6</b>	<b>What about the "Tragedy of the Commons"? Surely communal ownership will lead to overuse and environmental destruction?</b>	<b>241</b>
I.6.1	How can anarchists explain how the use of property "owned by everyone in the world" will be decided? . . . . .	243
I.6.2	Doesn't any form of communal ownership involve restricting individual liberty? . . . . .	246
<b>I.7</b>	<b>Won't Libertarian Socialism destroy individuality?</b>	<b>250</b>
I.7.1	Do tribal cultures indicate that communalism defends individuality? . . . . .	253
I.7.2	Is this not worshipping the past or the "noble savage"? . . . . .	256
I.7.3	Is the law required to protect individual rights? . . . . .	258
I.7.4	Does capitalism protect individuality? . . . . .	261
<b>I.8</b>	<b>Does revolutionary Spain show that libertarian socialism can work in practice?</b>	<b>264</b>
I.8.1	Wasn't the Spanish Revolution primarily a rural phenomenon and therefore inapplicable as a model for modern industrialised societies? . . . . .	267
I.8.2	How were the anarchists able to obtain mass popular support in Spain? . . . . .	268
I.8.3	How were Spanish industrial collectives organised? . . . . .	272
I.8.4	How were the Spanish industrial collectives co-ordinated? . . . . .	274
I.8.5	How were the Spanish agricultural co-operatives organised and co-ordinated? . . . . .	276
I.8.6	What did the agricultural collectives accomplish? . . . . .	278
I.8.7	I've heard that the rural collectives were created by force. Is this true? . . . . .	280
I.8.8	But did the Spanish collectives innovate? . . . . .	289

I.8.9 Why, if it was so good, did it not survive? . . . . .	290
I.8.10 Why did the C.N.T. collaborate with the state? . . . . .	291
I.8.11 Was the decision to collaborate a product of anarchist theory, so showing anarchism is flawed? . . . . .	295
I.8.12 Was the decision to collaborate imposed on the CNT's membership? . . . . .	301
I.8.13 What political lessons were learned from the revolution? . . . . .	305
I.8.14 What economic lessons were learned from the revolution? . . . . .	309

# **Section I: What would an anarchist society look like?**

So far this FAQ has been largely critical, focusing on hierarchy, capitalism, the state and so on, and the problems to which they have led, as well as refuting some bogus “solutions” that have been offered by authoritarians of both the right and the left. It is now time to examine the constructive side of anarchism — the libertarian-socialist society that anarchists envision. This is important because anarchism is essentially a **constructive** theory, in stark contradiction to the picture of usually painted of anarchism as chaos or mindless destruction.

In this section of the FAQ we will give an outline of what an anarchist society might look like. Such a society has basic features — such as being non-hierarchical, decentralised and, above all else, spontaneous like life itself. To quote Glenn Albrecht, anarchists “*lay great stress on the free unfolding of a spontaneous order without the use of external force or authority.*” [“*Ethics, Anarchy and Sustainable Development*”, pp. 95–117, **Anarchist Studies**, vol. 2, no. 2, p. 110] This type of development implies that anarchist society would be organised from the simple to the complex, from the individual upwards to the community, the bio-region and, ultimately, the planet. The resulting society, which would be the outcome of nature freely unfolding toward greater diversity and complexity, is ethically preferable to any other sort of order simply because it allows for the highest degree of organic solidarity and freedom. Kropotkin described this vision of a truly free society as follows:

*“We foresee millions and millions of groups freely constituting themselves for the satisfaction of all the varied needs of human beings ... All these will be composed of human beings who will combine freely ... ‘Take pebbles,’ said Fourier, ‘put them in a box and shake them, and they will arrange themselves in a mosaic that you could never get by instructing to anyone the work of arranging them harmoniously.’”* [The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution, pp. 11–12]

Anarchist opposition to hierarchy is an essential part of a “spontaneously ordered” society, for authority stops the free development and growth of the individual. From this natural growth of individuals, groups and society as a whole anarchists expect a society which meets the needs of all — for individual and social freedom, material goods to meet physical needs and free and equal social relationships that meet what could be termed “spiritual needs” (i.e., mental and emotional wellbeing, creativity, ethical development and so on). Any attempt to force society or individuals into a pre-determined structure which restricts their liberty will produce **dis-order** as natural balances and development is hindered and distorted in anti-social and destructive directions. Thus an anarchist society must be a free society of free individuals, associating within libertarian structures, rather than a series of competing hierarchies (be they political or economical). Only in freedom can society and individuals develop and create a just and fair world. In Proudhon’s words, “*liberty is the mother of order, not its daughter.*”

As the individual does not exist in a social vacuum, appropriate social conditions are required for individual freedom to develop and blossom according to its full potential. The theory of anarchism is built around the central assertion that individuals and their organisations **cannot** be considered in isolation from each other. That is, social structures shape us, “*that there is an interrelationship between the authority structures of institutions and the psychological qualities and attitudes of individuals*” and that “*the major function of participation is an educative one.*” [Carole Pateman, **Participation and Democratic Theory**, p. 27] Anarchism presents this position in its most coherent and libertarian form. In other words, freedom is only sustained and protected by

activity under conditions of freedom, namely self-government. Freedom is the only precondition for acquiring the maturity required for continued freedom: *“Only in freedom can man grow to his full stature. Only in freedom will he learn to think and move, and give the very best in him.”* [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 72]

As individual freedom can only be created, developed and defended by self-government and free association, a system which encourages individuality must be decentralised and participatory in order for people to develop a psychology that allows them to accept the responsibilities of self-management. Living under the state or any other authoritarian system produces a servile character, as the individual is constantly placed under hierarchical authority, which blunts their critical and self-governing abilities by lack of use. Such a situation cannot promote freedom, and so anarchists *“realise that power and authority corrupt those who exercise them as much as those who are compelled to submit to them.”* [Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 249]

Looking at capitalism, we find that under wage labour people sell their creative energy and control over their activity for a given period. The boss does not just take surplus value from the time employees sell, but the time itself – their liberty, their ability to make their own decisions, express themselves through work and with their fellow workers. Wage labour equals wage slavery as you sell your time and skills (i.e. liberty) everyday at work and you will never be able to buy that time back for yourself. Once it is gone; it is gone for good. It also generates, to quote Godwin, a *“sense of dependence”* and a *“servile and truckling spirit”*, so ensuring that the *“feudal spirit still survives that reduced the great mass of mankind to the rank of slaves and cattle for the service of the few.”* [**The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin**, pp. 125–6] This is why anarchists see the need to *“create the situation where each person may live by working freely, without being forced to sell his [or her] work and his [or her] liberty to others who accumulate wealth by the labour of their serfs.”* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 208]

Thus the aim of anarchism is to create a society in which every person *“should have the material and moral means to develop his humanity”* and so to *“organise society in such a way that every individual ... should find ... approximately equal means for the development of [their] various faculties and for their utilisation in [their] work; to create a society which would place every individual ... in such a position that it would be impossible for [them] to exploit the labour of anyone else”* and be *“enabled to participate in the enjoyment of social wealth”* as long as they *“contributed directly toward the production of that wealth.”* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 409] As such, anarchists would agree with George Orwell: *“The question is very simple. Shall people ... be allowed to live the decent, fully human life which is now technically achievable, or shan’t they? Shall the common man be pushed back into the mud, or shall he not?”* [**Orwell on Spain**, p. 361]

Anarchism, in summary, is about changing society and abolishing all forms of authoritarian social relationship, putting life before the soul-destroying “efficiency” needed to survive under capitalism; for the anarchist *“takes his stand on his positive right to life and all its pleasures, both intellectual, moral and physical. He loves life, and intends to enjoy it to the full.”* [Bakunin, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 101] Thus, to quote Emma Goldman, *“all human-beings, irrespective of race, colour, or sex, are born with the equal right to share at the table of life; that to secure this right, there must be established among men economic, social, and political freedom.”* [**A Documentary History of the American Years**, vol. 2, p. 450] This would be a classless and non-hierarchical society, one without masters and servants, one based on the free association of free individuals which encourages and celebrates individuality and freedom:

*“The phrase, ‘a classless society’, no doubt has terrors for any thoughtful person. It calls up immediately the image of dull mediocrity ... all one uniform scale of self-sufficient individuals, living in model-houses, travelling in uniform Fords along endless uniform roads ... But ... the sharing of this wealth would not produce a uniformity of life, simply because there is no uniformity of desire. Uniformity is an unintelligent nightmare; there can be no uniformity in a free human society. Uniformity can only be created by the tyranny of a totalitarian regime.”* [Herbert Read, **Anarchy and Order**, pp. 87–8]

Anarchists think that the essential social values are human values, and that society is a complex of associations which express the wills of their members, whose well-being is its purpose. We consider that it is not enough that the forms of association should have the passive or “implied” consent of their members, but that the society, and the individuals who make it up, will be healthy only if it is in the full sense libertarian, i.e. self-governing, self-managed, and egalitarian. This implies not only that all the members should have a right to influence its policy if they so desire, but that the greatest possible opportunity should be afforded for every person to exercise this right. Anarchism involves an active, not merely passive, citizenship on the part of society’s members and holds that this principle is not only applied to some “special” sphere of social action called “politics” but to any and every form of social action, including economic activity.

So, as will be seen, the key concept underlying both the social/political and the economic structure of libertarian socialism is “*self-management*,” a term that implies not only workers control of their workplaces but also citizens’ control of their communities (where it becomes “*self-government*”), through direct democracy and voluntary federation. Thus self-management is the positive implication of anarchism’s “negative” principle of opposition to hierarchical authority. For through self-management, hierarchical authority is dissolved as self-managing workplace and community assemblies/councils are decentralised, “horizontal” organisations in which each participant has an equal voice in the decisions that affect his or her life, instead of merely following orders and being governed by others. Self-management, therefore, is the essential condition for a world in which individuals will be free to follow their own dreams, in their own ways, co-operating together as equals without interference from any form of authoritarian power (such as government or boss).

Perhaps needless to say, this section is intended as a heuristic device **only**, as a way of helping readers envision how anarchist principles might be embodied in practice. It is not (nor is it intended to be, nor is it desired to be) a definitive statement of how they **must** be embodied. The idea that a few people could determine exactly what a free society would look like is contrary to the anarchist principles of free growth and thought, and is far from our intention. Here we simply try to indicate some of the structures that an anarchist society may contain, based on the what ideals and ideas anarchists hold, informed by the few examples of anarchy in action that have existed and our critical evaluation of their limitations and successes. As Herbert Read once put it, “*it is always a mistake to build a priori constitutions. The main thing is to establish your principles — the principles of equity, of individual freedom, of workers’ control. The community then aims at the establishment of these principles from the starting-point of local needs and local conditions.*” [Op. Cit., p. 51]

Moreover, we must remember that, the state has changed over time and, indeed, has not always existed. Thus it is possible to have a social organisation which is not a state and to confuse the two would be a “*confusion*” made by those “*who cannot visualise Society without a concentration*



of the State.” Yet this “is to overlook the fact that Man lived in Societies for thousands of years before the State had been heard of” and that “large numbers of people [have] lived in communes and free federations.” These were not states as the state “is only one of the forms assumed by society in the course of history. Why then make no distinction between what is permanent and what is accidental?” [Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role*, pp. 9–10] Similarly, the axioms of capitalist economics **not** withstanding, capitalism is but latest of a series of economies. Just as serfdom replaced slavery and capitalism replaced serfdom, so free (associated) labour can replace hired labour. As Proudhon noted, the “*period through which we are now passing ... is distinguished by a special characteristic, — WAGES.*” Capitalism, this system of wage-labour, has not always existed nor need it continue. Thus “*the radical vice of political economy*”, namely “*affirming as a definitive state a transitory condition — namely, the division of society into patricians and proletores.*” [**System of Economic Contradictions**, p. 198 and p. 67] Anarchists seek to make that transitory condition shorter rather than longer.

Ultimately, a free society based on self-managed communities and associated labour is, in many ways, a natural evolution of tendencies **within** existing society. For example, the means of production can only be used collectively, so suggesting that relations of equality and freedom based on associations of workers are a sensible alternative to ones based on hierarchy, exploitation and oppression based on masters and servants. It is the struggle against those oppressive social relationships which creates the very associations (workplace strike assemblies) which could expropriate the workplaces and make that possibility a reality.

So an anarchist society will not be created overnight nor without links to the past, and so it will initially be based on structures created in social struggle (i.e. created **within** but **against** capitalism and the state) and will be marked with the ideas that inspired and developed within that struggle. For example, the anarchist collectives in Spain were organised in a bottom-up manner, similar to the way the C.N.T. (the anarcho-syndicalist labour union) was organised before the revolution. In this sense, anarchy is not some distant goal but rather an expression of working class struggle. The creation of alternatives to the current hierarchical, oppressive, exploitative and alienated society is a necessary part of the struggle and the maintaining of your liberty and humanity in the insane world of hierarchical society. As such, an anarchist society will be the generalisation of the various types of “***anarchy in action***” created in the various struggles against all forms of oppression and exploitation (see section I.2.3).

This means that how an anarchist society would look like and work is not independent of the specific societies it is created from nor the means used to create it. In other words, an anarchist society will reflect the economic conditions inherited from capitalism, the social struggles which preceded it and the ideas which existed within that struggle as modified by the practical needs of any given situation. Therefore the vision of a free society indicated in this section of the FAQ is not some sort of abstraction which will be created overnight. If anarchists did think that then we would rightly be called utopian. No, an anarchist society is the outcome of social struggle, self-activity which helps to create a mass movement which contains individuals who can think for themselves and are willing and able to take responsibility for their own lives.

So, when reading this section please remember that this is not a blueprint but only possible suggestions of what anarchy would look like. It is designed to provoke thought and indicate that an anarchist society is possible. We hope that our arguments and ideas presented in this section will inspire more debate and discussion of how a free society could work and, equally as important, help to inspire the struggle which will create that society. After all, anarchists desire

to build the new world in the shell of the old. Unless we have some idea of what that new society will be like it is difficult to pre-figure it in our activities today! A point not lost on Kropotkin who argued that it is difficult to build “*without extremely careful consideration beforehand, based on the study of social life, of **what** and **how** we want to build — we must reject [Proudhon’s] slogan [that “in demolishing we shall build”] ... and declare: ‘in building we shall demolish.’*” [Conquest of Bread, p. 173f] More recently, Noam Chomsky argued that “[a]lternatives to existing forms of hierarchy, domination, private power and social control certainly exist in principle... But to make them realistic will require a great deal of committed work, including the work of articulating them clearly.” [Noam Chomsky, **Turning the Tide**, p. 250] This section of the FAQ can be considered as a contribution to the articulating of libertarian alternatives to existing society, of what we want to build for the future.

We are not afraid that many will argue that much of the vision we present in this section of the FAQ is utopian. Perhaps they are right, but, as Oscar Wilde once said:

*“A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.”* [The Soul of Man Under Socialism, p. 1184]

However, we have attempted to be as practical as we are visionary, presenting realistic problems as well as presenting evidence for our solutions to these problems from real life where possible, rather than present a series of impossible assumptions which dismiss possible problems by definition. It is better to consider the worse possible cases for if they do not appear then nothing has been lost and if they do at least we have a starting point for possible solutions. So, all in all, we have tried to be practical utopians!

We must stress, however, that anarchists do not want a “perfect” society (as is often associated with the term “*utopia*”). This would be as impossible as the neo-classical economic vision of perfect competition. Rather we want a free society and so one based on real human beings and so one with its own problems and difficulties. Our use of the word “*utopia*” should not be taken to imply that anarchists assume away all problems and argue that an anarchist society would be ideal and perfect. No society has ever been perfect and no society ever will be. All we argue is that an anarchist society will have fewer problems than those before and be better to live within. Anyone looking for perfection should look elsewhere. Anyone looking for a better, but still human and so imperfect, world may find in anarchism a potential end for their quest.

So anarchists are realistic in their hopes and dreams. We do not conjure up hopes that cannot be achieved but rather base our visions in an analysis of what is wrong with society today and a means of changing the world for the better. And even if some people call us utopians, we shrug off the accusation with a smile. After all, dreams are important, not only because they often are the source of change in reality but because of the hope they express:

*“People may ... call us dreamers ... They fail to see that dreams are also a part of the reality of life, that life without dreams would be unbearable. No change in our way of life would be possible without dreams and dreamers. The only people who are never disappointed are those who never hope and never try to realise their hope.”* [Rudolf Rocker, **The London Years**, p. 95]

One last point. We must point out here that we are discussing the social and economic structures of areas within which the inhabitants are predominately anarchists. It is obviously the case that areas in which the inhabitants are not anarchists will take on different forms depending upon the ideas that dominate there. Hence, assuming the end of the current state structure, we could see anarchist communities along with statist ones (capitalist or socialist) and these communities taking different forms depending on what their inhabitants want — communist to individualist communities in the case of anarchist ones, state socialist to private state communities in the statist areas, ones based on religious sects and so on. As Malatesta argued, anarchists “*must be intransigent in our opposition to all capitalist imposition and exploitation, and tolerant of all social concepts which prevail in different human groupings, so long as they do not threaten the equal rights and freedom of others.*” [Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas, p. 174] Thus we respect the wishes of others to experiment and live their own lives as they see fit, while encouraging those in capitalist and other statist communities to rise in revolution against their masters and join the free federation of the anarchist community. Needless to say, we do not discuss non-anarchist communities here as it is up to non-anarchists to present their arguments in favour of their kind of statism.

So remember that we are not arguing that everyone will live in an anarchist way in a free society. Far from it. There will be pockets of unfreedom around, simply because the development of ideas varies from area to area. Anarchists, needless to say, are against forcing people to become anarchists (how can you force someone to be free?) Our aim is to encourage those subject to authority to free themselves and to work with them to create an anarchist society but, obviously, how successful we are at this will vary. We can, therefore, expect areas of freedom to co-exist with areas dominated by, say, state socialism, religion or capitalism just as we can expect to see different kinds of anarchism co-existing.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that just because there are many choices of community available that it automatically makes a society an anarchist one. For example, the modern world boasts over 200 different states. For most of them, individuals can leave and join another if it will let them. There is no world government as such. This does not make this series of states an anarchy. Similarly, a system based on different corporations is not an anarchy either, nor would be one based on a series of company towns and neither would a (quasi-feudal or neo-feudal?) system based on a multitude of landlords who hire their land and workplaces to workers in return for rent. The nature of the associations is just as important as their voluntary nature. As Kropotkin argued, the “*communes of the next revolution will not only break down the state and substitute free federation for parliamentary rule; they will part with parliamentary rule within the commune itself ... They will be anarchist within the commune as they will be anarchist outside it.*” [Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution, p. 132] Hence an anarchist society is one that is freely joined and left, is internally non-hierarchical and non-oppressive and non-exploitative. Thus anarchist communities may co-exist with non-anarchist ones but this does **not** mean the non-anarchist ones are in any way anarchistic or libertarian.

To conclude. Anarchists, to state the blindly obvious, do not aim for chaos, anarchy in the popular sense of the word (George Orwell once noted how one right-wing author “*use[d] ‘Anarchism’ indifferently with ‘anarchy’, which is a hardly more correct use of words than saying that a Conservative is one who makes jam.*” [Op. Cit., p. 298]). Nor do anarchists reject any discussion of what a free society would be like (such a rejection is usually based on the somewhat spurious grounds that you cannot prescribe what free people would do). In fact, anarchists have quite

strong opinions on the basic outlines of a free society, always premised on the assumption that these are guidelines only. These suggestions are based on libertarian principles, developments in the class struggle and a keen awareness of what is wrong with class and hierarchical systems (and so what **not** to do!).

When reading this section of the FAQ remember that an anarchist society will be created by the autonomous actions of the mass of the population, not by anarchists writing books about it. This means any real anarchist society will make many mistakes and develop in ways we cannot predict. This implies that this is only a series of suggestions on how things **could** work in an anarchist society – it is **not** a blueprint of any kind. All anarchists can do is present what we believe and why we think such a vision is both desirable **and** viable. We hope that our arguments and ideas presented in this section of the FAQ will inspire more debate and discussion of how a free society would work. In addition, and equally as important, we hope it will help inspire the struggle that will create that society.

## I.1 Isn't libertarian socialism an oxymoron?

In a word, no. This question is often asked by those who have come across the so-called “libertarian” right. As discussed in section A.1.3, the word “*libertarian*” has been used by anarchists for far longer than the pro-free market right have been using it. In fact, anarchists have been using it as a synonym for anarchist for over 150 years, since 1858. In comparison, widespread use of the term by the so-called “libertarian” right dates from the 1970s in America (with, from the 1940s onwards, limited use by a few individuals). Indeed, outside of North America “*libertarian*” is still essentially used as an equivalent of “*anarchist*” and as a shortened version of “*libertarian socialist*.” As Noam Chomsky notes:

*“Let me just say regarding the terminology, since we happen to be in the United States, we have to be rather careful. Libertarian in the United States has a meaning which is almost the opposite of what it has in the rest of the world traditionally. Here, libertarian means ultra right-wing capitalist. In the European tradition, libertarian meant socialist. So, anarchism was sometimes called libertarian socialism, a large wing of anarchism, so we have to be a little careful about terminology.”* [Reluctant Icon]

This in itself does not prove that the term “*libertarian socialist*” is free of contradiction. However, as we will show below, the claim that the term is self-contradictory rests on the assumption that socialism requires the state in order to exist and that socialism is incompatible with liberty (and the equally fallacious claim that capitalism is libertarian and does not need the state). This assumption, as is often true of many objections to socialism, is based on a misconception of what socialism is, a misconception that many authoritarian socialists and the state capitalism of Soviet Russia have helped to foster. In reality it is the term “*state socialism*” which is the true oxymoron.

Sadly many people take for granted the assertion of many on the right and left that socialism equals Leninism or Marxism and ignore the rich and diverse history of socialist ideas, ideas that spread from communist and individualist-anarchism to Leninism. As Benjamin Tucker once noted, “*the fact that State Socialism ... has overshadowed other forms of Socialism gives it no right to a monopoly of the Socialistic idea.*” [Instead of a Book, pp. 363–4] Unfortunately, many on the left combine with the right to do exactly that. Indeed, the right (and, of course, many on the left) consider that, by definition, “socialism” is state ownership and control of the means of production, along with centrally planned determination of the national economy (and so social life).

Yet even a quick glance at the history of the socialist movement indicates that the identification of socialism with state ownership and control is not common. For example, Anarchists, many Guild Socialists, council communists (and other libertarian Marxists), as well as followers of Robert Owen, all rejected state ownership. Indeed, anarchists recognised that the means of production did not change their form as capital when the state took over their ownership nor did wage-labour change its nature when it is the state employing labour (for example, see

section H.3.13). For anarchists state ownership of capital is not socialistic in the slightest. Indeed, as Tucker was well aware, state ownership turned **everyone** into a proletarian (bar the state bureaucracy) — hardly a desirable thing for a political theory aiming for the end of wage slavery!

So what **does** socialism mean? Is it compatible with libertarian ideals? What do the words “*libertarian*” and “*socialism*” actually mean? It is tempting to use dictionary definitions as a starting point, although we should stress that such a method holds problems as different dictionaries have different definitions and the fact that dictionaries are rarely politically sophisticated. Use one definition, and someone else will counter with one more to their liking. For example, “*socialism*” is often defined as “*state ownership of wealth*” and “*anarchy*” as “*disorder*.” Neither of these definitions are useful when discussing political ideas, particularly anarchism as, obviously, no form of anarchism would be socialist by such a definition nor do anarchists seek disorder. Therefore, the use of dictionaries is not the end of a discussion and often misleading when applied to politics.

Libertarian, though, is generally defined to mean someone who upholds the principles of liberty, especially individual liberty of thought and action. Such a situation cannot but be encouraged by socialism, by free access to the means of life. This is because in such a situation people associate as equals and so, as John Most and Emma Goldman once argued, the “*system of communism logically excludes any and every relation between master and servant, and means really Anarchism.*” [“*Talking about Anarchy*”, p. 28, **Black Flag**, no. 228, p. 28] In other words, by basing itself on free association and self-management in every aspect of life the anarchist form of socialism cannot but be libertarian.

In other words, there is a reason why anarchists have used the term libertarian for over 150 years! More to the point, why assume that the right’s recent appropriation of the word be considered the base point? That implies that private property defends individual liberty rather than suppresses it. Such an assumption, as anarchists have argued from the start of anarchism as a distinct socio-political theory, is wrong. As we discussed earlier (see section B.4, for example), capitalism denies liberty of thought and action within the workplace (unless one is the boss, of course). As one staunch defender of capitalism (and a classical liberal often listed as a forefather of right-wing “libertarianism”) glibly noted, the capitalist “*of course exercises power over the workers*”, although “*he cannot exercise it arbitrarily*” thanks to the market but within this limit “*the entrepreneur is free to give full rein to his whims*” and “*to dismiss workers offhand*” [Ludwig von Mises, **Socialism**, p. 443 and p. 444] Right-wing “libertarians” are utterly blind to the liberty-destroying hierarchies associated with private property, perhaps unsurprisingly as they are fundamentally pro-capitalist and anti-socialist (equally unsurprisingly, genuine libertarians tend to call them “propertarians”). As left-wing economist Geoffrey M. Hodgson correctly notes:

*“By their own logic, [such] market individualists are forced to disregard the organisational structure of the firm, or to falsely imagine that markets exist inside it. To do otherwise would be to admit that a system as dynamic as capitalism depends upon a mode of organisation from which markets are excluded ... This ... allows market individualists to ignore the reality of non-market organisations in the private sector ... They can thus ignore the reality of control and authority within the private capitalist corporation but remain critical of public sector bureaucracy and state planning.”* [**Economics and Utopia**, pp. 85–6]

The propertarian perspective inevitably generates massive contradictions, such as admitting that both the state and private property share a common monopoly of decision making over a given area yet opposing only the former (see section F.1). As anarchists have long pointed out, the hierarchical social relations associated with private property have nothing to do with individual liberty. Removing the state but keeping private property would, therefore, not be a step forward: “*A fine business we would make if we destroyed the State and replaced it with a mass of little States! killing a monster with one head and keeping a monster with a thousand heads!*” [Carlo Cafiero, “*Anarchy and Communism*”, pp. 179–86, **The Raven**, No. 6, p. 181]

This is why we argue that anarchism is more than just a stateless society, for while a society without a state is a necessary condition for anarchy it is not sufficient — private hierarchies also limit freedom. Hence Chomsky:

*“It’s all generally based on the idea that hierarchic and authoritarian structures are not self-justifying. They have to have a justification ... For example, your workplace is one point of contact and association. So, workplaces ought to be democratically controlled by participants ... there are all kinds of ways in which people interact with one another. The forms of organisation and association that grow out of those should be, to the extent possible, non-authoritarian, non-hierarchic, managed and directed by the participants.”*  
[Reluctant Icon]

Therefore, anarchists argue, **real** libertarian ideas **must** be based on workers self-management, i.e. workers must control and manage the work they do, determining where and how they do it and what happens to the fruit of their labour, which in turn means the elimination of wage labour. Or, to use Proudhon’s words, the “*abolition of the proletariat.*” [Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, p. 179] Unless this is done then the majority of people will become subject to the authoritarian social relationships the likes of Mises and other right-wing “libertarians” support. As one communist-anarchist put it:

*“It is because the individual does not own himself, and is not permitted to be his true self. He has become a mere market commodity, an instrument for the accumulation of property — for others ... Individuality is stretched on the Procrustes bed of business ... If our individuality were to be made the price of breathing, what ado there would be about the violence done to the personality! And yet our very right to food, drink and shelter is only too often conditioned upon our loss of individuality. These things are granted to the propertyless millions (and how scantily!) only in exchange for their individuality — they become the mere instruments of industry.”* [Max Baginski, “*Stirner: The Ego and His Own*”, pp. 142–151, **Mother Earth**, Vol. II, No. 3, p. 150]

Socialism, anarchists argue, can only mean a classless and anti-authoritarian (i.e. libertarian) society in which people manage their own affairs, either as individuals or as part of a group (depending on the situation). In other words, it implies self-management in all aspects of life — including work. It has always struck anarchists as somewhat strange and paradoxical (to say the least) that a system of “*natural*” liberty (Adam Smith’s term, misappropriated by supporters of capitalism) involves the vast majority having to sell that liberty in order to survive. Thus to be consistently libertarian is, logically, to advocate self-management, and so socialism (see section G.4.2). This explains the long standing anarchist opposition to the phoney “individualism”

associated with classical liberalism (so-called right-wing “libertarian” ideology, although better termed “propertarian” to avoid confusion). Thus we find Emma Goldman dismissing “*this kind of individualism*” in “*whose name ... social oppression are defended and held up as virtues.*” [Red Emma Speaks, p. 112]

As we will discuss in section I.3.3, socialisation is advocated to ensure the elimination of wage labour and is a common theme of all genuine forms of socialism. In theory at least, anarchists argue that state socialism does not eliminate wage labour, rather it universalises it. In fact, state socialism shows that socialism is **necessarily** libertarian, not statist. For if the state owns the workplace, then the producers do not, and so they will not be at liberty to manage their own work but will instead be subject to the state as the boss. Moreover, replacing the capitalist owning class by state officials in no way eliminates wage labour; in fact it makes it worse in many cases. Therefore “socialists” who argue for nationalisation of the means of production are **not** socialists (which means that the Soviet Union and the other so-called “socialist” countries are **not** socialist nor are parties which advocate nationalisation socialist).

Indeed, attempts to associate socialism with the state misunderstands the nature of socialism. It is an essential principle of socialism that (social) inequalities between individuals must be abolished to ensure liberty for all (natural inequalities cannot be abolished, nor do anarchists desire to do so). Socialism, as Proudhon put it, “*is egalitarian above all else.*” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 57] This applies to inequalities of power as well, especially to **political** power. And any hierarchical system (particularly the state) is marked by inequalities of power — those at the top (elected or not) have more power than those at the bottom. Hence the following comments provoked by the expulsion of anarchists from the social democratic Second International:

*“It could be argued with much more reason that we are the most logical and most complete socialists, since we demand for every person not just his [or her] entire measure of the wealth of society but also his [or her] portion of social power, which is to say, the real ability to make his [or her] influence felt, along with that of everybody else, in the administration of public affairs.”* [Malatesta and Hamon, Op. Cit., vol. 2, p. 20]

The election of someone to administer public affairs **for you** is not having a portion of social power. It is, to use of words of Emile Pouget (a leading French anarcho-syndicalist) “*an act of abdication,*” the delegating of power into the hands of a few. [Op. Cit., p. 67] This means that “**[a]ll political power inevitably creates a privileged situation for the men who exercise it. Thus it violates, from the beginning, the equalitarian principle.**” [Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**, p. 249]

From this short discussion we see the links between libertarian and socialism. To be a true libertarian requires you to support workers’ control otherwise you support authoritarian social relationships. To support workers’ control, by necessity, means that you must ensure that the producers own (and so control) the means of producing and distributing the goods they create. Without ownership, they cannot truly control their own activity or the product of their labour. The situation where workers possess the means of producing and distributing goods is socialism. Thus to be a true libertarian requires you to be a socialist.

Similarly, a true socialist must also support individual liberty of thought and action, otherwise the producers “possess” the means of production and distribution in name only. If the state owns the means of life, then the producers do not and so are in no position to manage their own activity.



As the experience of Russia under Lenin shows, state ownership soon produces state control and the creation of a bureaucratic class which exploits and oppresses the workers even more so than their old bosses. Since it is an essential principle of socialism that inequalities between people must be abolished in order to ensure liberty, it makes no sense for a genuine socialist to support any institution based on inequalities of power (and as we discussed in section B.2, the state is just such an institution). To oppose inequality and not extend that opposition to inequalities in power, especially **political** power, suggests a lack of clear thinking. Thus to be a true socialist requires you to be a libertarian, to be for individual liberty and opposed to inequalities of power which restrict that liberty.

Therefore, rather than being an oxymoron, "*libertarian socialism*" indicates that true socialism must be libertarian and that a libertarian who is not a socialist is a phoney. As true socialists oppose wage labour, they must also oppose the state for the same reasons. Similarly, consistent libertarians must oppose wage labour for the same reasons they must oppose the state. So, libertarian socialism rejects the idea of state ownership and control of the economy, along with the state as such. Through workers' self-management it proposes to bring an end to authority, exploitation, and hierarchy in production. This in itself will increase, not reduce, liberty. Those who argue otherwise rarely claim that political democracy results in less freedom than political dictatorship.

One last point. It could be argued that many social anarchists smuggle the state back in via communal ownership of the means of life. This, however, is not the case. To argue so confuses society with the state. The communal ownership advocated by collectivist and communist anarchists is not the same as state ownership. This is because it is based on horizontal relationships between the actual workers and the "owners" of social capital (i.e. the federated communities as a whole, which includes the workers themselves we must stress), not vertical ones as in nationalisation (which are between state bureaucracies and its "citizens"). Also, such communal ownership is based upon letting workers manage their own work and workplaces. This means that it is based upon, and does not replace, workers' self-management. In addition, all the members of an anarchist community fall into one of three categories:

1. producers (i.e. members of a collective or self-employed artisans);
2. those unable to work (i.e. the old, sick and so on, who **were** producers); or
3. the young (i.e. those who **will be** producers).

Therefore, workers' self-management within a framework of communal ownership is entirely compatible with libertarian and socialist ideas concerning the possession of the means of producing and distributing goods by the producers themselves. Far from there being any contradiction between libertarianism and socialism, libertarian ideals imply socialist ones, and vice versa. As Bakunin put it in 1867:

*"We are convinced that freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice, and that Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality."* [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 127]

History has proven him correct. Rather than libertarian socialism being the oxymoron, it is state socialism and libertarian capitalism that are. Both historically (in terms of who first used the word) and logically (in terms of opposing all hierarchical organisations) it is anarchists who should be called libertarians, **not** the proprietarian right.

### I.1.1 Is socialism impossible?

In 1920, the right-wing economist Ludwig von Mises declared socialism to be impossible. A leading member of the “Austrian” school of economics, he argued this on the grounds that without private ownership of the means of production, there cannot be a competitive market for production goods and without a market for production goods, it is impossible to determine their values. Without knowing their values, economic rationality is impossible and so a socialist economy would simply be chaos: *“the absurd output of a senseless apparatus.”* For Mises, socialism meant central planning with the economy *“subject to the control of a supreme authority.”* [*Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth*, pp. 87–130, **Collectivist Economic Planning**, F.A von Hayek (ed.), p. 104 and p. 106] While applying his *“economic calculation argument”* to Marxist ideas of a future socialist society, his argument, it is claimed, is applicable to **all** schools of socialist thought, including libertarian ones. It is on the basis of his arguments that many right-wingers claim that libertarian (or any other kind of) socialism is impossible in principle.

Yet as David Schweickart observes *“[i]t has long been recognised that Mises’s argument is logically defective. Even without a market in production goods, their monetary values can be determined.”* [**Against Capitalism**, p. 88] In other words, economic calculation based on prices is perfectly possible in a libertarian socialist system. After all, to build a workplace requires so many tonnes of steel, so many bricks, so many hours of work and so on. If we assume a mutualist society, then the prices of these goods can be easily found as the co-operatives in question would be offer their services on the market. These commodities would be the inputs for the construction of production goods and so the latter’s monetary values can be found.

Ironically enough, Mises **did** mention the idea of such a mutualist system in his initial essay. *“Exchange relations between production-goods can only be established on the basis of private ownership of the means of production”* he asserted. *“When the ‘coal syndicate’ provides the ‘iron syndicate’ with coal, no price can be formed, except when both syndicates are the owners of the means of production employed in their business. This would not be socialisation but workers’ capitalism and syndicalism.”* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 112] However, his argument is flawed for numerous reasons.

First, and most obvious, socialisation (as we discuss in section I.3.3) simply means free access to the means of life. As long as those who join a workplace have the same rights and liberties as existing members then there is socialisation. A market system of co-operatives, in other words, is **not** capitalist as there is no wage labour involved as a new workers become full members of the syndicate, with the same rights and freedoms as existing members. Thus there are no hierarchical relationships between owners and wage slaves (even if these owners also happen to work there). As all workers’ control the means of production they use, it is not capitalism.

Second, nor is such a system usually called, as Mises suggests, *“syndicalism”* but rather mutualism and he obviously considered its most famous advocate, Proudhon and his *“fantastic dreams”* of a mutual bank, as a socialist. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 88] Significantly, Mises subsequently admitted that it was *“misleading”* to call syndicalism workers’ capitalism, although *“the workers are the owners of the means of production”* it was *“not genuine socialism, that is, centralised socialism”*, as it *“must withdraw productive goods from the market. Individual citizens must not dispose of the shares in the means of production which are allotted to them.”* Syndicalism, i.e., having those who do the work control of it, was *“the ideal of plundering hordes”!* [**Socialism**, p. 274fn, p. 270, p. 273 and p. 275]

His followers, likewise, concluded that *“syndicalism”* was not capitalism with Hayek stating that there were *“many types of socialism”* including *“communism, syndicalism, guild socialism”*.

Significantly, he indicated that Mises argument was aimed at systems based on the “*central direction of all economic activity*” and so “*earlier systems of more decentralised socialism, like guild-socialism or syndicalism, need not concern us here since it seems now to be fairly generally admitted that they provide no mechanism whatever for a rational direction of economic activity.*” [“*The Nature and History of the Problem*”, pp. 1–40, **Collectivist Economic Planning**, F.A von Hayek (ed.), p. 17, p. 36 and p. 19] Sadly he failed to indicate who “*generally admitted*” such a conclusion. More recently, Murray Rothbard urged the state to impose private shares onto the workers in the former Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe as ownership was “*not to be granted to collectives or co-operatives or workers or peasants holistically, which would only bring back the ills of socialism in a decentralised and chaotic syndicalist form.*” [The Logic of Action II, p. 210]

Third, syndicalism usually refers to a strategy (revolutionary unionism) used to achieve (libertarian) socialism rather than the goal itself (as Mises himself noted in a tirade against unions, “*Syndicalism is nothing else but the French word for trade unionism*” [Socialism, p. 480]). It could be argued that such a mutualist system could be an aim for some syndicalists, although most were and still are in favour of libertarian communism (a simple fact apparently unknown to Mises). Indeed, Mises ignorance of syndicalist thought is striking, asserting that the “*market is a consumers’ democracy. The syndicalists want to transform it into a producers’ democracy.*” [Human Action, p. 809] Most syndicalists, however, aim to **abolish** the market and **all** aim for workers’ control of production to **complement** (not replace) consumer choice. Syndicalists, like other anarchists, do not aim for workers’ control of consumption as Mises asserts. Given that Mises asserts that the market, in which one person can have a thousand votes and another one, is a “*democracy*” his ignorance of syndicalist ideas is perhaps only one aspect of a general ignorance of reality.

More importantly, the whole premise of his critique of mutualism is flawed. “*Exchange relations in productive goods*” he asserted, “*can only be established on the basis of private property in the means of production. If the Coal Syndicate delivers coal to the Iron Syndicate a price can be fixed only if both syndicates own the means of production in industry.*” [Socialism, p. 132] This may come as a surprise to the many companies whose different workplaces sell each other their products! In other words, capitalism itself shows that workplaces owned by the same body (in this case, a large company) can exchange goods via the market. That Mises makes such a statement indicates well the firm basis of his argument in reality. Thus a socialist society can have extensive autonomy for its co-operatives, just as a large capitalist firm can:

*“the entrepreneur is in a position to separate the calculation of each part of his total enterprise in such a way that he can determine the role it plays within his whole enterprise. Thus he can look at each section as if it were a separate entity and can appraise it according to the share it contributes to the success of the total enterprise. Within this system of business calculation each section of a firm represents an integral entity, a hypothetical independent business, as it were. It is assumed that this section ‘owns’ a definite part of the whole capital employed in the enterprise, that it buys from other sections and sells to them, that it has its own expenses and its own revenues, that its dealings result either in a profit or in a loss which is imputed to its own conduct of affairs as distinguished from the result of the other sections. Thus the entrepreneur can assign to each section’s management a great deal of independence ... Every manager and submanager is responsible for the working of his section or subsection. It is to his credit if the accounts show a profit, and it is to his disadvantage if they show a loss.*”

*His own interests impel him toward the utmost care and exertion in the conduct of his section's affairs.* [Human Action, pp. 301–2]

So much, then, for the notion that common ownership makes it impossible for market socialism to work. After all, the libertarian community can just as easily separate the calculation of each part of its enterprise in such a way as to determine the role each co-operative plays in its economy. It can look at each section as if it were a separate entity and appraise it according to the share it contributes as it is assumed that each section “owns” (i.e., has use rights over) its definite part. It can then buy from, and sell to, other co-operatives and a profit or loss can be imputed to evaluate the independent action of each co-operative and so their own interests impel the co-operative workers toward the utmost care and exertion in the conduct of their co-operative's affairs.

So to refute Mises, we need only repeat what he himself argued about large corporations! Thus there can be extensive autonomy for workplaces under socialism and this does not in any way contradict the fact that “*all the means of production are the property of the community.*” [“*Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth*”, Op. Cit., p. 89] Socialisation, in other words, does **not** imply central planning but rather free access and free association. In summary, then, Mises confused property rights with use rights, possession with property, and failed to see now a mutualist system of socialised co-operatives exchanging products can be a viable alternative to the current exploitative and oppressive economic regime.

Such a mutualist economy also strikes at the heart of Mises' claims that socialism was “*impossible.*” Given that he accepted that there may be markets, and hence market prices, for consumer goods in a socialist economy his claims of the impossibility of socialism seems unfounded. For Mises, the problem for socialism was that “*because no production-good will ever become the object of exchange, it will be impossible to determine its monetary value.*” [Op. Cit., p. 92] The flaw in his argument is clear. Taking, for example, coal, we find that it is both a means of production and of consumption. If a market in consumer goods is possible for a socialist system, then competitive prices for production goods is also possible as syndicates producing production-goods would also sell the product of their labour to other syndicates or communes. As Mises admitted when discussing one scheme of guild socialism, “*associations and sub-associations maintain a mutual exchange-relationship; they receive and give as if they were owners. Thus a market and market-prices are formed.*” Thus, when deciding upon a new workplace, railway or house, the designers in question do have access to competitive prices with which to make their decisions. Nor does Mises' argument work against communal ownership in such a system as the commune would be buying products from syndicates in the same way as one part of a company can buy products from another part of the same company under capitalism. That goods produced by self-managed syndicates have market-prices does not imply capitalism for, as they abolish wage labour and are based on free-access (socialisation), it is a form of socialism (as socialists define it, Mises' protestations that “*this is incompatible with socialism*” not-with-standing!). [Socialism, p. 518]

Murray Rothbard suggested that a self-managed system would fail, and a system “*composed exclusively of self-managed enterprises is impossible, and would lead ... to calculative chaos and complete breakdown.*” When “*each firm is owned jointly by all factor-owners*” then “*there is no separation at all between workers, landowners, capitalists, and entrepreneurs. There would be no way, then, of separating the wage incomes received from the interest or rent incomes or profits received. And now we finally arrive at the real reason why the economy cannot consist completely of such firms (called 'producers' co-operatives'). For, without an external market for wage rates, rents, and interest,*

*there would be no rational way for entrepreneurs to allocate factors in accordance with the wishes of the consumers. No one would know where he could allocate his land or his labour to provide the maximum monetary gains. No entrepreneur would know how to arrange factors in their most value-productive combination to earn greatest profit. There could be no efficiency in production because the requisite knowledge would be lacking.*" [quoted by David L. Prychitko, **Markets, Planning and Democracy**, p. 135 and p. 136]

It is hard to take this argument seriously. Consider, for example, a pre-capitalist society of farmers and artisans. Both groups of people own their own means of production (the land and the tools they use). The farmers grow crops for the artisans who, in turn, provide the farmers with the tools they use. According to Rothbard, the farmers would have no idea what to grow nor would the artisans know which tools to buy to meet the demand of the farmers nor which to use to reduce their working time. Presumably, both the farmers and artisans would stay awake at night worrying what to produce, wishing they had a landlord and boss to tell them how best to use their labour and resources.

Let us add the landlord class to this society. Now the landlord can tell the farmer what to grow as their rent income indicates how to allocate the land to its most productive use. Except, of course, it is still the farmers who decide what to produce. Knowing that they will need to pay rent (for access to the land) they will decide to devote their (rented) land to the most profitable use in order to both pay the rent and have enough to live on. Why they do not seek the most profitable use without the need for rent is not explored by Rothbard. Much the same can be said of artisans subject to a boss, for the worker can evaluate whether an investment in a specific new tool will result in more income or reduced time labouring or whether a new product will likely meet the needs of consumers. Moving from a pre-capitalist society to a post-capitalist one, it is clear that a system of self-managed co-operatives can make the same decisions without requiring economic masters. This is unsurprising, given that Mises' asserted that the boss "*of course exercises power over the workers*" but that the "*lord of production is the consumer.*" [**Socialism**, p. 443] In which case, the boss need not be an intermediary between the real "lord" and those who do the production!

All in all, Rothbard confirms Kropotkin's comments that economics ("*that pseudo-science of the bourgeoisie*") "*does not cease to give praise in every way to the benefits of individual property*" yet "*the economists do not conclude, 'The land to him who cultivates it.' On the contrary, they hasten to deduce from the situation, 'The land to the lord who will get it cultivated by wage earners!'*" [**Words of a Rebel**, pp. 209–10] In addition, Rothbard implicitly places "efficiency" above liberty, preferring dubious "efficiency" gains to the actual gains in freedom which the abolition of workplace autocracy would create. Given a choice between liberty and "efficiency", the genuine anarchist would prefer liberty. Luckily, though, workplace liberty increases efficiency so Rothbard's decision is a wrong one. It should also be noted that Rothbard's position (as is usually the case) is directly opposite that of Proudhon, who considered it "*inevitable*" that in a free society "*the two functions of **wage-labourer** on the one hand, and of **proprietor-capitalist-contractor** on the other, become equal and inseparable in the person of every workingman*". This was the "*first principle of the new economy, a principle full of hope and of consolation for the labourer without capital, but a principle full of terror for the parasite and for the tools of parasitism, who see reduced to naught their celebrated formula: **Capital, labour, talent!***" [**Proudhon's Solution of the Social Problem**, p. 165 and p. 85]

And it does seem a strange co-incidence that someone born into a capitalist economy, ideologically supporting it with a passion and seeking to justify its class system just happens to deduce from a given set of axioms that landlords and capitalists happen to play a vital role in the economy! It would not take too much time to determine if someone in a society without landlords or capitalists would also logically deduce from the same axioms the pressing economic necessity for such classes. Nor would it take long to ponder why Greek philosophers, like Aristotle, concluded that slavery was natural. And it does seem strange that centuries of coercion, authority, statism, classes and hierarchies all had absolutely no impact on how society evolved, as the end product of real history (the capitalist economy) just happens to be the same as Rothbard's deductions from a few assumptions predict. Little wonder, then, that "Austrian" economics seems more like rationalisations for some ideologically desired result than a serious economic analysis.

Even some dissident "Austrian" economists recognise the weakness of Rothbard's position. Thus "*Rothbard clearly misunderstands the general principle behind producer co-operatives and self-management in general.*" In reality, "*[a]s a democratic method of enterprise organisation, workers' self-management is, in principle, fully compatible with a market system*" and so "*a market economy comprised of self-managed enterprises is consistent with Austrian School theory ... It is fundamentally a market-based system ... that doesn't seem to face the epistemological hurdles ... that prohibit rational economic calculation*" under state socialism. Sadly, socialism is still equated with central planning, for such a system "*is certainly not socialism. Nor, however, is it capitalism in the conventional sense of the term.*" In fact, it is not capitalism at all and if we assume that free access to resources such as workplaces and credit, then it most definitely is socialism ("*Legal ownership is not the chief issue in defining workers' self-management — management is. Worker-managers, though not necessarily the legal owners of all the factors of production collected within the firm, are free to experiment and establish enterprise policy as they see fit.*"). [David L. Prychitko, *Op. Cit.*, p. 136, p. 135, pp. 4–5, p. 4 and p. 135] This suggests that non-labour factors can be purchased from other co-operatives, credit provided by mutual banks (credit co-operatives) at cost and so forth. As such, a mutualist system is perfectly feasible.

Thus economic calculation based on competitive market prices is possible under a socialist system. Indeed, we see examples of this even under capitalism. For example, the Mondragon co-operative complex in the Basque Country indicate that a libertarian socialist economy can exist and flourish. Perhaps it will be suggested that an economy needs stock markets to price companies, as Mises did. Thus investment is "*not a matter for the managers of joint stock companies, it is essentially a matter of the capitalists*" in the "*stock exchanges*". Investment, he asserted, was "*not a matter of wages*" of managers but of "*the capitalist who buys and sell stocks and shares, who make loans and recover them, who make deposits in the banks.*" [*Socialism*, p. 139]

It would be churlish to note that the members of co-operatives under capitalism, like most working class people, are more than able to make deposits in banks and arrange loans. In a mutualist economy, workers will not lose this ability just because the banks are themselves co-operatives. Similarly, it would be equally churlish but essential to note that the stock market is hardly the means by which capital is actually raised within capitalism. As David Engler points out, "*[s]upporters of the system ... claim that stock exchanges mobilise funds for business. Do they? When people buy and sell shares, 'no investment goes into company treasuries ... Shares simply change hands for cash in endless repetition.' Company treasuries get funds only from new equity issues. These accounted for an average of a mere 0.5 per cent of shares trading in the US during the 1980s.*" [*Apostles of Greed*, pp. 157–158] This is echoed by David Ellerman:

*“In spite of the stock market’s large symbolic value, it is notorious that it has relatively little to do with the production of goods and services in the economy (the gambling industry aside). The overwhelming bulk of stock transactions are in second-hand shares so that the capital paid for shares usually goes to other stock traders, not to productive enterprises issuing new shares.” [The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm, p. 199]*

This suggests that the “efficient allocation of capital in production does not require a stock market (witness the small business sector [under capitalism]).” “Socialist firms,” he notes, “are routinely attacked as being inherently inefficient because they have no equity shares exposed to market valuation. If this argument had any merit, it would imply that the whole sector of unquoted closely-held small and medium-sized firms in the West was ‘inherently inefficient’ — a conclusion that must be viewed with some scepticism. Indeed, in the comparison to large corporations with publicly-traded shares, the closely-held firms are probably **more** efficient users of capital.” [Op. Cit., p. 200 and p. 199]

In terms of the impact of the stock market on the economy there is good reason to think that this **hinders** economic efficiency by generating a perverse set of incentives and misleading information flows and so their abolition would actually **aid** production and productive efficiency).

Taking the first issue, the existence of a stock market has serious (negative) effects on investment. As Doug Henwood notes, there “are serious communication problems between managers and shareholders.” This is because “[e]ven if participants are aware of an upward bias to earnings estimates [of companies], and even if they correct for it, managers would still have an incentive to try to fool the market. If you tell the truth, your accurate estimate will be marked down by a sceptical market. So, it’s entirely rational for managers to boost profits in the short term, either through accounting gimmickry or by making only investments with quick paybacks.” So, managers “facing a market [the stock market] that is famous for its preference for quick profits today rather than patient long-term growth have little choice but to do its bidding. Otherwise, their stock will be marked down, and the firm ripe for take-over.” While “[f]irms and economies can’t get richer by starving themselves” stock market investors “can get richer when the companies they own go hungry — at least in the short term. As for the long term, well, that’s someone else’s problem the week after next.” [Wall Street, p. 171]

Ironically, this situation has a parallel with Stalinist central planning. Under that system the managers of State workplaces had an incentive to lie about their capacity to the planning bureaucracy. The planner would, in turn, assume higher capacity, so harming honest managers and encouraging them to lie. This, of course, had a seriously bad impact on the economy. Unsurprisingly, the similar effects caused by capital markets on economies subject to them are as bad as well as downplaying long term issues and investment. In addition, it should be noted that stock-markets regularly experiences bubbles and subsequent bursts. Stock markets may reflect the collective judgements of investors, but it says little about the quality of those judgements. What use are stock prices if they simply reflect herd mentality, the delusions of people ignorant of the real economy or who fail to see a bubble? Particularly when the real-world impact when such bubbles burst can be devastating to those uninvolved with the stock market?

In summary, then, firms are “over-whelmingly self-financing — that is, most of their investment expenditures are funded through profits (about 90%, on longer-term averages)” The stock markets provide “only a sliver of investment funds.” There are, of course, some “periods like the 1990s, during which the stock market serves as a conduit for shovelling huge amounts of cash into specu-

lative venues, most of which have evaporated ... Much, maybe most, of what was financed in the 1990s didn't deserve the money." Such booms do not last forever and are "no advertisement for the efficiency of our capital markets." [Henwood, *After the New Economy*, p. 187 and p. 188]

Thus there is substantial reason to question the suggestion that a stock market is necessary for the efficient allocation of capital. There is no need for capital markets in a system based on mutual banks and networks of co-operatives. As Henwood concludes, "*the signals emitted by the stock market are either irrelevant or harmful to real economic activity, and that the stock market itself counts little or nothing as a source of finance. Shareholders ... have no useful role.*" [Wall Street, p. 292]

Then there is also the ironic nature of Rothbard's assertion that self-management would ensure there "*could be no efficiency in production because the requisite knowledge would be lacking.*" This is because capitalist firms are hierarchies, based on top-down central planning, and this hinders the free flow of knowledge and information. As with Stalinism, within the capitalist firm information passes up the organisational hierarchy and becomes increasingly simplified and important local knowledge and details lost (when not deliberately falsified to ensure continual employment by suppressing bad news). The top-management takes decisions based on highly aggregated data, the quality of which is hard to know. The management, then, suffers from information and knowledge deficiencies while the workers below lack sufficient autonomy to act to correct inefficiencies as well as incentive to communicate accurate information and act to improve the production process. As Cornelius Castoriadis correctly noted:

*"Bureaucratic planning is nothing but the extension to the economy as a whole of the methods created and applied by capitalism in the 'rational' direction of large production units. If we consider the most profound feature of the economy, the concrete situation in which people are placed, we see that bureaucratic planning is the most highly perfected realisation of the spirit of capitalism; it pushes to the limit its most significant tendencies. Just as in the management of a large capitalist production unit, this type of planning is carried out by a separate stratum of managers ... Its essence, like that of capitalist production, lies in an effort to reduce the direct producers to the role of pure and simple executants of received orders, orders formulated by a particular stratum that pursues its own interests. This stratum cannot run things well, just as the management apparatus ... [in capitalist] factories cannot run things well. The myth of capitalism's productive efficiency at the level of the individual factory, a myth shared by bourgeois and Stalinist ideologues alike, cannot stand up to the most elemental examination of the facts, and any industrial worker could draw up a devastating indictment against capitalist 'rationalisation' judged on its own terms.*

*"First of all, the managerial bureaucracy does not **know** what it is supposed to be managing. The reality of production escapes it, for this reality is nothing but the activity of the producers, and the producers do not inform the managers ... about what is really taking place. Quite often they organise themselves in such a way that the managers won't be informed (in order to avoid increased exploitation, because they feel antagonistic, or quite simply because they have no interest: It isn't **their** business).*

*"In the second place, the way in which production is organised is set up entirely against the workers. They always are being asked, one way or another, to do more work without*



*getting paid for it. Management's orders, therefore, inevitably meet with fierce resistance on the part of those who have to carry them out.* [Political and Social Writings, vol. 2, pp. 62–3]

This is “*the same objection as that Hayek raises against the possibility of a planned economy. Indeed, the epistemological problems that Hayek raised against centralised planned economies have been echoed within the socialist tradition as a problem within the capitalist firm.*” There is “*a real conflict within the firm that parallels that which Hayek makes about any centralised economy.*” [John O’Neill, *The Market*, p. 142] This is because workers have knowledge about their work and workplace that their bosses lack and a self-managed co-operative workplace would motivate workers to use such information to improve the firm’s performance. In a capitalist workplace, as in a Stalinist economy, the workers have no incentive to communicate this information as “*improvements in the organisation and methods of production initiated by workers essentially profit capital, which often then seizes hold of them and turns them against the workers. The workers know it and consequently they restrict their participation in production ... They restrict their output; they keep their ideas to themselves ... They organise among themselves to carry out their work, all the while keeping up a facade of respect for the official way they are supposed to organise their work.*” [Castoriadis, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 181–2] An obvious example would be concerns that management would seek to monopolise the workers’ knowledge in order to accumulate more profits, better control the workforce or replace them (using the higher productivity as an excuse). Thus self-management rather than hierarchy enhances the flow and use of information in complex organisations and so improves efficiency.

This conclusion, it should be stressed, is not idle speculation and that Mises was utterly wrong in his assertions related to self-management. People, he stated, “*err*” in thinking that profit-sharing “*would spur the worker on to a more zealous fulfilment of his duties*” (indeed, it “*must lead straight to Syndicalism*”) and it was “*nonsensical to give ‘labour’ ... a share in management. The realisation of such a postulate would result in syndicalism.*” [*Socialism*, p. 268, p. 269 and p. 305] Yet, as we note in section I.3.2, the empirical evidence is overwhelmingly against Mises (which suggests why “Austrians” are so dismissive of empirical evidence, as it exposes flaws in the great chains of deductive reasoning they so love). In fact, workers’ participation in management and profit sharing enhance productivity. In one sense, though, Mises is right, in that capitalist firms will tend not to encourage participation or even profit sharing as it shows to workers the awkward fact that while the bosses may need them, they do not need the bosses. As discussed in section J.5.12, bosses are fearful that such schemes will lead to “syndicalism” and so quickly stop them in order to remain in power — in spite (or, more accurately, because) of the efficiency and productivity gains they result in.

“*Both capitalism and state socialism,*” summarises Ellerman, “*suffer from the motivational inefficiency of the employment relation.*” *Op. Cit.*, pp. 210–1] Mutualism would be **more** efficient as well as freer for, once the stock market and workplace hierarchies are removed, serious blocks and distortions to information flow will be eliminated.

Unfortunately, the state socialists who replied to Mises in the 1920s and 1930s did not have such a libertarian economy in mind. In response to Mises initial challenge, a number of economists pointed out that Pareto’s disciple, Enrico Barone, had already, 13 years earlier, demonstrated the theoretical possibility of a “*market-simulated socialism.*” However, the principal attack on Mises’s argument came from Fred Taylor and Oscar Lange (for a collection of their main papers, see **On**

the **Economic Theory of Socialism**). In light of their work, Hayek shifted the question from theoretical impossibility to whether the theoretical solution could be approximated in practice. Which raises an interesting question, for if (state) socialism is “*impossible*” (as Mises assured us) then what **did** collapse in Eastern Europe? If the “Austrians” claim it was “socialism” then they are in the somewhat awkward position that something they assure us is “*impossible*” existed for decades. Moreover, it should be noted that both sides of the argument accepted the idea of central planning of some kind or another. This means that most of the arguments of Mises and Hayek did not apply to libertarian socialism, which rejects central planning along with every other form of centralisation.

Nor was the response by Taylor and Lange particularly convincing in the first place. This was because it was based far more on neo-classical capitalist economic theory than on an appreciation of reality. In place of the Walrasian “*Auctioneer*” (the “god in the machine” of general equilibrium theory which ensures that all markets clear) Taylor and Lange presented the “*Central Planning Board*” whose job it was to adjust prices so that all markets cleared. Neo-classical economists who are inclined to accept Walrasian theory as an adequate account of a working capitalist economy will be forced to accept the validity of their model of “socialism.” Little wonder Taylor and Lange were considered, at the time, the victors in the “socialist calculation” debate by most of the economics profession (with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this decision has been revised somewhat — although we must point out that Taylor and Lange’s model was not the same as the Soviet system, a fact conveniently ignored by commentators).

Unfortunately, given that Walrasian theory has little bearing to reality, we must also come to the conclusion that the Taylor-Lange “solution” has about the same relevance (even ignoring its non-libertarian aspects, such as its basis in state-ownership, its centralisation, its lack of workers’ self-management and so on). Many people consider Taylor and Lange as fore-runners of “*market socialism*.” This is incorrect — rather than being market socialists, they are in fact “neo-classical” socialists, building a “socialist” system which mimics capitalist economic **theory** rather than its **reality**. Replacing Walrus’s mythical creation of the “*Auctioneer*” with a planning board does not really get to the heart of the problem! Nor does their vision of “socialism” have much appeal — a re-production of capitalism with a planning board and a more equal distribution of money income. Anarchists reject such “socialism” as little more than a nicer version of capitalism, if that.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has been fashionable to assert that “*Mises was right*” and that socialism is impossible (of course, **during** the cold war such claims were ignored as the Soviet threat had to be boosted and used as a means of social control and to justify state aid to capitalist industry). Nothing could be further from the truth as these countries were not socialist at all and did not even approximate the (libertarian) socialist idea (the only true form of socialism). The Stalinist countries had authoritarian “*command economies*” with bureaucratic central planning, and so their failure cannot be taken as proof that a decentralised, libertarian socialism cannot work. Nor can Mises’ and Hayek’s arguments against Taylor and Lange be used against a libertarian mutualist or collectivist system as such a system is decentralised and dynamic (unlike the “neo-classical” socialist model). Libertarian socialism of this kind did, in fact, work remarkably well during the Spanish Revolution in the face of amazing difficulties, with increased productivity and output in many workplaces as well as increased equality and liberty (see section I.8).

Thus the “*calculation argument*” does not prove that socialism is impossible. Mises was wrong in asserting that “*a socialist system with a market and market prices is as self-contradictory as is the notion of a triangular square.*” [**Human Action**, p. 706] This is because capitalism is not defined

by markets as such but rather by wage labour, a situation where working class people do not have free access to the means of production and so have to sell their labour (and so liberty) to those who do. If quoting Engels is not **too** out of place, the “*object of production — to produce commodities — does not import to the instrument the character of capital*” as the “*production of commodities is one of the preconditions for the existence of capital ... as long as the producer sells only what he himself produces, he is not a capitalist; he becomes so only from the moment he makes use of his instrument to exploit the wage labour of others.*” [Collected Works, Vol. 47, pp. 179–80] In this, as noted in section C.2.1, Engels was merely echoing Marx (who, in turn, was simply repeating Proudhon’s distinction between property and possession). As mutualism eliminates wage labour by self-management and free access to the means of production, its use of markets and prices (both of which pre-date capitalism) does not mean it is not socialist (and as we note in section G.1.1 Marx, Engels, Bakunin and Kropotkin, like Mises, acknowledged Proudhon as being a socialist). This focus on the market, as David Schweickart suggests, is no accident:

*“The identification of capitalism with the market is a pernicious error of both conservative defenders of laissez-faire [capitalism] and most left opponents ... If one looks at the works of the major apologists for capitalism ... one finds the focus of the apology always on the virtues of the market and on the vices of central planning. Rhetorically this is an effective strategy, for it is much easier to defend the market than to defend the other two defining institutions of capitalism. Proponents of capitalism know well that it is better to keep attention toward the market and away from wage labour or private ownership of the means of production.”* [“Market Socialism: A Defense”, pp. 7–22, **Market Socialism: the debate among socialists**, Bertell Ollman (ed.), p. 11]

The theoretical work of such socialists as David Schweickart (see his books **Against Capitalism** and **After Capitalism**) present an extensive discussion of a dynamic, decentralised market socialist system which has obvious similarities with mutualism — a link which some Leninists recognise and stress in order to discredit market socialism via guilt-by-association (Proudhon “*the anarchist and inveterate foe of Karl Marx ... put forward a conception of society, which is probably the first detailed exposition of a ‘socialist market.’*” [Hillel Ticktin, “*The Problem is Market Socialism*”, pp. 55–80, **Op. Cit.**, p. 56]). So far, most models of market socialism have not been fully libertarian, but instead involve the idea of workers’ control within a framework of state ownership of capital (Engler in **Apostles of Greed** is an exception to this, supporting community ownership). Ironically, while these Leninists reject the idea of market socialism as contradictory and, basically, not socialist they usually acknowledge that the transition to Marxist-communism under their workers’ state would utilise the market.

So, as anarchist Robert Graham points out, “*Market socialism is but one of the ideas defended by Proudhon which is both timely and controversial ... Proudhon’s market socialism is indissolubly linked with his notions of industrial democracy and workers’ self-management.*” [“Introduction”, P-J Proudhon, **General Idea of the Revolution**, p. xxxii] As we discuss in section I.3.5 Proudhon’s system of agro-industrial federations can be seen as a non-statist way of protecting self-management, liberty and equality in the face of market forces (Proudhon, unlike individualist anarchists, was well aware of the negative aspects of markets and the way market forces can disrupt society). Dissident economist Geoffrey M. Hodgson is right to suggest that Proudhon’s system, in which “*each co-operative association would be able to enter into contractual relations with others*”, could

be “described as an early form of ‘market socialism’”. In fact, “instead of Lange-type models, the term ‘market socialism’ is more appropriately to such systems. Market socialism, in this more appropriate and meaningful sense, involves producer co-operatives that are owned by the workers within them. Such co-operatives sell their products on markets, with genuine exchanges of property rights” (somewhat annoyingly, Hodgson incorrectly asserts that “Proudhon described himself as an anarchist, not a socialist” when, in reality, the French anarchist repeatedly referred to himself and his mutualist system as socialist). [Economics and Utopia, p. 20, p. 37 and p. 20]

Thus it is possible for a socialist economy to allocate resources using markets. By suppressing capital markets and workplace hierarchies, a mutualist system will improve upon capitalism by removing an important source of perverse incentives which hinder efficient use of resources as well as long term investment and social responsibility in addition to reducing inequalities and increasing freedom. As David Ellerman once noted, many “still look at the world in bipolar terms: capitalism or (state) socialism.” Yet there “are two broad traditions of socialism: **state socialism** and **self-management socialism**. State socialism is based on government ownership of major industry, while self-management socialism envisions firms being worker self-managed and not owned or managed by the government.” [Op. Cit., p. 147] Mutualism is a version of the second vision and anarchists reject the cosy agreement between mainstream Marxists and their ideological opponents on the proprietarian right that only state socialism is “real” socialism.

Finally, it should be noted that most anarchists are not mutualists but rather aim for (libertarian) communism, the abolition of money. Many do see a mutualist-like system as an inevitable stage in a social revolution, the transitional form imposed by the objective conditions facing a transformation of a society marked by thousands of years of oppression and exploitation (collectivist-anarchism contains elements of both mutualism and communism, with most of its supporters seeing it as a transitional system). This is discussed in section I.2.2, while section I.1.3 indicates why most anarchists reject even non-capitalist markets. So does Mises’s argument mean that a socialism that abolishes the market (such as libertarian communism) is impossible? Given that the vast majority of anarchists seek a libertarian communist society, this is an important question. We address it in the next section.

## I.1.2 Is libertarian communism impossible?

In a word, no. While the “*calculation argument*” (see last section) is often used by proprietarians (so-called right-wing “libertarians”) as the basis for the argument that communism (a moneyless society) is impossible, it is based on certain false ideas of what prices do, the nature of the market and how a communist-anarchist society would function. This is hardly surprising, as Mises based his theory on a variation of neo-classical economics and the Marxist social-democratic (and so Leninist) ideas of what a “socialist” economy would look like. So there has been little discussion of what a true (i.e. libertarian) communist society would be like, one that utterly transformed the existing conditions of production by workers’ self-management and the abolition of both wage-labour **and** money. However, it is useful here to indicate exactly why communism would work and why the “*calculation argument*” is flawed as an objection to it.

Mises argued that without money there was no way a socialist economy would make “rational” production decisions. Not even Mises denied that a moneyless society could estimate what is likely to be needed over a given period of time (as expressed as physical quantities of definite

types and sorts of objects). As he argued, “*calculation in natura in an economy without exchange can embrace consumption-goods only.*” His argument was that the next step, working out which productive methods to employ, would not be possible, or at least would not be able to be done “rationally,” i.e. avoiding waste and inefficiency. The evaluation of producer goods “*can only be done with some kind of economic calculation. The human mind cannot orient itself properly among the bewildering mass of intermediate products and potentialities without such aid. It would simply stand perplexed before the problems of management and location.*” Thus we would quickly see “*the spectacle of a socialist economic order floundering in the ocean of possible and conceivable economic combinations without the compass of economic calculation.*” [“*Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth*”, pp. 87–130, **Collectivist Economic Planning**, F.A. von Hayek (ed.), p. 104, p. 103 and p. 110] Hence the claim that monetary calculation based on market prices is the only solution.

This argument is not without its force. How can a producer be expected to know if tin is a better use of resources than iron when creating a product if all they know is that iron and tin are available and suitable for their purpose? Or, if we have a consumer good which can be made with  $A + 2B$  or  $2A + B$  (where A and B are both input factors such as steel, oil electricity, etc.) how can we tell which method is more efficient (i.e. which one used least resources and so left the most over for other uses)? With market prices, Mises’ argued, it is simple. If A cost \$10 and B \$5, then clearly method one would be the most efficient (\$20 versus \$25). Without the market, Mises argued, such a decision would be impossible and so every decision would be “*groping in the dark.*” [Op. Cit., p. 110]

Mises’ argument rests on three flawed assumptions, two against communism and one for capitalism. The first two negative assumptions are that communism entails central planning and that it is impossible to make investment decisions without money values. We discuss why each is wrong in this section. Mises’ positive assumption for capitalism, namely that markets allow exact and efficient allocation of resources, is discussed in section I.1.5.

Firstly, Mises assumes a centralised planned economy. As Hayek summarised, the crux of the matter was “*the impossibility of a rational calculation in a centrally directed economy from which prices are necessarily absent*”, one which “*involves planning on a most extensive scale — minute direction of practically all productive activity by one central authority*”. Thus the “*one central authority has to solve the economic problem of distributing a limited amount of resources between a practically infinite number of competing purposes*” with “*a reasonable degree of accuracy, with a degree of success equally or approaching the results of competitive capitalism*” is what “*constitutes the problem of socialism as a method.*” [“*The Nature and History of the Problem*”, pp. 1–40, Op. Cit., p. 35, p. 19 and pp. 16–7]

While this was a common idea in Marxian social democracy (and the Leninism that came from it), centralised organisations are rejected by anarchism. As Bakunin argued, “*where are the intellects powerful enough to embrace the infinite multiplicity and diversity of real interests, aspirations, wishes, and needs which sum up the collective will of the people? And to invent a social organisation that will not be a Procrustean bed upon which the violence of the State will more or less overtly force unhappy society to stretch out?*” Moreover, a socialist government, “*unless it were endowed with omniscience, omnipresence, and the omnipotence which the theologians attribute to God, could not possibly know and foresee the needs of its people, or satisfy with an even justice those interests which are most legitimate and pressing.*” [Bakunin on Anarchism, pp. 268–9 and p. 318] For Malatesta, such a system would require “*immense centralisation*” and would either be “*an*

*impossible thing to achieve, or, if possible, would end up as a colossal and very complex tyranny.*" [At the Café, p. 65]

Kropotkin, likewise, dismissed the notion of central planning as the *"economic changes that will result from the social revolution will be so immense and so profound ... that it will be impossible for one or even a number of individuals to elaborate the social forms to which a further society must give birth. The elaboration of new social forms can only be the collective work of the masses."* [Words of a Rebel, p. 175] The notion that a *"strongly centralised Government"* could *"command that a prescribed quantity"* of a good *"be sent to such a place on such a day"* and be *"received on a given day by a specified official and stored in particular warehouses"* was not only *"undesirable"* but also *"wildly Utopian."* During his discussion of the benefits of free agreement against state tutelage, Kropotkin noted that only the former allowed the utilisation of *"the co-operation, the enthusiasm, the local knowledge"* of the people. [The Conquest of Bread, pp. 82–3 and p. 137]

Kropotkin's own experience had shown how the *"high functionaries"* of the Tsarist bureaucracy *"were simply charming in their innocent ignorance"* of the areas they were meant to be administering and how, thanks to Marxism, the socialist ideal had *"lost the character of something that had to be worked out by the labour organisations themselves, and became state management of industries — in fact, state socialism; that is, state capitalism."* As an anarchist, he knew that governments become *"isolated from the masses"* and so *"the very success of socialism"* required *"the ideas of no-government, of self-reliance, of free initiative of the individual"* to be *"preached side by side with those of socialised ownership and production."* Thus it was essential that socialism was decentralised, federal and participatory, that the *"structure of the society which we longed for"* was *"worked out, in theory and practice, from beneath"* in by *"all labour unions"* with *"a full knowledge of local needs of each trade and each locality."* [Memoirs of a Revolutionist, p. 184, p. 360, p. 374–5 and p. 376]

So anarchists can agree with Mises that central planning cannot work in practice as its advocates hope. Or, more correctly, Mises agreed with the anarchists, as we had opposed central planning first. We have long recognised that no small body of people can be expected to know what happens in society and plan accordingly (*"No single brain nor any bureau of brains can see to this organisation."* [Issac Puente, Libertarian Communism, p. 29]). Moreover, there is the pressing question of freedom as well, for *"the despotism of [the 'socialist'] State would be equal to the despotism of the present state, increased by the economic despotism of all the capital which would pass into the hands of the State, and the whole would be multiplied by all the centralisation necessary for this new State. And it is for this reason that we, the Anarchists, friends of liberty, we intend to fight them to the end."* [Carlo Cafiero, "Anarchy and Communism", pp. 179–86, The Raven, No. 6, p. 179]

As John O'Neill summarises, the *"argument against centralised planning is one that has been articulated within the history of socialist planning as an argument for democratic and decentralised decision making."* [The Market, p. 132] So, for good economic and political reasons, anarchists reject central planning. This central libertarian socialist position feeds directly into refuting Mises' argument, for while a **centralised** system would need to compare a large (*"infinite"*) number of possible alternatives to a large number of possible needs, this is not the case in a **decentralised** system. Rather than a vast multitude of alternatives which would swamp a centralised planning agency, one workplace comparing different alternatives to meet a specific need faces a much lower number of possibilities as the objective technical requirements (use-values) of a project

are known and so local knowledge will eliminate most of the options available to a small number which can be directly compared.

As such, removing the assumption of a central planning body automatically drains Mises' critique of much of its force — rather than an “*the ocean of possible and conceivable economic combinations*” faced by a central body, a specific workplace or community has a more limited number of possible solutions for a limited number of requirements. Moreover, any complex machine is a product of less complex goods, meaning that the workplace is a consumer of other workplace's goods. If, as Mises admitted, a customer can decide between consumption goods without the need for money then the user and producer of a “*higher order*” good can decide between consumption goods required to meet their needs.

In terms of decision making, it is true that a centralised planning agency would be swamped by the multiple options available to it. However, in a decentralised socialist system individual workplaces and communes would be deciding between a much smaller number of alternatives. Moreover, unlike a centralised system, the individual firm or commune knows exactly what is required to meet its needs, and so the number of possible alternatives is reduced as well (for example, certain materials are simply technically unsuitable for certain tasks).

Mises' other assumption is equally flawed. This is that without the market, no information is passed between producers beyond the final outcome of production. In other words, he assumed that the final product is all that counts in evaluating its use. Needless to say, it is true that without more information than the name of a given product it is impossible to determine whether using it would be an efficient utilisation of resources. Yet more information can be provided which can be used to inform decision making. As socialists Adam Buick and John Crump point out, “*at the level of the individual production unit or industry, the only calculations that would be necessary in socialism would be calculations in kind. On the one side would be recorded the resources (materials, energy, equipment, labour) used up in production and on the other the amount of good produced, together with any by-products... Socialist production is simply the production of use values from use values, and nothing more.*” [State Capitalism: The Wages System Under New Management, p. 137] Thus any good used as an input into a production process would require the communication of this kind of information.

The generation and communication of such information implies a decentralised, horizontal network between producers and consumers. This is because what counts as a use-value can only be determined by those directly using it. Thus the production of use-values from use-values cannot be achieved via central planning, as the central planners have no notion of the use-value of the goods being used or produced. Such knowledge lies in many hands, dispersed throughout society, and so socialist production implies decentralisation. Capitalist ideologues claim that the market allows the utilisation of such dispersed knowledge, but as John O'Neill notes, “*the market may be one way in which dispersed knowledge can be put to good effect. It is not ... the only way*”. “*The strength of the epistemological argument for the market depends in part on the implausibility of assuming that all knowledge could be centralised upon some particular planning agency*” he stresses, but Mises' “*argument ignores, however, the existence of the decentralised but predominantly non-market institutions for the distribution of knowledge ... The assumption that only the market can co-ordinate dispersed non-vocalisable knowledge is false.*” [Op. Cit., p. 118 and p. 132]

So, in order to determine if a specific good is useful to a person, that person needs to know its “cost.” Under capitalism, the notion of cost has been so associated with price that we have to put the word “cost” in quotation marks. However, the real cost of, say, writing a book, is not

a sum of money but so much paper, so much energy, so much ink, so much human labour. In order to make a rational decision on whether a given good is better for meeting a given need than another, the would-be consumer requires this information. However, under capitalism this information is **hidden** by the price.

Somewhat ironically, given how “Austrian” economics tends to stress that the informational limitations are at the root of its “*impossibility*” of socialism, the fact is that the market hides a significant amount of essential information required to make a sensible investment decision. This can be seen from an analysis of Mises’ discussion on why labour-time cannot replace money as a decision-making tool. Using labour, he argued, “*leaves the employment of material factors of production out of account*” and presents an example of two goods, P and Q, which take 10 hours to produce. P takes 8 hours of labour, plus 2 units of raw material A (which is produced by an hour’s socially necessary labour). Q takes 9 hours of labour and one unit of A. He asserts that in terms of labour P and Q “*are equivalent, but in value terms P is more valuable than Q. The former is false, and only the later corresponds to the nature and purpose of calculation.*” [“*Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth*”, *Op. Cit.*, p. 113]

The flaw in his argument is clear. Assuming that an hour of socially necessary labour is £10 then, in price terms, P would have £80 of direct labour costs, with £20 of raw material A while Q would have £90 of direct labour and £10 of A. Both cost £100 so it hard to see how this “*corresponds to the nature and purpose of calculation*”! Using less of raw material A is a judgement made **in addition** to “*calculation*” in this example. The question of whether to economise on the use of A simply cannot be made using prices. If P, for example, can only be produced via a more ecologically destructive process than Q or if the work process by which P is created is marked by dull, mindless work but Q’s is more satisfying for the people involved than Q may be considered a better decision. Sadly, that kind of information is **not** communicated by the price mechanism.

As John O’Neill points out, “*Mises’ earlier arguments against socialist planning turned on an assumption about commensurability. His central argument was that rational economic decision-making required a single measure on the basis of which the worth of alternative states of affairs could be calculated and compared.*” [Ecology, Policy and Politics, p. 115] This central assumption was unchallenged by Taylor and Lange in their defence of “socialism”, meaning that from the start the debate against Mises was defensive and based on the argument that socialist planning could mimic the market and produce results which were efficient from a capitalist point of view.

Anarchists question whether using prices means basing all decision making on one criterion and ignoring all others is a rational thing to do. As O’Neill suggests, “*the relative scarcity of items ... hardly exhaust the full gamut of information that is distributed throughout society which might be relevant to the co-ordination of economic activities and plans.*” [The Market, p. 196] Saying that a good costs £10 does not tell you much about the amount of pollution its production or use generates, under what conditions of labour it was produced, whether its price is affected by the market power of the firm producing it, whether it is produced in an ecologically sustainable way, and so forth. Similarly, saying that another, similar, good costs £9 does not tell you whether than £1 difference is due to a more efficient use of inputs or whether it is caused by imposing pollution onto the planet.

And do prices **actually** reflect costs? The question of profit, the reward for owning capital and allowing others to use it, is hardly a cost in the same way as labour, resources and so on (attempts to explain profits as an equivalent sacrifice as labour have always been ridiculous and quickly dropped). When looking at prices to evaluate efficient use for goods, you cannot actually tell by



the price if this is so. Two goods may have the same price, but profit levels (perhaps under the influence of market power) may be such that one has a higher cost price than another. The price mechanism fails to indicate which uses least resources as it is influenced by market power. Indeed, as Takis Fotopoulos notes, “[i]f ... *both central planning and the market economy inevitably lead to concentrations of power, then neither the former nor the latter can produce the sort of information flows and incentives which are necessary for the best functioning of any economic system.*” [Towards an Inclusive Democracy, p. 252] Moreover, a good produced under a authoritarian state which represses its workforce could have a lower price than one produced in a country which allowed unions to organise and has basic human rights. The repression would force down the cost of labour, so making the good in question appear as a more “efficient” use of resources. In other words, the market can mask inhumanity as “efficiency” and actually reward that behaviour by market share.

In other words, market prices can be horribly distorted in that they ignore quality issues. Exchanges therefore occur in light of false information and, moreover, with anti-social motivations – to maximise short-term surplus for the capitalists regardless of losses to others. Thus they distort valuations and impose a crass, narrow and ultimately self-defeating individualism. Prices are shaped by more than costs, with, for example, market power increasing market prices far higher than actual costs. Market prices also fail to take into account public goods and so bias allocation choices against them not to mention ignoring the effects on the wider society, i.e. beyond the direct buyers and sellers. Similarly, in order to make rational decisions relating to using a good, you need to know **why** the price has changed for if a change is permanent or transient implies different responses. Thus the current price is not enough in itself. Has the good become more expensive temporarily, due, say, to a strike? Or is it because the supply of the resource has been exhausted? Actions that are sensible in the former situation will be wrong in the other. As O’Neill suggests, “*the information [in the market] is passed back without dialogue. The market informs by ‘exit’ – some products find a market, others do not. ‘Voice’ is not exercised. This failure of dialogue ... represents an informational failure of the market, not a virtue ... The market ... does distribute information ... it also blocks a great deal.*” [Op. Cit., p. 99]

So a purely market-based system leaves out information on which to base rational resource allocations (or, at the very least, hides it). The reason for this is that a market system measures, at best, preferences of **individual** buyers among the **available** options. This assumes that all the pertinent use-values that are to be outcomes of production are things that are to be consumed by the individual, rather than use-values that are collectively enjoyed (like clean air). Prices in the market do not measure social costs or externalities, meaning that such costs are not reflected in the price and so you cannot have a rational price system. Similarly, if the market measures only preferences amongst things that can be monopolised and sold to individuals, as distinguished from values that are enjoyed collectively, then it follows that information necessary for rational decision-making in production is not provided by the market. In other words, capitalist “calculation” fails because private firms are oblivious to the social cost of their labour and raw materials inputs.

Indeed, prices often **mis**-value goods as companies can gain a competitive advantage by passing costs onto society (in the form of pollution, for example, or de-skilling workers, increasing job insecurity, and so on). This externalisation of costs is actually rewarded in the market as consumers seek the lowest prices, unaware of the reasons **why** it is lower (such information cannot be gathered from looking at the price). Even if we assume that such activity is penalised by fines

later, the damage is still done and cannot be undone. Indeed, the company may be able to weather the fines due to the profits it originally made by externalising costs (see section E.3). Thus the market creates a perverse incentive to subsidise their input costs through off-the-book social and environmental externalities. As Chomsky suggests:

*“it is by now widely realised that the economist’s ‘externalities can no longer be consigned to footnotes. No one who gives a moment’s thought to the problems of contemporary society can fail to be aware of the social costs of consumption and production, the progressive destruction of the environment, the utter irrationality of the utilisation of contemporary technology, the inability of a system based on profit or growth-maximisation to deal with needs that can only be expressed collectively, and the enormous bias this system imposes towards maximisation of commodities for personal use in place of the general improvement of the quality of life.”* [Radical Priorities, pp. 190–1]

Prices hide the actual costs that production involved for the individual, society, and the environment, and instead boils everything down into **one** factor, namely price. There is a lack of dialogue and information between producer and consumer.

Moreover, without using another means of cost accounting instead of prices how can supporters of capitalism know there is a correlation between actual and price costs? One can determine whether such a correlation exists by measuring one against the other. If this cannot be done, then the claim that prices measure costs is a tautology (in that a price represents a cost and we know that it is a cost because it has a price). If it can be done, then we can calculate costs in some other sense than in market prices and so the argument that only market prices represent costs falls. Equally, there may be costs (in terms of quality of life issues) which **cannot** be reflected in price terms.

Simply put, the market fails to distribute all relevant information and, particularly when prices are at disequilibrium, can communicate distinctly **misleading** information. In the words of two South African anarchists, *“prices in capitalism provided at best incomplete and partial information that obscured the workings of capitalism, and would generate and reproduce economic and social inequalities. Ignoring the social character of the economy with their methodological individualism, economic liberals also ignored the social costs of particular choices and the question of externalities.”* [Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, **Black Flame**, p. 92] This suggests that prices cannot be taken to reflect real costs any more that they can reflect the social expression of the valuation of goods. They are the result of a conflict waged over these goods and those that acted as their inputs (including, of course, labour). Market and social power, much more than need or resource usage, decides the issue. The inequality in the means of purchasers, in the market power of firms and in the bargaining position of labour and capital all play their part, so distorting any relationship a price may have to its costs in terms of resource use. Prices are misshapen.

Little wonder Kropotkin asked whether *“are we not yet bound to analyse that compound result we call price rather than to accept it as a supreme and blind ruler of our actions?”* [Fields, **Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 71] It is precisely these **real** costs, hidden by price, which need to be communicated to producers and consumers for them to make informed and rational decisions concerning their economic activity.

It is useful to remember that Mises argued that it is the **complexity** of a modern economy that ensures money is required: *“Within the narrow confines of household economy, for instance, where*

*the father can supervise the entire economic management, it is possible to determine the significance of changes in the processes of production, without such aids to the mind [as monetary calculation], and yet with more or less of accuracy.”* However, *“the mind of one man alone — be it ever so cunning, is too weak to grasp the importance of any single one among the countless many goods of higher order. No single man can ever master all the possibilities of production, innumerable as they are, as to be in a position to make straightway evident judgements of value without the aid of some system of computation.”* [Op. Cit., p. 102]

A libertarian communist society would, it must be stressed, use various “*aids to the mind*” to help individuals and groups to make economic decisions. This would reduce the complexity of economic decision making, by allowing different options and resources to be compared to each other. Hence the complexity of economic decision making in an economy with a multitude of goods can be reduced by the use of rational algorithmic procedures and methods to aid the process. Such tools would aid decision making, not dominate it as these decisions affect humans and the planet and should never be made automatically.

That being the case, a libertarian communist society would quickly develop the means of comparing the real impact of specific “*higher order*” goods in terms of their real costs (i.e. the amount of labour, energy and raw materials used plus any social and ecological costs). Moreover, it should be remembered that production goods are made up on inputs of other goods, that is, higher goods are made up of consumption goods of a lower order. If, as Mises admits, calculation without money is possible for consumption goods then the creation of “*higher order*” goods can be also achieved and a record of its costs made and communicated to those who seek to use it.

While the specific “*aids to the mind*” as well as “costs” and their relative weight would be determined by the people of a free society, we can speculate that it would include direct and indirect labour, externalities (such as pollution), energy use and materials, and so forth. As such, it must be stressed that a libertarian communist society would seek to communicate the “costs” associated with any specific product as well as its relative scarcity. In other words, it needs a means of determining the objective or absolute costs associated with different alternatives as well as an indication of how much of a given good is available at a given it (i.e., its scarcity). Both of these can be determined without the use of money and markets.

Section I.4 discusses possible frameworks for an anarchist economy, including suggestions for libertarian communist economic decision-making processes. In terms of “*aids to the mind*”, these include methods to compare goods for resource allocation by indicating the absolute costs involved in producing a good and the relative scarcity of a specific good, among other things. Such a framework is necessary because *“an appeal to a necessary role for practical judgements in decision making is **not** to deny any role to general principles. Neither ... does it deny any place for the use of technical rules and algorithmic procedures ... Moreover, there is a necessary role for rules of thumb, standard procedures, the default procedures and institutional arrangements that can be followed unreflectively and which **reduce** the scope for **explicit** judgements comparing different states of affairs. There are limits in time, efficient use of resources and the dispersal of knowledge which require rules and institutions. Such rules and institutions can free us for space and time for reflective judgements where they matter most.”* [John O’Neill, **Ecology, Policy and Politics**, pp. 117–8] It is these “*rules and institutions need themselves to be open to critical and reflective appraisal.*” [O’Neill, **The Market**, p. 118]

Economic decisions, in other words, cannot be reduced down to one factor yet Mises argued that anyone “*who wished to make calculations in regard to a complicated process of production will*

*immediately notice whether he has worked more economically than others or not; if he finds, from reference to the exchange values obtaining in the market, that he will not be able to produce profitably, this shows that others understand how to make better use of the higher-order goods in question.*” [Op. Cit., pp. 97–8] However, this only shows whether someone has worked more **profitably** than others, not whether it is more economical. Market power automatically muddles this issue, as does the possibility of reducing the monetary cost of production by recklessly exploiting natural resources and labour, polluting, or otherwise passing costs onto others. Similarly, the issue of wealth inequality is important, for if the production of luxury goods proves more profitable than basic essentials for the poor does this show that producing the former is a better use of resources? And, of course, the key issue of the relative strength of market power between workers and capitalists plays a key role in determining “profitably.”

Basing your economic decision making on a single criteria, namely profitability, can, and does, lead to perverse results. Most obviously, the tendency for capitalists to save money by not introducing safety equipment (“*To save a dollar the capitalist build their railroads poorly, and along comes a train, and loads of people are killed. What are their lives to him, if by their sacrifice he has saved money?*” [Emma Goldman, *A Documentary History of the American Years*, vol. 1, p. 157]). Similarly, it is considered a more “efficient” use of resources to condemn workers to deskilling and degrading work than “waste” resources in developing machines to eliminate or reduce it (“*How many machines remain unused solely because they do not return an immediate profit to the capitalist! ... How many discoveries, how many applications of science remain a dead letter solely because they don’t bring the capitalist enough!*” [Carlo Cafiero, “*Anarchy and Communism*”, pp. 179–86, *The Raven*, No. 6, p. 182]). Similarly, those investments which have a higher initial cost but which, in the long run, would have, say, a smaller environmental impact would not be selected in a profit-driven system.

This has seriously irrational effects, because the managers of capitalist enterprises are obliged to choose technical means of production which produce the cheapest results. All other considerations are subordinate, in particular the health and welfare of the producers and the effects on the environment. The harmful effects resulting from “rational” capitalist production methods have long been pointed out. For example, speed-ups, pain, stress, accidents, boredom, overwork, long hours and so on all harm the physical and mental health of those involved, while pollution, the destruction of the environment, and the exhaustion of non-renewable resources all have serious effects on both the planet and those who live on it. As green economist E. F. Schumacher argued:

*“But what does it **mean** when we say that something is uneconomic? ... [S]omething is uneconomic when it fails to earn an adequate profit in terms of money. The method of economics does not, and cannot, produce any other meaning ... The judgement of economics ... is an extremely **fragmentary** judgement; out of the large number of aspects which in real life have to be seen and judged together before a decision can be taken, economics supplies only one — whether a money profit accrues **to those who undertake it or not.**”* [Small is Beautiful, pp. 27–8]

Schumacher stressed that “*about the **fragmentary** nature of the judgements of economics there can be no doubt whatever. Even with the narrow compass of the economic calculus, these judgements are necessarily and **methodically** narrow. For one thing, they give vastly more weight to the short than to the long term... [S]econd, they are based on a definition of cost which excludes all ‘free goods’*

... [such as the] environment, except for those parts that have been privately appropriated. This means that an activity can be economic although it plays hell with the environment, and that a competing activity, if at some cost it protects and conserves the environment, will be uneconomic.” Moreover, “[d]o not overlook the words ‘to those who undertake it.’ It is a great error to assume, for instance, that the methodology of economics is normally applied to determine whether an activity carried out by a group within society yields a profit to society as a whole.” [Op. Cit., p. 29]

To claim that prices include all these “externalities” is nonsense. If they did, we would not see capital moving to third-world countries with few or no anti-pollution or labour laws. At best, the “cost” of pollution would only be included in a price if the company was sued successfully in court for damages — in other words, once the damage is done. Ultimately, companies have a strong interest in buying inputs with the lowest prices, regardless of **how** they are produced. In fact, the market rewards such behaviour as a company which was socially responsible would be penalised by higher costs, and so market prices. It is reductionist accounting and its accompanying “*ethics of mathematics*” that produces the “*irrationality of rationality*” which plagues capitalism’s exclusive reliance on prices (i.e. profits) to measure “efficiency.”

Ironically enough, Mises also pointed to the irrational nature of the price mechanism. He stated (correctly) that there are “*extra-economic*” elements which “*monetary calculation cannot embrace*” because of “*its very nature*.” He acknowledged that these “*considerations themselves can scarcely be termed irrational*” and, as examples, listed “[i]n any place where men regard as significant the beauty of a neighbourhood or a building, the health, happiness and contentment of mankind, the honour of individuals or nations.” He also noted that “*they are just as much motive forces of rational conduct as are economic factors*” but they “*do not enter into exchange relationships*.” How rational is an economic system which ignores the “*health, happiness and contentment*” of people? Or the beauty of their surroundings? Which, moreover, penalises those who take these factors into consideration? For anarchists, Mises comments indicate well the inverted logic of capitalism. That Mises can support a system which ignores the needs of individuals, their happiness, health, surroundings, environment and so on by “*its very nature*” says a lot. His suggestion that we assign monetary values to such dimensions begs the question and has plausibility only if it assumes what it is supposed to prove. [Op. Cit., p. 99–100] Indeed, the person who would put a price on friendship simply would have no friends as they simply do not understand what friendship is and are thereby excluded from much which is best in human life. Likewise for other “*extra-economic*” goods that individual’s value, such as beautiful places, happiness, the environment and so on.

So essential information required for sensible decision making would have to be recorded and communicated in a communist society and used to evaluate different options using agreed methods of comparison. This differs drastically from the price mechanism as it recognises that mindless, automatic calculation is impossible in social choices. Such choices have an unavoidable ethical and social dimension simply because they involve other human beings and the environment. As Mises himself acknowledged, monetary calculation does not capture such dimensions.

We, therefore, need to employ practical judgement in making choices aided by a full understanding of the **real** social and ecological costs involved using, of course, the appropriate “*aids to the mind*.” Given that an anarchist society would be complex and integrated, such aids would be essential but, due to its decentralised nature, it need not embrace the price mechanism. It can evaluate the efficiency of its decisions by looking at the **real** costs involved to society rather than embrace the distorted system of costing explicit in the price mechanism (as Kropotkin once put

it, “if we analyse *price*” we must “make a distinction between its different elements”. [Op. Cit., p. 72]).

In summary, then, Mises considered only central planning as genuine socialism, meaning that a decentralised communism was not addressed. Weighting up the pros and cons of how to use millions of different goods in the millions of potential situations they could be used would be impossible in a centralised system, yet in decentralised communism this is not an issue. Each individual commune and syndicate would be choosing from the few alternatives required to meet their needs. With the needs known, the alternatives can be compared – particularly if agreed criteria (“*aids to the mind*”) are utilised and the appropriate agreed information communicated.

Efficient economic decision making in a moneyless “economy” is possible, assuming that sufficient information is passed between syndicates and communes to evaluate the relative and absolute costs of a good. Thus, decisions can be reached which aimed to reduce the use of goods in short supply or which take large amounts of resources to produce (or which produce large externalities to create). While a **centralised** system would be swamped by the large number of different uses and combinations of goods, a **decentralised** communist system would not be.

Thus, anarchists argue that Mises was wrong. Communism is viable, but only if it is **libertarian** communism. Ultimately, though, the real charge is not that socialism is “*impossible*” but rather that it would be inefficient, i.e., it would allocate resources such that too much is used to achieve specified goals and that there would be no way to check that the allocated resources were valued sufficiently to warrant their use in the first place. While some may portray this as a case of planning against markets (no-planning), this is false. Planning occurs in capitalism (as can be seen from any business), it is a question of whether capitalism ensures that more plans can be co-ordinated and needs met by means of relative prices and profit-loss accounting than by communism (free access and distribution according to need). As such, the question is does the capitalist system add additional problems to the efficient co-ordination of plans? Libertarian communists argue, yes, it does (as we discuss at length in section I.1.5).

All choices involve lost possibilities, so the efficient use of resources is required to increase the possibilities for creating other goods. At best, all you can say is that by picking options which cost the least a market economy will make more resources available for other activities. Yet this assumption crucially depends equating “efficient” with profitable, a situation which cannot be predicted beforehand and which easily leads to inefficient allocation of resources (particularly if we are looking at meeting human needs). Then there are the costs of using money for if we are talking of opportunity costs, of the freeing up of resources for other uses, then the labour and other resources used to process money related activities should be included. While these activities (banking, advertising, defending property, and so forth) are essential to a capitalist economy, they are not needed and unproductive from the standpoint of producing use values or meeting human need. This would suggest that a libertarian communist economy would have a productive advantage over a capitalist economy as the elimination of this structural waste intrinsic to capitalism will free up a vast amount of labour and materials for socially useful production. This is not to mention the so-called “costs” which are no such thing, but relate to capitalist property rights. Thus “rent” may be considered a cost under capitalism, but would disappear if those who used a resource controlled it rather than pay a tribute to gain access to it. As Kropotkin argued, “*the capitalist system makes us pay for everything three or four times its labour value*” thanks to rent, profit, interest and the actions of middle men. Such system specific “costs” hide the actual

costs (in terms of labour and resource use) by increasing the price compared to if we “reckon our expenses in labour”. [Op. Cit., p. 68]

Moreover, somewhat ironically, this “economising” of resources which the market claims to achieve is not to conserve resources for future generations or to ensure environmental stability. Rather, it is to allow **more** goods to be produced in order to accumulate more capital. It could be argued that the market forces producers to minimise costs on the assumption that lower costs will be more likely to result in higher profits. However, this leaves the social impact of such cost-cutting out of the equation. For example, imposing externalities on others does reduce a firm’s prices and, as a result, is rewarded by the market however alienating and exhausting work or rising pollution levels does not seem like a wise thing to do. So, yes, it is true that a capitalist firm will seek to minimise costs in order to maximise profits. This, at first glance, could be seen as leading to an efficient use of resources until such time as the results of this become clear. Thus goods could be created which do not last as long as they could, which need constant repairing, etc. So a house produced “efficiently” under capitalism could be a worse place to live simply because costs were reduced by cutting corners (less insulation, thinner walls, less robust materials, etc.). In addition, the collective outcome of all these “efficient” decisions could be socially inefficient as they reduce the quality of life of those subject to them as well as leading to over-investment, over-production, falling profits and economic crisis. As such, it could be argued that Mises’ argument exposes more difficulties for capitalism rather than for anarchism.

Finally, it should be noted that most anarchists would question the criteria Hayek and Mises used to judge the relative merits of communism and capitalism. As the former put it, the issue was “a distribution of income independent of private property in the means of production and a volume of output which was at least approximately the same or even greater than that procured under free competition.” [“The Nature and History of the Problem”, Op. Cit., p. 37] Thus the issue is reduced to that of output (quantity), not issues of freedom (quality). If slavery or Stalinism **had** produced more output than free market capitalism, that would not make either system desirable. This was, in fact, a common argument against Stalinism during the 1950s and 1960s when it **did** appear that central planning was producing more goods (and, ironically, by the propertarian right against the welfare state for, it should be remembered, that volume of output, like profitability and so “efficiency”, in the market depends on income distribution and a redistribution from rich to poor could easily result in more output becoming profitable). Similarly, that capitalism produces more alcohol and Prozac to meet the higher demand for dulling the minds of those trying to survive under it would **not** be an argument against libertarian communism! As we discuss in section I.4, while anarchists seek to meet material human needs we do not aim, as under capitalism, to sacrifice all other goals to that aim as capitalism does. Thus, to state the obvious, the aim for maximum volume of output only makes sense under capitalism as the maximum of human happiness and liberty may occur with a lower volume of output in a free society. The people of a society without oppression, exploitation and alienation will hardly act in identical ways, nor seek the same volume of output, as those in one, like capitalism, marked by those traits!

Moreover, the volume of output is a somewhat misleading criteria as it totally ignores its distribution. If the bulk of that volume goes to a few, then that is hardly a good use of resources. This is hardly an academic concern as can be seen from the Hayek influenced neo-liberalism of the 1980s onwards. As economist Paul Krugman notes, the value of the output of an average worker “has risen almost 50 percent since 1973. Yet the growing concentration of income in the hands of a small minority had proceeded so rapidly that we’re not sure whether the typical American has

*gained anything from rising productivity.*” This means that wealth have flooded upwards, and “*the lion’s share of economic growth in America over the past thirty years has gone to a small, wealthy minority.*” [The Conscience of a Liberal, p. 124 and p. 244]

To conclude. Capitalist “efficiency” is hardly rational and for a fully human and ecological efficiency libertarian communism is required. As Buick and Crump point out, “*socialist society still has to be concerned with using resources efficiently and rationally, but the criteria of ‘efficiency’ and ‘rationality’ are not the same as they are under capitalism.*” [Op. Cit., p. 137] Under communist-anarchism, the decision-making system used to determine the best use of resources is not more or less “efficient” than market allocation, because it goes beyond the market-based concept of “efficiency.” It does not seek to mimic the market but to do what the market fails to do. This is important, because the market is not the rational system its defenders often claim. While reducing all decisions to one common factor is, without a doubt, an easy method of decision making, it also has serious side-effects **because** of its reductionistic basis. The market makes decision making simplistic and generates a host of irrationalities and dehumanising effects as a result. So, to claim that communism will be “more” efficient than capitalism or vice versa misses the point. Libertarian communism will be “efficient” in a totally different way and people will act in ways considered “irrational” only under the narrow logic of capitalism.

For another critique of Mises, see Robin Cox’s “*The ‘Economic Calculation’ controversy: unravelling of a myth*” [Common Voice, Issue 3]

### I.1.3 What is wrong with markets anyway?

A lot. Markets soon result in what are termed “*market forces,*” impersonal forces which ensure that the people in the economy do what is required of them in order for the economy to function. The market system, in capitalist apologetics, is presented to appear as a regime of freedom where no one forces anyone to do anything, where we “freely” exchange with others as we see fit. However, the facts of the matter are somewhat different, since the market often ensures that people act in ways **opposite** to what they desire or forces them to accept “free agreements” which they may not actually desire. Wage labour is the most obvious example of this, for, as we indicated in section B.4, most people have little option but to agree to work for others.

We must stress here that not all anarchists are opposed to the market. Individualist anarchists favour it while Proudhon wanted to modify it while retaining competition. For many, the market equals capitalism but this is not the case as it ignores the fundamental issue of (economic) class, namely who owns the means of production. Capitalism is unique in that it is based on wage labour, i.e. a market for labour as workers do not own their own means of production and have to sell themselves to those who do. Thus it is entirely possible for a market to exist within a society and for that society **not** to be capitalist. For example, a society of independent artisans and peasants selling their product on the market would not be capitalist as workers would own and control their means of production. Similarly, Proudhon’s competitive system of self-managed co-operatives and mutual banks would be non-capitalist (and socialist) for the same reason. Anarchists object to capitalism due to the quality of the social relationships it generates between people (i.e. it generates authoritarian ones). If these relationships are eliminated then the kinds of ownership which do so are anarchistic. Thus the issue of ownership matters only in-so-far it generates relationships of the desired kind (i.e. those based on liberty, equality and solidarity).



To concentrate purely on “markets” or “property” means to ignore social relationships and the key aspect of capitalism, namely wage labour. That right-wingers do this is understandable (to hide the authoritarian core of capitalism) but why (libertarian or other) socialists should do so is less clear.

In this section of the FAQ we discuss anarchist objections to the market as **such** rather than the capitalist market. The workings of the market do have problems with them which are independent of, or made worse by, the existence of wage-labour. It is these problems which make most anarchists hostile to the market and so desire a (libertarian) communist society. So, even if we assume a mutualist (a libertarian market-socialist) system of competing self-managed workplaces, then communist anarchists would argue that market forces would soon result in many irrationalities occurring.

Most obviously, operating in a market means submitting to the profit criterion. This means that however much workers might want to employ social criteria in their decision making, they cannot. To ignore profitability would cause their firm to go bankrupt. Markets, therefore, create conditions that compel producers to decide things which are not in their, or others, interest, such as introducing deskilling or polluting technology, working longer hours, and so on, in order to survive on the market. For example, a self-managed workplace will be more likely to invest in safe equipment and working practices, this would still be dependent on finding the money to do so and may still increase the price of their finished product. So we could point to the numerous industrial deaths and accidents which are due to market forces making it unprofitable to introduce adequate safety equipment or working conditions, (conservative estimates for industrial deaths in the USA are between 14,000 and 25,000 per year plus over 2 million disabled), or to increased pollution and stress levels which shorten life spans.

This tendency for self-managed firms to adjust to market forces by increasing hours, working more intensely, allocating resources to accumulating equipment rather than leisure time or consumption can be seen in co-operatives under capitalism. While lacking bosses may reduce this tendency in a post-capitalist economy, it will not eliminate it. This is why many socialists, including anarchists, call the way markets force unwilling members of a co-operatives make such unpleasant decisions a form of “self-exploitation” (although this is somewhat misleading, as there is no exploitation in the capitalist sense of owners appropriating unpaid labour). For communist-anarchists, a market system of co-operatives “*has serious limitations*” as “*a collective enterprise is not necessarily a commune — nor is it necessarily communistic in its outlook.*” This is because it can end up “*competing with like concerns for resources, customers, privileges, and even profits*” as they “*become a particularistic interest*” and “*are subjected to the same social pressures by the market in which they must function.*” This “*tends increasingly to encroach on their higher ethical goals — generally, in the name of ‘efficiency’, and the need to ‘grow’ if they are to survive, and the overwhelming temptation to acquire larger earnings.*” [Murray Bookchin, **Remaking Society**, pp. 193–4]

Similarly, a market of self-managed firms would still suffer from booms and slumps as the co-operatives response to changes in prices would still result in over-production (see section C.7.2) and over-investment (see section C.7.3). While the lack of non-labour income would help reduce the severity of the business cycle, it seems unlikely to eliminate it totally. Equally, many of the problems of market-increased uncertainty and the destabilising aspects of price signals discussed in section I.1.5 are just as applicable to all markets, including post-capitalist ones.

This is related to the issue of the “*tyranny of small decisions*” we highlighted in section B.6. This suggests that the aggregate effect of individual decisions produces social circumstances which are irrational and against the interests of those subject to them. This is the case with markets, where competition results in economic pressures which force its participants to act in certain ways, ways they would prefer not to do but, as isolated individuals or workplaces, end up doing due to market forces. In markets, it is rational for people try to buy cheap and sell dear. Each tries to maximise their income by either minimising their costs or maximising their prices, not because they particularly want to but because they need to as taking into account other priorities is difficult as there is no means of finding them out and deeply inadvisable as it is competitively suicidal as it places burdens on firms which their competitors need not face.

As we noted in section E.3, markets tend to reward those who act in anti-social ways and externalise costs (in terms of pollution and so on). In a market economy, it is impossible to determine whether a low cost reflects actual efficiency or a willingness to externalise, i.e., impose costs on others. Markets rarely internalise external costs. Two economic agents who strike a market-rational bargain between themselves need not consider the consequences of their bargain for other people outside their bargain, nor the consequences for the earth. In reality, then, market exchanges are never bilateral agreements as their effects impact on the wider society (in terms of, say, pollution, inequality and so on). This awkward fact is ignored in the market. As the left-wing economist Joan Robinson put it: “*In what industry, in what line of business, are the true social costs of the activity registered in its accounts? Where is the pricing system that offers the consumer a fair choice between air to breath and motor cars to drive about in?*” [Contribution to Modern Economics, p. 10]

While, to be fair, there will be a reduced likelihood for a workplace of self-employed workers to pollute their own neighbourhoods in a free society, the competitive pressures and rewards would still be there and it seems unlikely that they will be ignored, particularly if survival on the market is at stake so communist-anarchists fear that while not having bosses, capitalists and landlords would mitigate some of the irrationalities associated with markets under capitalism, it will not totally remove them. While the market may be free, people would not be.

Even if we assume that self-managed firms resist the temptations and pressures of the market, any market system is also marked by a continuing need to expand production and consumption. In terms of environmental impact, a self-managed firm must still make profits in order to survive and so the economy must grow. As such, every market system will tend to expand into an environment which is of fixed size. As well as placing pressure on the planet’s ecology, this need to grow impacts on human activity as it also means that market forces ensure that work continually has to expand. Competition means that we can never take it easy, for as Max Stirner argued, “[r]estless acquisition does not let us take breath, take a calm **enjoyment**. We do not get the comfort of our possessions ... Hence it is at any rate helpful that we come to an agreement about **human labours** that they may not, as under competition, claim all our time and toil.” [The Ego and Its Own, p. 268] Value needs to be created, and that can only be done by labour and so even a non-capitalist market system will see work dominate people’s lives. Thus the need to survive on the market can impact on broader (non-monetary) measures of welfare, with quality of life falling as a higher GDP is created as the result of longer working hours with fewer holidays. Such a regime may, perhaps, be good for material wealth but it is not great for people.

The market can also block the efficient use of resources. For example, for a long time energy efficient light-bulbs were much more expensive than normal ones. Over the long period, however,

they used far less energy than normal ones, meaning less need to produce more energy (and so burn coal and oil, for example). However, the high initial price ensured that most people continued to use the less efficient bulbs and so waste resources. Much the same can be said of alternative forms of energy, with investment in (say) wind energy ignored in favour of one-use and polluting energy sources. A purely market system would not allow decisions which benefit the long-term interests of people to be made (for example, by distributing energy-efficient light-bulbs freely or at a reduced cost) as these would harm the profits of those co-operatives which tried to do so.

Also, markets do not reflect the values of things we do not put a price upon (as we argued in section B.5). It cannot protect wilderness, for example, simply because it requires people to turn it into property and sell it as a commodity. If you cannot afford to visit the new commodity, the market turns it into something else, no matter how much you value it. The market also ignores the needs of future generations as they always discount the value of the long term future. A payment to be made 1,000 years from now (a mere speck in geological time) has a market value of virtually zero according to any commonly used discount rate. Even 50 years in the future cannot be adequately considered as competitive pressures force a short term perspective on people harmful to present and future generations, plus the ecology of the planet.

Then there are corrosive effects of the market on human personalities. As we have argued elsewhere (see section B.1.3), competition in a free market creates numerous problems — for example, the creation of an *“ethics of mathematics”* and the strange inversion of values in which things (property/money) become more important than people. This can have a de-humanising effect, with people becoming cold-hearted calculators who put profits before people. This can be seen in capitalism, where economic decisions are far more important than ethical ones — particularly as such an inhuman mentality can be rewarded on the market. Merit does not necessarily breed success, and the successful do not necessarily have merit. The truth is that, in the words of Noam Chomsky, *“wealth and power tend to accrue to those who are ruthless, cunning, avaricious, self-seeking, lacking in sympathy and compassion, subservient to authority and willing to abandon principle for material gain, and so on ... Such qualities might be just the valuable ones for a war of all against all.”* [For Reasons of State, pp. 139–140]

Needless to be said, if the market does reward such people with success it can hardly be considered as a **good** thing. A system which elevates making money to the position of the most important individual activity will obviously result in the degrading of human values and an increase in neurotic and psychotic behaviour. Little wonder, as Alfie Kohn has argued, competition can have serious negative effects on us outside of work, with it damaging both our personal psychology and our interpersonal relationships. Thus competition *“itself is responsible for the development of a lower moral standard”* which places winning at any cost above fairness and justice. Kohn quotes Nathan Ackerman, the father of family therapy, who noted that the *“strife of competition reduces empathic sympathy, distorts communication, impairs the mutuality of support and sharing, and decreases the satisfaction of personal need.”* [No Contest, p. 163 and pp. 142–3] Thus, the market can impoverish us as individuals, sabotaging self-esteem, promoting conformity, ruining relationships and making us less than what we could be. This is a problem of markets as such, not only capitalist ones and so non-capitalist markets could make us less human and more a robot.

All market decisions are crucially conditioned by the purchasing power of those income groups that can back their demands with money. Not everyone can work (the sick, the very old, children and so forth) and for those who can, personal circumstances may impact on their income.

Moreover, production has become so interwoven that it “is utterly impossible to draw a distinction between the work of each” and so we should “put the **needs** above the **works**, and first of all to recognise **the right to live**, and later on **the right to well-being** for all those who took their share in production.” This is particularly the case as “the needs of the individual, do not always correspond to his **works**” — for example, “a man of forty, father of three children, has other needs than a young man of twenty” and “the woman who suckles her infant and spends sleepless nights at its bedside, cannot do as much **work** as the man who has slept peacefully.” [Kropotkin, **Conquest of Bread**, p. 170 and p. 171] This was why communist-anarchists like Kropotkin stressed the need not only to abolish wage-labour but also money, the wages system.

So it goes without saying that purchasing power (demand) and need are not related, with people often suffering simply because they do not have the money required to purchase, say, health care, housing or food for themselves or their families. While economic distress may be less in a non-capitalist market system, it still would exist as would the fear of it. The market is a continuous bidding for goods, resources, and services, with those who have the most purchasing power the winners. This means that the market system is the worst one for allocating resources when purchasing power is unequally distributed (this is why orthodox economists make the convenient assumption of a “given distribution of income” when they try to show that a capitalist allocation of resources is the best one via “Pareto optimality”). While a mutualist system should reduce inequality drastically, it cannot be assumed that inequalities will not increase over time. This is because inequalities in resources leads to inequalities of power on the market and, assuming self-interest, any trade or contract will benefit the powerful more than the powerless, so re-enforcing and potentially increasing the inequalities and power between the parties. Similarly, while an anarchist society would be created with people driven by a sense of solidarity and desire for equality, markets tend to erode those feelings and syndicates or communes which, thanks to the resources they control (such as rare raw materials or simply the size of their investments reducing competitive pressures) have an advantage on the market may be tempted to use their monopoly power vis-à-vis other groups in society to accrue more income for themselves at the expense of less fortunate syndicates and communes. This could degenerate back into capitalism as any inequalities that exist between co-operatives would be increased by competition, forcing weaker co-operatives to fail and so creating a pool of workers with nothing to sell but their labour. The successful co-operatives could then hire those workers and so re-introduce wage labour. So these possibilities could, over time, lead to a return a post-capitalist market system to capitalism if the inequalities become so great that the new rich become so alienated from the rest of society they recreate wage-labour and, by necessity, a state to enforce a desire for property in land and the means of production against public opinion.

All this ensures that the market cannot really provide the information necessary for rational-decision making in terms of ecological impact as well as human activity and so resources are inefficiently allocated. We all suffer from the consequences of that, with market forces impoverishing our environment and quality of life. Thus are plenty of reasons for concluding that efficiency and the market not only do not necessarily coincide, but, indeed, necessarily do not coincide. Indeed, rather than respond to individual needs, the market responds to money (more correctly, profit), which by its very nature provides a distorted indication of individual preferences (and does not take into account values which are enjoyed collectively, such as clean air, or **potentially** enjoyed, such as the wilderness a person may never visit but desires to see exist and protected).

This does not mean that social anarchists propose to “ban” the market — far from it. This would be impossible. What we do propose is to convince people that a profit-based market system has distinctly **bad** effects on individuals, society and the planet’s ecology, and that we can organise our common activity to replace it with libertarian communism. As Max Stirner argued, competition “*has a continued existence*” because “*all do not attend to **their affair** and come to an **understanding** with each other about it ... Abolishing competition is not equivalent to favouring the guild. The difference is this: In the **guild** baking, etc., is the affair of the guild-brothers; in **competition**, the affair of chance competitors; in the **union**, of those who require baked goods, and therefore my affair, yours, the affair of neither guildic nor the concessionary baker, but the affair of the **united**.*” [Op. Cit., p. 275]

Therefore, social anarchists do not appeal purely to altruism in their struggle against the dehumanising effects of the market, but also to egoism: the simple fact that co-operation and mutual aid is in our best interests as individuals. By co-operating and controlling “*the affairs of the united,*” we can ensure a free society which is worth living in, one in which the individual is not crushed by market forces and has time to fully develop his or her individuality and uniqueness:

*“Solidarity is therefore the state of being in which Man attains the greatest degree of security and wellbeing; and therefore egoism itself, that is the exclusive consideration of one’s own interests, impels Man and human society towards solidarity.”* [Errico Malatesta, *Anarchy*, p. 30]

In conclusion then, communist-anarchists argue that even non-capitalist markets would result in everyone being so busy competing to further their “self-interest” that they would lose sight of what makes life worth living and so harm their **actual** interests. Ultimately, what counts as self-interest is shaped by the surrounding social system. The pressures of competing may easily result in short-term and narrow interests taking precedence over richer, deeper needs and aspirations which a communal system could allow to flourish by providing the social institutions by which individuals can discuss their joint interests, formulate them and act to achieve them. That is, even non-capitalist markets would result in people simply working long and hard to survive on the market rather than **living**. If one paradox of authoritarian socialism is that it makes everyone miserable by forcing them to altruistically look out for the happiness of others, market-based libertarian socialism could produce the potential paradox of making everyone miserable by the market forcing them to pursue a limited notion of self-interest which ensures that they do not have the time or opportunity to really be happy and at one with themselves and others.

In other words, bosses act as they do under capitalism in part because markets force them to. Getting rid of bosses need not eliminate all the economic pressures which influence the bosses’ decisions and, in turn, could force groups of workers to act in similar ways. Thus a competitive system would undermine many of the benefits which people sought when they ended capitalism. This is why some socialists inaccurately call socialist schemes of competing co-operatives “self-managed capitalism” or “self-exploitation” — they are simply drawing attention to the negative aspects of markets which getting rid of the boss cannot solve. Significantly, Proudhon was well aware of the negative aspect of market forces and suggested various institutional structures, such as the ago-industrial federation, to combat them (so while in favour of competition he was, unlike the individualist anarchists, against the free market). Communist anarchists, unsurprisingly, argue that individualist anarchists tend to stress the positive aspects of competition while

ignoring or downplaying its negative sides. While, undoubtedly, capitalism makes the negative side of competition worse than it could be it does not automatically follow that a non-capitalist market would not have similar, if smaller, negative aspects to it.

#### I.1.4 If capitalism is exploitative, then isn't socialism as well?

Some libertarian Marxists (as well as Leninists) claim that non-communist forms of socialism are just “self-managed” capitalism. Strangely, propertarians (the so-called “libertarian” right) also say yes to this question, arguing that socialist opposition to exploitation does not imply socialism but what they also call “self-managed” capitalism. Thus some on the left proclaim anything short of communism is a form of capitalism while, on the right, some proclaim that communism is exploitative and only a market system (which they erroneously equate to capitalism) is non-exploitative.

Both are wrong. First, and most obviously, socialism does not equal communism (and vice versa). While there is a tendency on both right and left to equate socialism with communism (particularly Marxism), in reality, as Proudhon once noted, socialism “*was not founded as a sect or church; it has seen a number of different schools.*” [Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, p. 177] Only a few of these schools are communist, just as only a few of them are libertarian. Second, not all socialist schools aim to abolish the market and payment by deed. Proudhon, for example, opposed communism and state socialism just as much as he opposed capitalism. Third, capitalism does not equal the market. The market predates capitalism and, for some libertarian socialists, will survive it. Even from a Marxist position, as noted in section I.1.1, the defining feature of capitalism is **wage labour**, not the market.

Why some socialists desire to reduce the choices facing humanity to either communism or some form of capitalism is frankly strange, but also understandable because of the potential dehumanising effects of market systems (as shown under capitalism). Why the propertarian right wishes to do so is more clear, as it aims to discredit all forms of socialism by equating them to communism (which, in turn, it equates to central planning and Stalinism).

Yet this is not a valid inference to make. Opposition to capitalism can imply both socialism (distribution according to deed, or selling the product of one's labour) and communism (distribution according to need, or a moneyless economy). The theory is a critique of capitalism, based on an analysis of that system as being rooted in the exploitation of labour (as we discussed in section C.2), i.e., it is marked by workers not being paid the full-value of the goods they create. This analysis, however, is not necessarily the basis of a socialist economy although it can be considered this as well. As noted, Proudhon used his critique of capitalism as an exploitative system as the foundation of his proposals for mutual banking and co-operatives. Marx, on the other hand, used a similar analysis as Proudhon's purely as a critique of capitalism while hoping for communism. Robert Owen used it as the basis of his system of labour notes while Kropotkin argued that such a system was just the wages-system under another form and a free society “*having taken possession of all social wealth, having boldly proclaimed the right of all to this wealth ... will be compelled to abandon any system of wages, whether in currency or labour-notes.*” [The Conquest of Bread, p. 167]

In other words, though a system of co-operative selling on the market (what is mistakenly termed “self-managed” capitalism by some) or exchanging labour-time values would not be com-

munism, it is **not** capitalism. This is because the workers are not separated from the means of production. Therefore, the attempts by proprietarians to claim that it is capitalism are false, an example of misinformed insistence that virtually every economic system, bar state socialism and feudalism, is capitalist. However, it could be argued that communism (based on free access and communal ownership of all resources including the product of labour) would mean that workers are exploited by non-workers (the young, the sick, the elderly and so on). As communism abolishes the link between performance and payment, it could be argued that the workers under communism would be just as exploited as under capitalism, although (of course) not by a class of capitalists and landlords but by the community. As Proudhon put it, while the “*members of a community, it is true, have no private property*” the community itself “*is proprietor*” and so communism “*is inequality, but not as property is. Property is the exploitation of the weak by the strong. Communism is the exploitation of the strong by the weak.*” [What is Property?, p. 250]

Needless to say, subsequent anarchists rejected Proudhon’s blanket opposition to all forms of communism, rejecting this position as only applicable to authoritarian, not libertarian, communism. Which, it must be remembered, was the only kind around when this was written in 1840 (as we noted in section H.1, what was known as communism in Proudhon’s time was authoritarian). Suffice to say, Proudhon’s opposition to communism shares little with that of the Propertarian-right, which reflects the sad lack of personal empathy (and so ethics) of the typical defender of capitalism. However, the notion that communism (distribution according to need) rather than socialism (distribution according to deed) is exploitative misses the point as far as communist anarchism goes. This is because of two reasons.

Firstly, “*Anarchist Communism ... means voluntary Communism, Communism from free choice.*” [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism**, p. 148] This means it is not imposed on anyone but is created and practised only by those who believe in it.

Therefore it would be up to the communities and syndicates to decide how they wish to distribute the products of their labour and individuals to join, or create, those that meet their ideas of right and wrong. Some may decide on equal pay, others on payment in terms of labour time, yet others on communistic associations. The important thing to realise is that individuals and the co-operatives they join will decide what to do with their output, whether to exchange it or to distribute it freely. Hence, because it is based on free agreement, communism-anarchism cannot be exploitative. Members of a commune or co-operative which is communistic are free to leave, after all. Needless to say, the co-operatives will usually distribute their product to others within their confederation and exchange with the non-communist ones in a different manner. We say “usually” for in the case of emergencies like earthquakes and so forth the situation would call for, and produce, mutual aid just as it does today to a large degree, even under capitalism.

The reason why capitalism is exploitative is that workers **have** to agree to give the product of their labour to another (the boss, the landlord) in order to be employed in the first place (see section B.4). While they can choose who to be exploited by (and, to varying degrees, pick the best of the limited options available to them) they cannot avoid selling their liberty to property owners (a handful do become self-employed and some manage to join the exploiting class, but not enough to make either a meaningful option for the bulk of the working class). In libertarian communism, by contrast, the workers themselves agree to distribute part of their product to others (i.e. society as a whole, their neighbours, friends, and so forth). It is based on free agreement, while capitalism is marked by power, authority, and the firm (invisible) hand of market forces (supplemented, as

necessary, by the visible fist of the state). As resources are held in common under anarchism, people always have the option of working alone if they so desired (see section I.3.7).

Secondly, unlike under capitalism, there is no separate class which is appropriating the goods produced. The so-called “non-workers” in a libertarian communist society have been, or will be, workers. As the noted Spanish anarchist De Santillan pointed out, “[n]aturally, children, the aged and the sick are not considered parasites. The children will be productive when they grow up. The aged have already made their contribution to social wealth and the sick are only temporarily unproductive.” [After the Revolution, p. 20] In other words, over their life time, everyone contributes to society and so using the “account book” mentality of capitalism misses the point. As Kropotkin put it:

*“Services rendered to society, be they work in factory or field, or mental services, **cannot be** valued in money. There can be no exact measure of value (of what has been wrongly-termed exchange value), nor of use value, with regard to production. If two individuals work for the community five hours a day, year in year out, at different work which is equally agreeable to them, we may say that on the whole their labour is equivalent. But we cannot divide their work, and say that the result of any particular day, hour, or minute of work of the one is worth the result of a minute or hour of the other.” [Conquest of Bread, p. 168]*

So it is difficult to evaluate how much an individual worker or group of workers actually contribute to society. This can be seen whenever workers strike, particularly so-called “key” areas like transport. Then the media is full of accounts of how much the strike is costing “the economy” and it is always far more than that of the wages lost in strike action. Yet, according to capitalist economics, the wages of a worker are equal to their contribution to production — no more, no less. Striking workers, in other words, should only harm the economy to the value of their wages yet, of course, this is obviously not the case. This is because of the interconnected nature of any advanced economy, where contributions of individuals are so bound together.

Needless to say, this does not imply that a free people would tolerate the able-bodied simply taking without contributing towards the mass of products and services society. As we discuss in section I.4.14, such people will be asked to leave the community and be in the same situation as those who do not wish to be communists.

Ultimately, the focus on calculating exact amounts and on the evaluation of contributions down to the last penny is exactly the kind of narrow-minded account-book mentality which makes most people socialists in the first place. It would be ironic if, in the name of non-exploitation, a similar accounting mentality to that which records how much surplus value is extracted from workers under capitalism is continued into a free society. It makes life easier not to have to worry whether you can afford to visit the doctors or dentists, not to have to pay for use of roads and bridges, know that you can visit a public library for a book and so forth. For those who wish to spend their time calculating such activities and seeking to pay the community for them simply because they hate the idea of being “exploited” by the “less” productive, the ill, the young or the old then we are sure that a libertarian communist society will accommodate them (although we are sure that emergencies will be an exception and they will be given free access to communal hospitals, fire services and so forth).

Thus the notion that communism would be exploitative like capitalism misses the point. While all socialists accuse capitalism for failing to live up to its own standards, of not paying workers



the full product of their labour, most do not think that a socialist society should seek to make that full payment a reality. Life, for libertarian communists, is just too complex and fleeting to waste time and energy calculating exactly the contribution of each to society. As Malatesta put it:

*“I say that **the worker has the right to the entire product of his work**: but I recognise that this right is only a formula of abstract justice; and means, in practice, that there should be no exploitation, that everyone must work and enjoy the fruits of their labour, according to the custom agreed among them.*

*“Workers are not isolated beings that live for themselves and for themselves, but social beings ... Moreover, it is impossible, the more so with modern production methods, to determine the exact labour that each worker contributed, just as it is impossible to determine the differences in productivity of each worker or each group of workers, how much is due to the fertility of the soil, the quality of the implements used, the advantages or difficulties flowing from the geographical situation or the social environment. Hence, the solution cannot be found in respect to the strict rights of each person, but must be sought in fraternal agreement, in solidarity.” [At the Café, pp. 56–7]*

All in all, most anarchists reject the notion that people sharing the world (which is all communism really means) equates to them being exploited by others. Rather than waste time trying to record the minutiae of who contributed exactly what to society, most anarchists are happy if people contribute to society roughly equal amounts of time and energy and take what they need in return. To consider such a situation of free co-operation as exploitative is simply ridiculous (just as well consider the family as the exploitation of its working members by their non-working partners and children). Those who do are free to leave such an association and pay their own way in everything (a task which would soon drive home the simplicity and utility of communism, most anarchists would suggest).

### I.1.5 Does capitalism efficiently allocate resources?

We have discussed, in section I.1.1, the negative effects of workplace hierarchy and stock markets and, in section I.1.2, the informational problems of prices and the limitations in using profit as the sole criteria for decision making for the efficient allocation of resources. As such, anarchists have reason to doubt the arguments of the “Austrian” school of economics that (libertarian) socialism is impossible, as first suggested by Ludwig Von Mises in 1920. [“*Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth*”, **Collectivist Economic Planning**, F.A von Hayek (ed.), pp. 87–130] Here, we discuss why anarchists also have strong reason to question the underlying assumption that capitalism efficiently allocates resources and how this impacts on claims that “socialism” is impossible. This is based on an awareness of the flaws in any (implicit) assumption that all prices are at equilibrium, the issue of uncertainty, the assumption that human well-being is best served by market forces and, lastly, the problem of periodic economic crisis under capitalism.

The first issue is that prices only provide adequate knowledge for rational decision making only if they are at their equilibrium values as this equates supply and demand. Sadly, for the “Austrian” school and its arguments against socialism, it rejects the notion that prices could be at

equilibrium. While modern “Austrian” economics is keen to stress its (somewhat underdeveloped) disequilibrium analysis of capitalism, this was not always the case. When Mises wrote his 1920 essay on socialism his school of economics was considered a branch of the neo-classicalism and this can be seen from Mises’ critique of central planning. In fact, it would be fair to say that the neo-“Austrian” focus of prices as information and (lip-service to) disequilibrium flowed from the Economic Calculation debate, specifically the awkward fact that their more orthodox neo-classical peers viewed Lange’s “solution” as answering Mises and Hayek.

Thus there is a fundamental inconsistency in Mises’ argument, namely that while Austrian economics reject the notion of equilibrium and the perfect competition of neo-classical economics he nonetheless maintains that market prices are the correct prices and can be used to make rational decisions. Yet, in any real market, these correct prices must be ever changing so making the possibility that “*precise*” economic decisions by price can go wrong on a large scale (i.e., in slumps). In other words, Mises effectively assumed away uncertainty and, moreover, failed to mention that this uncertainty is increased dramatically within capitalism.

This can be seen from modern “Austrian” economics which, after the Economic Calculation debates of the 1920s and 1930s, moved increasingly away from neo-classical equilibrium theory. However, this opened up a whole new can of worms which, ironically, weakened the “Austrian” case against socialism. For the modern “Austrian” economist, the economy is considered not to be in equilibrium, with entrepreneur being seen as the means by which it brought towards it. Thus “*this approach postulates a tendency for profit opportunities to be **discovered and grasped** by routine-resisting entrepreneurial market participants*”, with this “*tending to nudge the market in the equilibrative direction.*” Lip-service is paid to the obvious fact that entrepreneurs can make errors but “***there is no tendency for entrepreneurial errors to be made.** The tendency which the market generates toward greater mutual awareness, is not offset by any equal but opposite tendency in the direction of diminishing awareness*” and so the “*entrepreneurial market process may indeed reflect a systematically equilibrative **tendency**, but this by no means constitutes a **guaranteed** unidirectional, flawlessly converging trajectory.*” All this results on the “*speculative actions of entrepreneurs who see opportunities for pure profit in the conditions of disequilibrium.*” [Israel M. Kirzner, “*Entrepreneurial Discovery and the Competitive Market Process: An Austrian Approach*”, pp. 60–85, *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 71, p. 73, p. 82, p. 72 and p. 68]

When evaluating this argument, it is useful to remember that “*postulate*” means “**to assume without proof to be true**” or “**to take as self-evident.**” At its most simple, this argument ignores how entrepreneurial activity pushes an economy away from equilibrium (unlike radical economists, only a few “Austrian” economists, such as those who follow Ludwig Lachmann, recognise that market forces have both equilibrating and disequilibrium effects, acknowledged in passing by Kirzner: “*In a world of incessant change, they argue, it is precisely those acts of entrepreneurial boldness which must frustrate any discovery efforts made by fellow entrepreneurs.*” [Op. Cit., p. 79]). In other words, market activity can lead to economic crisis and inefficient allocation decisions. A successful entrepreneur will, by their actions, frustrate the plans of others, most obviously those of his competitors but also those who require the goods they used to produce their commodities and those whose incomes are reduced by the new products being available. It staggers belief to think that **every** action by a firm will be step towards equilibrium or a better co-ordination of plans, particularly if you include **unsuccessful** entrepreneurs into the process. In other words, the market can be as discoordinating as it can be co-ordinating and it cannot be “postulated” beforehand which will predominate at any given time.

There is an obvious example of entrepreneurial activity which leads to increasing disequilibrium, one (ironically) drawn straight from “Austrian” economics itself. This is the actions of bankers extending credit and so deviating from the “natural” (equilibrium) rate of interest. As one post-Keynesian economist notes, this, the “Austrian” theory of the business cycle, “*not only proved to be vulnerable to the Cambridge capital critique ... , but also appeared to reply upon concepts of equilibrium (the ‘natural rate of interest’, for example) that were inconsistent with the broader principles of Austrian economic theory.*” [J.E. King, **A history of post Keynesian economics since 1936**, p. 230] As we discussed in section C.8, this kind of activity is to be expected of entrepreneurs seeking to make money from meeting market demand. The net result of this activity is a tendency away from equilibrium. This can be generalised for all markets, with the profit seeking activities of some businesses frustrating the plans of others. Ultimately, the implication that all entrepreneurial activity is stabilising, virtuous arbitrage that removes disequilibria is unconvincing as the suggestion that the misinformation conveyed by disequilibrium prices can cause very substantial macroeconomic distortions for only one good (credit). Surely, the argument as regards interest rates can apply to other disequilibrium prices, with responses to unsustainable prices for other goods being equally capable of generating mal-investment (which only becomes apparent when the prices adjust towards their “natural” levels). After all, any single price distortion leads to all other prices becoming distorted because of the ramifications for exchange ratios throughout the economy.

One of the reasons why neo-classical economists stress equilibrium is that prices only provide the basis for rational calculation only in that state for disequilibrium prices can convey extremely misleading information. When people trade at disequilibrium prices, it has serious impacts on the economy (which is why neo-classical economics abstracts from it). As one economist notes, if people “*were to buy and sell at prices which did not clear the market*” then once “*such trading has taken place, there can be no guarantee that, even if an equilibrium exists, the economy will ever converge to it. In fact, it is likely to move in cycles around the equilibrium.*” This “*is more than a mere supposition. It is an accurate description of what does happen in the real world.*” [Paul Ormerod, **The Death of Economics**, pp. 87–8] Once we dismiss the ideologically driven “*postulate*” of “Austrian” economics, we can see how these opportunities for “pure profit” (and, of course, a corresponding pure loss for the buyer) impacts on the economy and how the market system adds to uncertainty. As dissident economist Steve Keen puts it:

*“However, a change in prices in one market will affect consumer demand in all other markets. This implies that a move towards equilibrium by one market could cause some or all others to move away from equilibrium. Clearly it is possible that this ... might never settle down to equilibrium.*”

*“This will be especially so if trades actually occur at disequilibrium — as in practice they must ... A disequilibrium trade will mean that the people on the winning side of the bargain — sellers if the price is higher than equilibrium — will gain real income at the expense of the losers, compared to the alleged standard of equilibrium. This shift in income distribution will then affect all other markets, making the dance of many markets even more chaotic.”* [Debunking Economics, p. 169]

That prices can, and do, convey extremely misleading information is something which “Austrians” have a tendency to downplay. Yet in economies closer to their ideal (for example, nineteenth

century America) there were many more recessions (usually triggered by financial crises arising from the collapse of speculative bubbles) than in the twentieth and so the economy was fundamentally more unstable, resulting in the market “precisely” investing in the “wrong” areas. Of course, it could be argued that there was not really free market capitalism then (e.g., protectionism, no true free banking due to regulation by state governments and so on) yet this would be question begging in the extreme (particularly since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries saw speculative crises precisely in those areas which were regulated least).

Thus, the notion that prices can ensure the efficient allocation of resources is question begging. If prices are in disequilibrium, as “Austrians” suggest, then the market does not automatically ensure that they move towards equilibrium. Without equilibrium, we cannot say that prices provide companies sufficient information to make rational investment decisions. They may act on price information which is misleading, in that it reflects temporary highs or lows in the market or which is a result of speculative bubbles. An investment decision made on the **mis**-information implied in disequilibrium prices is as likely to produce mal-investment and subsequent macro-economic distortions as decisions made in light of the interest rate not being at its “natural” (equilibrium) value. So unless it is assumed that the market is in equilibrium when an investment decision is made then prices can reflect misinformation as much as information. These, the obvious implications of disequilibrium, help undermine Mises’ arguments against socialism.

Even if we assume that prices are at or, at best, near equilibrium when investment decisions are made, the awkward fact is that these prices do not tell you prices in the future nor what will be bought when production is finished. Rather, they tell you what was **thought** to be profitable before **investment began**. There are always differences between the prices used to cost various investments and the prices which prevail on the market when the finished goods are finally sold, suggesting that the market presents systematically misleading signals. In addition, rival companies respond to the same price signals by undertaking long term investments at the same time, so creating the possibility of a general crisis of over-accumulate and over-production when they are complete. As we discussed in section C.7.2, this is a key factor in the business cycle. Hence the recurring possibility of over-production, when the aggregate response to a specific market’s rising price results in the market being swamped by good, so driving the market price down. Thus the market is marked by uncertainty, the future is not known. So it seems ironic to read Mises asserting that “*in the socialist commonwealth every economic change becomes an undertaking whose success can be neither appraised in advance nor later retrospectively determined. There is only groping in the dark.*” [Op. Cit., p. 110]

In terms of “*appraised in advance*”, Mises is essentially assuming that capitalists can see the future. In the real world, rather than in the unreal world of capitalist economics, the future is unknown and, as a result, success can only be guessed at. This means that any investment decision under real capitalism is, equally, “*groping in the dark*” because there is no way to know, before hand, whether the expectations driving the investment decisions will come to be. As Mises himself noted as part of his attack on socialism, “*a static state is impossible in real life, as our economic data are for ever changing*” and so, needless to say, the success of an investment **cannot** be appraised beforehand with any real degree of certainty. Somewhat ironically, Mises noted that “*the static nature of economic activity is only a theoretical assumption corresponding to no real state of affairs, however necessary it may be for our thinking and for the perfection of our knowledge of economics.*” [Op. Cit., p. 109] Or, for that matter, our critique of socialism! This can be seen from one his examples against socialism:

*“Picture the building of a new railroad. Should it be built at all, and if so, which out of a number of conceivable roads should be built? In a competitive and monetary economy, this question would be answered by monetary calculation. The new road will render less expensive the transport of some goods, and it may be possible to calculate whether this reduction of expense transcends that involved in the building and upkeep of the next line. That can only be calculated in money.” [Op. Cit., p. 108]*

It “*may be possible*”? Not before hand. At best, an investor could **estimate** the willingness of firms to swap to the new railroad and whether those expected costs will result in a profit on both fixed and running costs. The construction costs can be estimated, although unexpected price rises in the future may make a mockery of these too, but the amount of future income cannot. Equally, the impact of building the new railroad will change the distribution of income as well, which in turn affects prices across the market and people’s consumption decisions which, in turn, affects the profitability of new railroad investment. Yet all this is ignored in order to attack socialism.

In other words, Mises assumes that the future can be accurately predicted in order to attack socialism. Thus he asserts that a socialist society “*would issue an edict and decide for or against the projected building. Yet this decision would depend at best upon vague estimates; it would never be based upon the foundation of an exact calculation of value.*” [Op. Cit., p. 109] Yet any investment decision in a real capitalist economy depends “*at best upon vague estimates*” of future market conditions and expected returns on the investment. This is because accounting is backward looking, while investment depends on the unknowable future.

In other words, “*people recognise that their economic future is uncertain (nonergodic) and cannot be reliably predicted from existing market information. Consequently, investment expenditures on production facilities and people’s desire to save are typically based on differing expectations of an unknowable, uncertain future.*” This means that in an uncertain world future profits “*can neither be reliably forecasted from existing market information, nor endogenously determined via today’s planned saving propensity of income earners ... Thus, unless one assumes that entrepreneurs can accurately predict the future from here to eternity, current expectations of prospective yield must depend on the animal optimism or pessimism of entrepreneurs*” [Paul Davidson, **John Maynard Keynes**, pp. 62–3] So, yes, under capitalism you can determine the money cost (price) of a building but the decision to build is based on estimates and guesses of the future, to use Mises’ words “*vague estimates.*” A change in the market can mean that even a building which is constructed exactly to expected costs does not produce a profit and so sits empty. Even in terms of “*exact calculation*” of inputs these can change, so undermining the projected final cost and so its profit margin.

For a good explanation of the problems of uncertainty, we must turn to Keynes who placed it at the heart of his analysis of capitalism. “*The actual results of an investment over a long term of years,*” argued Keynes, “*very seldom agree with the initial expectation*” since “*our existing knowledge does not provide a sufficient basis for a calculated mathematical expectation. In point of fact, all sorts of considerations enter into the market valuation which are in no way relevant to the prospective yield.*” He stressed that “*human decisions affecting the future, whether personal or political or economic, cannot depend on strict mathematical expectation, since the basis for making such calculations does not exist.*” He also suggested that the “*chief result*” of wage flexibility “*would be to cause a great instability of prices, so violent perhaps as to make business calculations futile.*” [**The General Theory**, p. 152, pp. 162–3 and p. 269]

Much the same can be said of other prices as well. As Proudhon argued decades before Mises proclaimed socialism impossible, profit is ultimately an unknown value. Under capitalism wages are the “*least that can be given*” to a worker: “*that is, we do not know.*” The “*price of the merchandise put upon the market*” by the capitalist will be the “*highest that he can obtain; that is, again, we do not know.*” Economics “*admits*” that “*the prices of merchandise and labour ... can be **estimated***” and “*that estimation is essentially an arbitrary operation, which never can lead to sure and certain conclusions.*” Thus capitalism is based on “*the relation between two unknowns*” which “*cannot be determined.*” [System of Economical Contradictions, p. 64]

So under capitalism all decisions are “*groping in the dark*”. Which can, and does, lead to inefficient allocations of resources:

*“It leads, that is to say, to **misdirected** investment. But over and above this it is an essential characteristic of the boom that investments which will in fact yield, say, 2 per cent. in conditions of full employment are made in the expectation of a yield of, say, 6 per cent., and are valued accordingly. When the disillusion comes, this expectation is replaced by a contrary ‘error of pessimism’, with the result that the investments, which would in fact yield 2 per cent. in conditions of full employment, are expected to yield less than nothing; and the resulting collapse of new investment then leads to a state of unemployment in which the investments, which would have yielded 2 per cent. in conditions of full employment, in fact yield less than nothing. We reach a condition where there is a shortage of houses, but where nevertheless no one can afford to live in the houses that there are.”* [Keynes, Op. Cit., pp. 321–2]

Thus uncertainty and expectations of profit can lead to massive allocation inefficiencies and waste. Of course Mises pays lip-service to this uncertainty of markets. He noted that there are “*ceaseless alternations in other economic data*” and that exchange relations are “*subject to constant ... fluctuations*” but those “*fluctuations disturb value calculations only in the slightest degree*”! He admitted that “*some mistakes are inevitable in such a calculation*” but rest assured “[w]hat remains of uncertainty comes into the calculation of the uncertainty of future conditions, which is an inevitable concomitant of the dynamic nature of economic life.” [Op. Cit., p. 98, p. 110 and p. 111] So, somewhat ironically, Mises assumed that, when attacking socialism, that prices are so fluid that no central planning agency could ever compute their correct price and so allocated resources inefficiently yet, when it comes to capitalism, prices are not so fluid that they make investment decisions difficult!

The question is, does capitalism reduce or increase these uncertainties? We can suggest that capitalism adds two extra layers of uncertainty. As with any economy, there is the uncertainty that produced goods will meet an actual need of others (i.e., that it has a use-value). The market adds another layer of uncertainty by adding the need for its price to exceed costs a market. Finally, capitalism adds another level of uncertainty in that the capitalist class must make suffice profits as well. Thus, regardless of how much people need a specific good if capitalists cannot make a profit from it then it will not be produced.

Uncertainty will, of course, afflict a communist-anarchist society. Mistakes in resource allocation will happen, with some goods over produced at times and under-produced at others. However, a communist society removes the added uncertainty associated with a capitalist economy as such mistakes do **not** lead to general slumps as losses result in the failure of firms and ris-

ing unemployment. In other words, without Mises' precise economic calculation society will no longer be afflicted by the uncertainty associated with the profit system.

Significantly, there are developments within capitalism which point to the benefits of communism in reducing uncertainty. This is the rise of the large-scale corporation. In fact, many capitalist firms expand precisely to reduce the uncertainties associated with market prices and their (negative) impact on the plans they make. Thus companies integrate horizontally by take-over to gain more control over investment and supply decisions as well as vertically to stabilise costs and secure demand for necessary inputs.

As economist John Kenneth Galbraith noted, when investment is large, “[n]o form of market uncertainty is so serious as that involving the terms and conditions on which capital is obtained.” As a result internal funds are used as “the firm has a secure source of capital” and “no longer faces the risks of the market.” This applies to other inputs, for a “firm cannot satisfactorily foresee and schedule future action or prepare for contingencies if it does not know what its prices will be, what its sales will be, what its costs, including labour and capital costs, will be and what will be available at these costs. If the market is uncontrolled, it will not know these things ... Much of what the firm regards as planning consists in minimising uncontrolled market influences.” This partly explains why firms grow (the other reason is to dominate the market and reap oligopolistic profits). The “market is superseded by vertical integration” as the firm “takes over the source of supply or the outlet”. This “does not eliminate market uncertainty” but rather replaces “the large and unmanageable uncertainty as to the price” of inputs with “smaller, more diffuse and more manageable uncertainties” such as the costs of labour. A large firm can only control the market, by “reducing or eliminating the independence of action” of those it sells to or buys from. This means the behaviour of others can be controlled, so that “uncertainty as to that behaviour is reduced.” Finally, advertising is used to influence the amount sold. Firms also “eliminate market uncertainty” by “entering into contracts specifying prices and amounts to be provided or bought for substantial periods of time.” Thus “one of the strategies of eliminating market uncertainty is to eliminate the market.” [The New Industrial State p. 47, pp. 30–6 and p. 47]

Of course, such attempts to reduce uncertainty within capitalism are incomplete and subject to breakdown. Such planning systems can come into conflict with others (for example, the rise of Japanese corporations in the 1970s and 1980s and subsequent decline of American industrial power). They are centralised, hierarchically structured and based on top-down central planning (and so subject to the informational problems we highlighted in section I.1.2). Market forces can reassert themselves, making a mockery of even the best organised plans. However, these attempts at transcending the market within capitalism, as incomplete as they are, show a major problem with relying on markets and market prices to allocate resources. They add an extra layer of uncertainty which ensure that investors and firms are as much in the dark about their decisions as Mises argued central planners would be. As such, to state as Mises does that production in socialism can “never be based upon the foundation of an exact calculation of value” is somewhat begging the question. [Op. Cit., p. 109] This is because knowing the “exact” price of an investment is meaningless as the key question is whether it makes a profit or not – and that is unknown when it is made and if it makes a loss, it is still a waste of resources! So it does not follow that a knowledge of current prices allows efficient allocation of resources (assuming, of course, that profitability equates to social usefulness).

In summary, Mises totally ignored the issues of uncertainty (we do not, and cannot, know the future) and the collective impact of individual decisions. Production and investment decisions

are made based on expectations about future profits, yet these (expected) profits depend (in part) on what other decisions are being, and will be, made. This is because they will affect the future aggregate supply of a good and so market price, the price of inputs and the distribution of effective demand. In the market-based (and so fragmented and atomistic) decision-making Mises assumes, any production and investment decisions are made on the basis on unavoidable ignorance of the actions of others and the results of those actions. Of course there is uncertainty which would affect every social system (such as the weather, discovery of new sources of energy, raw materials and technology, changing customer needs, and so forth). However, market based systems add extra levels of uncertainty by the lack of communication between decision-makers as well as making profit the be-all-and-end-all of economic rationalism.

So in terms of Mises' claim that only capitalism ensures that success can be "*appraised in advance*", it is clear that in reality that system is as marked by "*groping in the dark*" as any other. What of the claim that only markets can ensure that a project's success is "*later retrospectively determined*"? By this, Mises makes a flawed assumption — namely the dubious notion that what is profitable is right. Thus economically is identified with profitably. So even if we assume prices provide enough information for rational decision making, that the economy jumps from one state of equilibrium to another and that capitalists can predict the future, the awkward fact is that maximising profit does not equal maximising human well-being.

Neither well-being nor efficiency equals profitability as the latter does not take into account need. Meeting needs is not "*retrospectively determined*" under capitalism, only profit and loss. An investment may fail not because it is not needed but because there is no effective demand for it due to income inequalities. So it is important to remember that the distribution of income determines whether something is an "efficient" use of resources or not. As Thomas Balogh noted, real income "*is measured in terms of a certain set of prices ruling in a given period and that these prices will reflect the prevailing distribution of income. (With no Texan oil millionaires here would be little chance of selling a baby blue Roll-Royce ... at a price ten times the yearly income of a small farmer or sharecropper).*" [**The Irrelevance of Conventional Economics**, pp. 98–9] The market demand for commodities, which allocates resources between uses, is based not on the tastes of consumers but on the distribution of purchasing power between them. This, ironically, was mentioned by Mises as part of his attack on socialism, arguing that the central planners could not use current prices for "*the transition to socialism must, as a consequence of the levelling out of the differences in income and the resultant re-adjustments in consumption, and therefore production, change all economic data.*" [Op. Cit., p. 109] He did not mention the impact this has in terms of "efficiency" or profitability! After all, what is and is not profitable ("efficient") depends on effective demand, which in turn depends of a specific income distribution. Identical production processes become efficient and inefficient simply by a redistribution of income from the rich to the poor, and vice versa. Similarly, changes in market prices may make once profitably investments unprofitable, without affecting the needs they were satisfying. And this, needless to say, can have serious impacts on human well-being.

As discussed in section C.1.5, this becomes most obvious during famines. As Allan Engler points out, "*[w]hen people are denied access to the means of livelihood, the invisible hand of market forces does not intervene on their behalf. Equilibrium between supply and demand has no necessary connection with human need. For example, assume a country of one million people in which 900,000 are without means of livelihood. One million bushels of wheat are produced. The entire crop is sold to 100,000 people at \$10 a bushel. Supply and demand are in equilibrium, yet 900 000 people will*



*face starvation.*” [Apostles of Greed, pp. 50–51] In case anyone thinks that this just happens in theory, the example of numerous famines (from the Irish famine of the 1840s to those in African countries in 1980s) gives a classic example of this occurring in practice, with rich landowners exporting food to the other nations while millions starve in their own.

So the distributional consequences of the market system play havoc with any attempt to define what is and is not an “efficient” use of resources. As markets inform by ‘exit’ only — some products find a market, others do not — ‘voice’ is absent. The operation of ‘exit’ rather than ‘voice’ leaves behind those without power in the marketplace. For example, the wealthy do not buy food poisoned with additives, the poor consume it. This means a division grows between two environments: one inhabited by those with wealth and one inhabited by those without it. As can be seen from the current capitalist practice of “exporting pollution” to developing countries, this problem can have serious ecological and social effects. So, far from the market being a “democracy” based on “one dollar, one vote,” it is an oligarchy in which, for example, the “79,000 Americans who earned the minimum wage in 1987 have the same influence [or “vote”] as Michael Milken, who ‘earned’ as much as all of them combined.” [Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, **The Political Economy of Participatory Economics**, p. 21] One dissident economist states the blindly obvious, namely that the “market and democracy clash at a fundamental level. Democracy runs on the principle of ‘one man (one person), one vote.’ The market runs on the principle of ‘one dollar, one vote.’ Naturally, the former gives equal weight to each person, regardless of the money she/he has. The latter gives greater weight to richer people.” This means that the market is automatically skewed in favour of the wealthy and so “[l]eaving everything to the market means that the rich may be able to realise even the most frivolous element of their desires, while the poor may not be able even to survive — thus the world spends twenty times more research money on slimming drugs than on malaria, which claims more than a million lives and debilitates millions more in developing countries every year.” [Ha-Joon Chang, **Bad Samaritans**, p. 172 and p. 174]

In other words, markets are always biased in favour of effective demand, i.e. in favour of the demands of people with money, and so can never (except in the imaginary abstractions of neo-classical economics) allocate the necessities of life to those who need them the most. Thus a simple redistribution of wealth (via militant unions or the welfare state, for example) could make previously “bad” investments good simply because the new income allows those who had previously needed, but could not afford, the good or service in question to purchase it. So just because something makes a loss under one distribution of income does not mean that it is an inefficient use of resources in the sense of meeting human needs (and could make a profit under another, more equal, distribution of wealth). So the “efficient” allocation of resources in terms of price (i.e., profit) is often no such thing as the wealthy few skews market decisions in their favour.

It is important to remember that, for the “Austrians”, preferences are demonstrated through action in the market and they are not interested in opinions, thus any preference which is not expressed by action is irrelevant to them. So any attempt to collectively prioritise, say, building decent housing for all, provide health care for everyone, abolish poverty, and so forth are all considered “inefficient” uses of resources as those who receive them would not, normally, be able to afford them and, consequently, do not really desire them anyway (as they, needless to say, do not express that desire by market exchanges!). Yet this ignores the awkward fact that in the market, people can only act if they have money to make their preferences known. Thus those who have a need but no money do not count when determining if the market is efficient or not. There is simply no room for the real people who can be harmed by real markets. As economist Amartya

Sen argues, the workings of a “pure” capitalist market, as desired by “Austrians” economists and other proprietarians, “*can be problematic since the actual consequences of the operation of these entitlements can, quite possibly, include rather terrible results. It can, in particular, lead to the violation of the substantive freedom of individuals to achieve those things to which they have reason to attach great importance, including escaping avoidable morality, being well nourished and healthy, being able to read, write and count and so on.*” In fact, “*even gigantic famines can result without anyone’s [right] libertarian rights (including property rights) being violated. The destitutes such as the unemployed or the impoverished may starve precisely because their ‘entitlements’ ... do not give them enough food.*” Similarly, “*deprivation*” such as “*regular undernourishment*”, the “*lack of medical care for curable illnesses*” can “*coexist with all [right] libertarian rights (including rights of property ownership) being fully satisfied.*” [**Development as Freedom**, p. 66]

All of which, it must be stressed, is ignored in the “Austrian” case against socialism. Ultimately, if providing food to a rich person’s pets makes a profit then it becomes a more economical and efficient use of the resource than providing food to famine victims who cannot purchase food on the market. So it should never be forgotten that the “Austrians” insist that only preferences demonstrated in action are real. So if you cannot act on the market (i.e., buy something) then your need for it is not real. In other words, if a person loses their job and, as a consequence, loses their home then, according to this logic, they do not “need” a home as their “demonstrated preference” (i.e., their actual choices in action) shows that they genuinely value living under a bridge (assuming they gain the bridge owners agreement, of course).

As an aside, this obvious fact shows that the “Austrian” assertion that intervention in the market **always** reduces social utility cannot be supported. The argument that the market maximises utility is based on assuming a given allocation of resources before the process of free exchange begins. If someone does not have sufficient income to, say, buy food or essential medical treatment then this is not reflected in the market. If wealth is redistributed and they then they get access to the goods in question, then (obviously) their utility has increased and it is a moot point whether social utility has decreased as the disutility of the millionaire who was taxed to achieve it cannot be compared to it. Significantly, those “Austrians” who have sought to prove that all intervention in the market reduces social utility have failed. For example, as one dissident “Austrian” economist notes, while Murray Rothbard “*claimed he offered a purely deductive*” argument that state intervention always reduced social utility “*his case [was] logically flawed.*” He simply assumed that social utility was reduced although he gave no reason for such an assumption as he admitted that interpersonal comparisons of utility were impossible. For someone “*who asks that his claims be tested only by their logic*”, his ultimate conclusions about state intervention “*do not follow*” and exhibit “*a careless self-contradiction*” [David L. Prychitko, **Markets, Planning and Democracy**, p. 189, p. 111 and p. 110]

In summary, then, in terms of feedback saying that if something made a profit then it was efficiently produced confuses efficiency and need with profitability and effective demand. Something can make a profit by imposing costs via externalities and lowering quality. Equally, a good may not make a profit in spite of there being a need for it simply because people cannot afford to pay for it.

As such, Mises was wrong to assert that “*[b]etween production for profit and production for need, there is no contrast.*” [**Socialism**, p. 143] In fact, it seems incredible that anyone claiming to be an economist could make such a comment. As Proudhon and Marx (like Smith and Ricardo before them) made clear, a commodity in order to be exchanged must first have a use-value (util-

ity) to others. Thus production for profit, by definition, means production for “use” — otherwise exchange would not happen. What socialists were highlighting by contrasting production for profit to need was, firstly, that need comes after profit and so without profit a good will not be produced no matter how many people need it. Secondly, it highlights the fact that during crises capitalism is marked by an over-production of goods reducing profits, so stopping production, while people who need those goods go without them. Thus capitalism is marked by homeless people living next to empty housing and hungry people seeing food exported or destroyed in order to maximise profit. Ultimately, if the capitalist does not make a profit then it is a bad investment — regardless of whether it could be used to meet people’s needs and so make their lives better. In other words, Mises ignores the very basis of capitalism (production for profit) and depicts it as production aiming at the direct satisfaction of consumers.

Equally, that something makes a profit does not mean that it is an efficient use of resources. If, for example, that profit is achieved by imposing pollution externalities or by market power then it cannot be said that society as a whole, rather than the capitalists, have benefited. Similarly, non-market based systems can be seen to be more efficient than market based ones in terms of outcome. For example, making health care available to all who need it rather than those who can afford it is economically “inefficient” in “Austrian” eyes but only an ideologue would claim that we should not do so because of this particularly as we can point to the awkward fact that the more privatised health care systems in the USA and Chile are more inefficient than the nationalised systems elsewhere in the world. Administration costs are higher and the societies in question pay far more for an equivalent level of treatment. Of course, it could be argued that the privatised systems are not truly private but the awkward fact remains — the more market based system is worse, in terms of coverage of the population, cost for treatment, bureaucracy and health outcomes per pound spent.

In addition, in a highly unequal society costs are externalised to those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The consequences are harmful, as suggested by the newspeak used to disguise this reality. For example, there is what is called “increasing flexibility of the labour market.” “Flexibility” sounds great: rigid structures are unappealing and hardly suitable for human growth. In reality, as Noam Chomsky points out “[f]lexibility means insecurity. It means you go to bed at night and don’t know if you have a job tomorrow morning. That’s called flexibility of the labour market, and any economist can explain that’s a good thing for the economy, where by ‘the economy’ now we understand profit-making. We don’t mean by ‘the economy’ the way people live. That’s good for the economy, and temporary jobs increase flexibility. Low wages also increase job insecurity. They keep inflation low. That’s good for people who have money, say, bondholders. So these all contribute to what’s called a ‘healthy economy,’ meaning one with very high profits. Profits are doing fine. Corporate profits are zooming. But for most of the population, very grim circumstances. And grim circumstances, without much prospect of a future, may lead to constructive social action, but where that’s lacking they express themselves in violence.” [Keeping the Rabble in Line, pp. 283–4] So it simply cannot be assumed that what is good for the economy (profits) equates to what is good for people (at least the working class).

Thus the “Austrians” prizes profitability above all and this assumption is at the root of the “Calculation Argument” against socialism, but this only makes sense only insofar as efficiency is confused with profit. The market will invest in coal if profits are higher and, in so doing, contribute to global warming. It will deny medical care to the sick (no profits and so it is inefficient) while contributing to, say, a housing bubble because it makes short-term profits by providing

loans to people who really cannot afford it. It will support all kinds of economic activity, regardless of the wider impact, and so “efficiency” (i.e., profits) can, and does, contradict both wisdom and ethics and so, ultimately, an efficient allocation of resources to meet people’s needs.

Lastly, our critique has so far ignored the periodic crises that hit capitalist economies which produce massive unemployment and social disruption — crises that are due to subjective and objective pressures on the operation of the price mechanism (see section C.7 for details). In the upswing, when expectations are buoyant, firms will invest and produce a mutually reinforcing expansion. However, the net effect of such decisions eventually leads to over-investment, excess capacity and over-production — mal-investment and the waste of the embodied resources. This leads to lower than expected profits, expectations change for the worse and the boom turns into bust, capital equipment is scrapped, workers are unemployed and resources are either wasted or left idle.

In a crisis we see the contradiction between use value and exchange value come to a head. Workers are no less productive than when the crisis started, the goods and services they create are no less needed than before. The means of production are just as productive as they were. Both are just as capable as before of affording for everyone a decent standard of living. Even though people are homeless, housing stands empty. Even though people need goods, production is stopped. Even though people want jobs, workplaces are closed. Yet, according to the logic of “*exact*” “economic calculation”, production is now “inefficient” and should be closed-down, workers made unemployed and expected to find work by forcing down the wages of those lucky enough to remain employed in the hope that the owners of the means of life will find it profitable to exploit them as much as before (for when hard times arrive it is never long until somebody suggests that the return of prosperity requires sacrifices at the bottom of the heap and, needless to say, the “Austrian” economists are usually the first to do so).

This suggests that the efficient allocation of resources becomes meaningless if its reality is a cycle where consumers go without essential goods due to scarcity and high prices followed by businesses going bust because of over-production and low prices. This process ruins large numbers of people’s lives, not to mention wasting vast stocks of productive equipment and goods. There are always people who need the over-produced goods and so the market adds to uncertainty as there is a difference between the over-production of goods and the over-production of commodities. If more goods were produced in a communist society this may signify a waste of resources but it would not, as under capitalism, produce a crisis situation as well!

So in a real capitalist economy, there are numerous reasons for apparently rational investment decisions going wrong. Not that these investments produce goods which people do not need, simply that “*exact*” “economic calculation” indicates that they are not making a profit and so are an “inefficient” use of resources. However, it is question begging in the extreme to argue that if (thanks to a recession) workers can no longer buy food then is it an “efficient” allocation of resources that they starve. Similarly, during the Great Depression, the American government (under the New Deal) hired about 60% of the unemployed in public works and conservation projects. These saw a billion trees planted, the whooping crane saved, the modernisation of rural America, and the building of (among others) the Cathedral of Learning in Pittsburgh, the Montana state capitol, New York’s Lincoln Tunnel and Triborough Bridge complex, the Tennessee Valley Authority as well as building or renovating 2,500 hospitals, 45,000 schools, 13,000 parks and playgrounds, 7,800 bridges, 700,000 miles of roads, 1,000 airfields as well as employing 50,000

teachers and rebuilding the country's entire rural school system. Can all these schemes really be considered a waste of resources simply because they would never have made a capitalist a profit?

Of course, our discussion is affected by the fact that "actually existing" capitalism has various forms of state-intervention. Some of these "socialise" costs and risks, such as publicly funded creation of an infrastructure and Research and Development (R&D). Given that much R&D is conducted via state funding (via universities, military procurements, and so on) and (of course!) the profits of such research are then privatised, question arises would the initial research have gone ahead if the costs had not been "socialised"? Would Mises' "exact" calculation have resulted in, say, the internet being developed? If, as seems likely, not, does not mean our current use of the World Wide Web is an inefficient use of resources? Then there are the numerous state interventions which exist to ensure that certain activities become "efficient" (i.e., profitable) such as specifying and defending intellectual property rights, the limited liability of corporations and enforcing capitalist property rights (in land, for example). While we take this activity for granted when evaluating capitalism, they are serious imperfections in the market and so what counts as an "efficient" use of resources. Other state interventions aim to reduce uncertainty and stabilise the market, such as welfare maintaining aggregate demand.

Removing these "imperfections" in the market would substantially affect the persuasiveness of Mises' case. "What data we do have," notes Doug Henwood, "don't lend any support to the notion that the nineteenth century was more 'stable' than the twentieth ... the price level bounced all over the place, with periods of inflation alternating with periods of deflation, and GDP growth in the last three decades ... was similarly volatile. The busts were savage, resulting in massive bank failures and very lean times for workers and farmers." [After the New Economy, p. 242] Looking at business cycle data for America, what becomes clear is that some of those regular nineteenth century slumps were extremely long; the Panic of 1873, for example, was followed by a recession that lasted 5 1/2 years. The New York Stock Exchange closed for ten days and 89 of the country's 364 railroads went bankrupt. A total of 18,000 businesses failed between 1873 and 1875. Unemployment reached 14% by 1876, during a time which became known as the Long Depression. Construction work lagged, wages were cut, real estate values fell and corporate profits vanished.

Given this, given the tendency of capitalism to crisis and to ignore real needs in favour of effective demand, it is far better to be roughly right than precisely wrong. In other words, the economic calculation that Mises celebrates regularly leads to situations where people suffer because it precisely shows that workplaces should shut because, although nothing had changed in their productivity and the need of their products, they can no longer make a profit. Saying, in the middle of a crisis, that people should be without work, be homeless and go hungry because economic calculation proves they have no need for employment, homes and food shows the irrationality of glorifying "economic calculation" as the be all and end all of resource allocation.

In summary, then, not only is libertarian communism possible, capitalism itself makes economic calculation problematic and resource allocation inefficient. Given the systematic uncertainty which market dynamics imply and the tendencies to crisis inherent in the system, "economic calculation" ensures that resources are wasted. Using the profit criteria as the measure of "efficiency" is also problematic as it ensures that real needs are ignored and places society in frequent situations (crises) where "economic calculation" ensures that industries close, so ensuring that goods and services people need are no longer produced. As Proudhon put it, under capitalism there is "a miserable oscillation between usury and bankruptcy." [Proudhon's Solution of the Social Problem, p. 63] For anarchists, these drawbacks to capitalist allocation are obvious.

Equally obvious is the reason why Mises failed to discuss them: ultimately, like neo-classical economics, the “Austrian” school seeks to eulogise capitalism rather than to understand it.

## I.2 Is this a blueprint for an anarchist society?

No, far from it. There can be no such thing as a “blueprint” for a free society. “Anarchism”, as Rocker correctly stressed, “*is no patent solution for all human problems, no Utopia of a perfect social order, as it has so often been called, since on principle it rejects all absolute schemes and concepts. It does not believe in any absolute truth, or in definite final goals for human development, but in an unlimited perfectibility of social arrangements and human living conditions, which are always straining after higher forms of expression, and to which for this reason one can assign no definite terminus nor set any fixed goal.*” [Anarcho-Syndicalism, p. 15]

All we can do here is indicate those general features that we believe a free society **must** have in order to qualify as truly libertarian. For example, a society based on hierarchical management in the workplace (like capitalism) would not be libertarian and would soon see private or public states developing to protect the power of those at the top hierarchical positions. Beyond such general considerations, however, the specifics of how to structure a non-hierarchical society must remain open for discussion and experimentation:

*“Anarchism, meaning Liberty, is compatible with the most diverse economic [and social] conditions, on the premise that these cannot imply, as under capitalist monopoly, the negation of liberty.”* [D. A. de Santillan, **After the Revolution**, p. 95]

So, our comments should not be regarded as a detailed plan but rather a series of suggestions based on what anarchists have traditionally advocated as an alternative to capitalism combined with what has been tried in various social revolutions. Anarchists have always been reticent about spelling out their vision of the future in too much detail for it would be contrary to anarchist principles to be dogmatic about the precise forms the new society must take. Free people will create their own alternative institutions in response to conditions specific to their area as well as their needs, desires and hopes and it would be presumptuous of us to attempt to set forth universal policies in advance. As Kropotkin argued, once expropriation of social wealth by the masses has been achieved “*then, after a period of groping, there will necessarily arise a new system of organising production and exchange ... and that system will be a lot more attuned to popular aspirations and the requirements of co-existence and mutual relations than any theory, however splendid, devised by the thinking and imagination of reformers*”. This, however, did not stop him “*predicting right now that*” in some areas influenced by anarchists “*the foundations of the new organisation will be the free federation of producers’ groups and the free federation of Communes and groups in independent Communes.*” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 232]

This is because what we think now will influence the future just as real experience will influence and change how we think. Given the libertarian critique of the state and capitalism, certain kinds of social organisation are implied. Thus, our recognition that wage-labour creates authoritarian social relationships and exploitation suggests a workplace in a free society can only be based on associated and co-operative labour (i.e., self-management). Similarly, given that the

state is a centralised body which delegates power upwards it is not hard to imagine that a free society would have communal institutions which were federal and organised from the bottom-up.

Moreover, given the ways in which our own unfree society has shaped our ways of thinking, it is probably impossible for us to imagine what new forms will arise once humanity's ingenuity and creativity is unleashed by the removal of its present authoritarian fetters. Thus any attempts to paint a detailed picture of the future will be doomed to failure. Ultimately, anarchists think that *"the new society should be organised with the direct participation of all concerned, from the periphery to the centre, freely and spontaneously, at the prompting of the sentiment of solidarity and under pressure of the natural needs of society."* [E. Malatesta and A. Hamon, *Op. Cit.*, vol. 2, p. 20]

Nevertheless, anarchists have been willing to specify some broad principles indicating the general framework within which they expect the institutions of the new society to grow. It is important to emphasise that these principles are not the arbitrary creations of intellectuals in ivory towers. Rather, they are based on the actual political, social and economic structures that have arisen **spontaneously** whenever working class people have attempted to throw off their chains during eras of heightened revolutionary activity, such as the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Revolution, and the Hungarian uprising of 1956, France in 1968, the Argentinean revolt against neo-liberalism in 2001, to name just a few. It is clear, from these examples, that federations of self-managed workers' councils and community assemblies appear repeatedly in such popular revolts as people attempt to manage their own destinies directly, both economically and socially. While their names and specific organisational structures differ, these can be considered basic libertarian socialist forms, since they have appeared during all revolutionary periods. Ultimately, such organisations are the only alternatives to political, social and economic authority – unless we make our own decisions ourselves, someone else will.

So, when reading these sections, please remember that this is just an attempt to sketch the outline of a possible future. It is in no way an attempt to determine **exactly** what a free society would be like, for such a free society will be the result of the actions of all of society, not just anarchists. As Malatesta argued:

*"it is a question of freedom for everybody, freedom for each individual so long as he [or she] respects the equal freedom of others."*

*"None can judge with certainty who is right and who is wrong, who is nearest to the truth, or which is the best way to achieve the greatest good for each and everyone. Freedom, coupled by experience, is the only way of discovering the truth and what is best; and there is no freedom if there is a denial of the freedom to err."* [Errico Malatesta: **His Life and Ideas**, p. 49]

And, of course, real life has a habit of over-turning even the most realistic sounding theories, ideas and ideologies. Marxism, Leninism, Monetarism, laissez-faire capitalism (among others) have proven time and time again that ideology applied to real life has effects not predicted by the theory before hand (although in all four cases, their negative effects were predicted by others; in the case of Marxism and Leninism by anarchists). Anarchists are aware of this, which is why we reject ideology in favour of theory and why we are hesitant to create blue-prints for the future. History has repeatedly proven Proudhon right when he stated that *"every society declines*



*the moment it falls into the hands of the ideologists.” [System of Economical Contradictions, p. 115]*

Only life, as Bakunin stressed, can create and so life must inform theory — and so if the theory is producing adverse results it is better to revise the theory than deny reality or justify the evil effects it creates on real people. Thus this section of the FAQ is not a blue print, rather it is a series of suggestions (suggestions drawn, we stress, from actual experiences of working class revolt and organisation). These suggestions may be right or wrong and informed by Malatesta’s comments that:

*“We do not boast that we possess absolute truth, on the contrary, we believe that **social truth** is not a fixed quantity, good for all times, universally applicable or determinable in advance, but that instead, once freedom has been secured, mankind will go forward discovering and acting gradually with the least number of upheavals and with a minimum of friction. Thus our solutions always leave the door open to different and, one hopes, better solutions.” [Op. Cit., p.21]*

It is for this reason that anarchists, to quote Bakunin, think that the *“revolution should not only be made for the people’s sake; it should also be made by the people.”* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 141] Social problems will be solved in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. This applies to a social revolution — it will only liberate the working class if working class people make it themselves, using their own organisations and power. Indeed, it is the course of struggling for social change, to correct social problems, by, say, strikes, occupations, demonstrations and other forms of direct action, that people can transform their assumptions about what is possible, necessary and desirable. The necessity of organising their struggles and their actions ensures the development of assemblies and other organs of popular power in order to manage their activity. These create, potentially, an alternative means by which society can be organised. As Kropotkin argued, *“[a]ny strike trains the participants for a common management of affairs.”* [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 233] The ability of people to manage their own lives, and so society, becomes increasingly apparent and the existence of hierarchical authority, the state, the boss or a ruling class, becomes clearly undesirable and unnecessary. Thus the framework of the free society will be created by the very process of class struggle, as working class people create the organisations required to fight for improvements and change within capitalism (see section I.2.3).

Thus, the **actual** framework of an anarchist society and how it develops and shapes itself is dependent on the needs and desires of those who live in such a society or are trying to create one. This is why anarchists stress the need for mass assemblies in both the community and workplace and their federation from the bottom up to manage common affairs. Anarchy can only be created by the active participation of the mass of people. In the words of Malatesta, an anarchist society would be based on *“decisions taken at popular assemblies and carried out by groups and individuals who have volunteered or are duly delegated.”* The *“success of the revolution”* depends on *“a large number of individuals with initiative and the ability to tackle practical tasks: by ac-customing the masses not to leave the common cause in the hands of a few, and to delegate, when delegation is necessary, only for specific missions and for limited duration.”* [Op. Cit., p. 129] This self-management would be the basis on which an anarchist society would change and develop, with the new society created by those who live within it. Thus Bakunin:

*“revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation.”*  
[Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 172]

And, we must not forget that while we may be able to roughly guess the way an anarchist society could start initially, we cannot pretend to predict how it will develop in the long term. A social revolution is just the beginning of a process of social transformation. Unfortunately, we have to start where we are now, not where we hope to end up! Therefore our discussion will, by necessity, reflect the current society as this is the society we will be transforming. While, for some, this outlook may not be of a sufficient qualitative break with the world we now inhabit, it is essential. We need to offer and discuss suggestions for action in the **here and now**, not for some future pie in the sky world which can only possibly exist years, even decades, **after** a successful revolution.

For example, the ultimate goal of anarchism, we stress, is **not** the self-management of existing workplaces or industries within the same industrial structure produced by capitalism. However, a revolution will undoubtedly see the occupation and placing under self-management much of existing industry and we start our discussion assuming a similar set-up as exists today. This does not mean that an anarchist society will continue to be like this, we simply present the initial stages using examples we are all familiar with. It is simply the first stage of transforming industry into something more ecologically safe, socially integrated and individually and collectively empowering for people.

Some people **seriously** seem to think that after a social revolution working people will continue using the same technology, in the same old workplaces, in the same old ways and not change a single thing (except, perhaps, electing their managers). They simply transfer their own lack of imagination onto the rest of humanity. For anarchists, it is *“certain, however, that, when they [the workers] find themselves their own masters, they will modify the old system to suit their convenience in a variety of ways ... as common sense is likely to suggest to free men [and women].”* [Charlotte M. Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 23] So we have little doubt that working people will quickly transform their work, workplaces and society into one suitable for human beings, rejecting the legacy of capitalism and create a society we simply cannot predict. The occupying of workplaces is, we stress, simply the first stage of the process of transforming them and the rest of society. These words of the strikers just before the 1919 Seattle General Strike expresses this perspective well:

*“Labour will not only SHUT DOWN the industries, but Labour will REOPEN, under the management of the appropriate trades, such activities as are needed to preserve public health and public peace. If the strike continues, Labour may feel led to avoid public suffering by reopening more and more activities,*

*“UNDER ITS OWN MANAGEMENT.*

*“And that is why we say that we are starting on a road that leads — NO ONE KNOWS WHERE!”* [quoted by Jeremy Brecher, **Strike!**, p. 110]

People’s lives in a post-revolutionary society will not centre around fixed jobs and workplaces as they do now. Productive activity will go on, but not in the alienated way it does today. Similarly,

in their communities people will apply their imaginations, skills and hopes to transform them into better places to live (the beautification of the commune, as the CNT put it). The first stage, of course, will be to take over their existing communities and place them under community control. Therefore, it is essential to remember that our discussion can only provide an indication on how an anarchist society will operate in the months and years after a successful revolution, an anarchist society still marked by the legacy of capitalism. However, it would be a great mistake to think that anarchists do not seek to transform all aspects of society to eliminate that legacy and create a society fit for unique individuals to live in. As an anarchist society develops it will, we stress, transform society in ways we cannot guess at now, based on the talents, hopes, dreams and imaginations of those living in it.

Lastly, it could be argued that we spend too much time discussing the “*form*” (i.e. the types of organisation and how they make decisions) rather than the “*content*” of an anarchist society (the nature of the decisions reached). Moreover, the implication of this distinction also extends to the organisations created in the class struggle that would, in all likelihood, become the framework of a free society. However, form is as, perhaps more, important than content. This is because “*form*” and “*content*” are inter-related – a libertarian, participatory “*form*” of organisation allows the “*content*” of a decision, society or struggle to change. Self-management has an educational effect on those involved, as they are made aware of different ideas, think about them and decide between them (and, of course, formulate and present their own ones). Thus the nature of these decisions can and will evolve. Thus form has a decisive impact on “*content*” and so we make no apologies for discussing the form of a free society. As Murray Bookchin argued:

*“To assume that the forms of freedom can be treated merely as forms would be as absurd as to assume that legal concepts can be treated merely as questions of jurisprudence. The form and content of freedom, like law and society, are mutually determined. By the same token, there are forms of organisation that promote and forms that vitiate the goal of freedom ... To one degree or another, these forms either alter the individual who uses them or inhibit his [or her] further development.”* [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 89]

And the **content** of decisions are determined by the individuals involved. Thus participatory, decentralised, self-managed organisations are essential for the development of the content of decisions because they develop the individuals who make them.

### **I.2.1 Why discuss what an anarchist society would be like at all?**

Partly, in order to indicate why people should become anarchists. Most people do not like making jumps in the dark, so an indication of what anarchists think a desirable society could look like may help those people who are attracted to anarchism, inspiring them to become committed to its practical realisation. Partly, it’s a case of learning from past mistakes. There have been numerous anarchistic social experiments on varying scales, and it’s useful to understand what happened, what worked and what did not. In that way, hopefully, we will not make the same mistakes twice.

However, the most important reason for discussing what an anarchist society would look like is to ensure that the creation of such a society is the action of as many people as possible. As Errico Malatesta indicated in the middle of the Italian revolutionary “*Two Red Years*” (see section

A.5.5), “either we all apply our minds to thinking about social reorganisation, and right away, at the very same moment that the old structures are being swept away, and we shall have a more humane and more just society, open to future advances, or we shall leave such matters to the ‘leaders’ and we shall have a new government.” [The Anarchist Revolution, p. 69]

Hence the importance of discussing what the future will be like in the here and now. The more people who have a fairly clear idea of what a free society would look like the easier it will be to create that society and ensure that no important matters are left to others to decide for us. The example of the Spanish Revolution comes to mind. For many years before 1936, the C.N.T. and F.A.I. put out publications discussing what an anarchist society would look like (for example, **After the Revolution** by Diego Abel de Santillan and **Libertarian Communism** by Isaac Puente), the end product of libertarians organising and educating in Spain for almost seventy years before the revolution. When it finally occurred, the millions of people who participated already shared a similar vision and started to build a society based on it, thus learning firsthand where their books were wrong and which areas of life they did not adequately cover.

So, this discussion of what an anarchist society might look like is not a drawing up of blueprints, nor is it an attempt to force the future into the shapes created in past revolts. It is purely and simply an attempt to start people discussing what a free society would be like and to learn from previous experiments. However, as anarchists recognise the importance of building the new world in the shell of the old, our ideas of what a free society would be like can feed into how we organise and struggle today. And vice versa; for how we organise and struggle today will have an impact on the future.

As Malatesta pointed out, such discussions are necessary and essential, for it is “*absurd to believe that, once government has been destroyed and the capitalists expropriated, ‘things will look after themselves’ without the intervention of those who already have an idea on what has to be done and who immediately set about doing it*” for “*social life, as the life of individuals, does not permit of interruption.*” He stressed that to “*neglect all the problems of reconstruction or to pre-arrange complete and uniform plans are both errors, excesses which, by different routes, would led to our defeat as anarchists and to the victory of new or old authoritarian regime. The truth lies in the middle.*” [Op. Cit., p. 121]

Moreover, the importance of discussing the future can help indicate whether our activities are actually creating a better world. After all, if Karl Marx had been more willing to discuss his vision of a socialist society then the Stalinists would have found it much harder to claim that their hellish system was, in fact, socialism. Given that anarchists like Proudhon and Bakunin gave a board outline of their vision of a free society it would have been impossible for anarchism to be twisted as Marxism was. Most anarchists would agree with Chomsky’s evaluation of the issue:

*“A movement of the left should distinguish with clarity between its long-range revolutionary aims and certain more immediate effects it can hope to achieve ...*

*“But in the long run, a movement of the left has no chance of success, and deserves none, unless it develops an understanding of contemporary society and a vision of a future social order that is persuasive to a large majority of the population. Its goals and organisational forms must take shape through their active participation in political struggle [in its widest sense] and social reconstruction. A genuine radical culture can be created only through the spiritual transformation of great masses of people the essential*

*feature of any social revolution that is to extend the possibilities for human creativity and freedom ... The cultural and intellectual level of any serious radical movement will have to be far higher than in the past ... It will not be able to satisfy itself with a litany of forms of oppression and injustice. It will need to provide compelling answers to the question of how these evils can be overcome by revolution or large-scale reform. To accomplish this aim, the left will have to achieve and maintain a position of honesty and commitment to libertarian values.” [Radical Priorities, pp. 189–90]*

We hope that this section of the FAQ, in its own small way, will encourage as many people as possible to discuss what a libertarian society would be like and use that discussion to bring it closer.

## I.2.2 Will it be possible to go straight to an anarchist society from capitalism?

Possibly, it depends what is meant by an anarchist society.

If it is meant a fully classless society (what some people, inaccurately, would call a “utopia”) then the answer is a clear “no, that would be impossible.” Anarchists are well aware that “class difference do not vanish at the stroke of a pen whether that pen belongs to the theoreticians or to the pen-pushers who set out laws or decrees. Only action, that is to say direct action (not through government) expropriation by the proletarians, directed against the privileged class, can wipe out class difference.” [Luigi Fabbri, “Anarchy and ‘Scientific’ Communism”, pp. 13–49, *The Poverty of Statism*, pp. 13–49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 30]

As we discussed in section H.2.5, few anarchists consider it likely that a perfectly functioning libertarian communist society would be the immediate effect of a social revolution. For anarchists a social revolution is a **process** and not an event (although, of course, a process marked by such events as general strikes, uprisings, insurrections and so on). As Kropotkin argued:

*“It is a whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps five years that we must traverse to accomplish our revolution in the property system and in social organisation.”*  
[*Words of a Rebel*, p. 72]

His famous work *The Conquest of Bread* aimed, to use his words, at “prov[ing] that communism — at least partial — has more chance of being established than collectivism, especially in communes taking the lead” and tried “to indicate how, during a revolutionary period, a large city — if its inhabitants have accepted the idea — could organise itself on the lines of free communism.” [Anarchism, p. 298] The revolution, in other words, would progress towards communism after the initial revolt:

*“we know that an **uprising** can overthrow and change a government in one day, while a **revolution** needs three or four years of revolutionary convulsion to arrive at tangible results ... if we should expect the revolution, from its **earliest** insurrections, to have a communist character, we would have to relinquish the possibility of a revolution, since in that case there would be need of a strong majority to agree on carrying through a change in the direction of communism.”* [Kropotkin, quoted by Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, pp. 282–3]

In addition, different areas will develop in different speeds and in different ways, depending on the influences dominant in the area. “*Side by side with the revolutionised communes,*” argued Kropotkin, other areas “*would remain in an expectant attitude, and would go on living on the Individualist system ... revolution would break out everywhere, but revolution under different aspects; in one country State Socialism, in another Federation; everywhere more or less Socialism, not conforming to any particular rule.*” Thus “*the Revolution will take a different character in each of the different European nations; the point attained in the socialisation of wealth will not be everywhere the same.*” [The Conquest of Bread, pp. 81–2 and p. 81]

Kropotkin was also aware that a revolution would face many problems, including the disruption of economic activity, civil war and isolation. He argued that it was “*certain that the coming Revolution ... will burst upon us in the middle of a great industrial crisis ... There are millions of unemployed workers in Europe at this moment. It will be worse when Revolution has burst upon us ... The number of the out-of-works will be doubled as soon as barricades are erected in Europe and the United States ... we know that in time of Revolution exchange and industry suffer most from the general upheaval ... A Revolution in Europe means, then, the unavoidable stoppage of at least half the factories and workshops.*” He stressed that there would be “*the complete disorganisation*” of the capitalist economy and that during a revolution “[i]nternational commerce will come to a standstill” and “*the circulation of commodities and of provisions will be paralysed.*” This would, of course, have an impact on the development of a revolution and so the “*circumstances will dictate the measures.*” [Op. Cit., pp. 69–70, p. 191 and p. 79]

Thus we have anarcho-communism being introduced “*during a revolutionary period*” rather than instantly and the possibility that it will be “*partial*” in many, if not all areas, depending on the “*circumstances*” encountered. Therefore the (Marxist inspired) claim that anarchists think a fully communist society is possible overnight is simply false — we recognise that a social revolution takes time to develop after it starts. As Malatesta put it, “*after the revolution, that is after the defeat of the existing powers and the overwhelming victory of the forces of insurrection*” then “*gradualism really comes into operation. We shall have to study all the practical problems of life: production, exchange, the means of communication, relations between anarchist groupings and those living under some kind of authority, between communist collectives and those living in an individualistic way; relations between town and country ... and so on.*” [Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas, p. 173] In other words, “*each community will decide for itself during the transition period the method they deem best for the distribution of the products of associated labour.*” [James Guillaume, “On Building the New Social Order”, pp. 356–79, Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 362]

However, if by “anarchist society” it is meant a society that has abolished the state and started the process of transforming society from below then anarchists argue that such a society is not only possible after a successful revolution, it is essential. Thus the anarchist social revolution would be political (abolition of the state), economic (abolition of capitalism) and social (abolition of hierarchical social relationships). Or, more positively, the introduction of self-management into every aspect of life. In other words, “*political transformation*” and “*economic transformation*” must be “*accomplished together and simultaneously.*” [Bakunin, The Basic Bakunin, p. 106] This transformation would be based upon the organisations created by working class people in their struggle against capitalism and the state (see next section). Thus the framework of a free society would be created by the struggle for freedom itself, by the class struggle **within** but **against** hierarchical society. This revolution would come “*from below*” and would expropriate capital as

well as smash the state (see section H.2.4). Such a society, as Bakunin argued, will not be “perfect” by any means:

*“I do not say that the peasants [and workers], freely organised from the bottom up, will miraculously create an ideal organisation, confirming in all respects to our dreams. But I am convinced that what they construct will be living and vibrant, a thousands times better and more just than any existing organisation. Moreover, this ... organisation, being on the one hand open to revolutionary propaganda ... , and on the other, not petrified by the intervention of the State ... will develop and perfect itself through free experimentation as fully as one can reasonably expect in our times.*

*“With the abolition of the State, the spontaneous self-organisation of popular life ... will revert to the communes. The development of each commune will take its point of departure the actual condition of its civilisation.” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 207]*

How far such a new social organisation will meet the all the ideals and hopes of communist-anarchists will vary according to objective circumstances and the influence of libertarian theory. As people start to liberate themselves they will under go an ethical and psychological transformation as they act to the end specific hierarchical social structures and relationships. It does not imply that people need to be “perfect” nor that a perfect anarchist society will come about “overnight. Rather, it means that while an anarchist society (i.e., one without a state or private property) would be created by revolution, it will be one initially marked by the society it came from and would require a period of self-activity by which individuals reshape and change themselves as they are reshaping and changing the world about them. Thus Malatesta:

*“And even after a successful insurrection, could we overnight realise all desires and pass from a governmental and capitalist hell to a libertarian-communist heaven which is the complete freedom of man within the wished-for community of interests with all men?*

*“These are illusions which can take root among authoritarians who look upon the masses as the raw material which those who have power can, by decrees, supported by bullets and handcuffs, mould to their will. But these illusions have not taken among anarchists. We need the people’s consensus, and therefore we must persuade by means of propaganda and example ... to win over to our ideas an ever greater number of people.” [Op. Cit., pp. 82–3]*

So, clearly, the idea of a “one-day revolution” is one rejected as a harmful fallacy by anarchists. We are aware that revolutions are a **process** and not an event (or series of events). However, one thing that anarchists do agree on is that it is essential for both the state and capitalism to be undermined as quickly as possible. It is true that, in the course of social revolution, we anarchists may not be able to stop a new state being created or the old one from surviving. It all depends on the balance of support for anarchist ideas in the population and how willing people are to introduce them. There is no doubt, though, that for a social revolt to be fully anarchist, the state and capitalism must be destroyed and new forms of oppression and exploitation not put in their place. How quickly after such a destruction we move to a fully communist-anarchist society is a moot point, dependent on the conditions the revolution is facing and the ideas and wants of the people making it.

So the degree which a society which has abolished the state can progress towards free communism depends on objective conditions and what a free people want. Bakunin and other collectivists doubted the possibility of introducing a communistic system instantly after a revolution. For Kropotkin and many other anarcho-communists, communistic anarchy can, and must, be introduced as far as possible and as soon as possible in order to ensure a successful revolution. We should mention here that some anarchists, like the individualists and mutualists, do not support the idea of revolution and instead see anarchist alternatives growing within capitalism and slowly replacing it.

In other words anarchists agree that an anarchist society cannot be created overnight, for to assume so would be to imagine that anarchists could enforce their ideas on a pliable population. Libertarian socialism can only be created from below, by people who want it and understand it, organising and liberating themselves. “*Communist organisations,*” argued Kropotkin, “*must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free.*” [Anarchism, p. 140] The results of the Russian Revolution should have cleared away long ago any contrary illusions about how to create “socialist” societies. The lesson from every revolution is that the mistakes made by people in liberating themselves and transforming society are always minor compared to the results of creating authorities, who eliminate such “ideological errors” by destroying the freedom to make mistakes (and so freedom as such). Freedom is the only real basis on which socialism can be built (“*Experience through freedom is the only means to arrive at the truth and the best solutions; and there is no freedom if there is not the freedom to be wrong.*” [Malatesta, Op. Cit., p. 72]). Therefore, most anarchists would agree with Malatesta:

*“To organise a [libertarian] communist society on a large scale it would be necessary to transform all economic life radically, such as methods of production, of exchange and consumption; and all this could not be achieved other than gradually, as the objective circumstances permitted and to the extent that the masses understood what advantages could be gained and were able to act for themselves.” [Op. Cit., p. 36]*

This means that while the conditions necessary of a free society would be created in a broad way by a social revolution, it would be utopian to imagine everything will be perfect immediately. Few anarchists have argued that such a jump would be possible – rather they have argued that revolutions create the conditions for the evolution towards an anarchist society by abolishing state and capitalism. “*Besides,*” argued Alexander Berkman, “*you must not confuse the social revolution with anarchy. Revolution, in some of its stages, is a violent upheaval; anarchy is a social condition of freedom and peace. The revolution is the means of bringing anarchy about but it is not anarchy itself. It is to pave the road to anarchy, to establish conditions which will make a life of liberty possible.*” However, “*to achieve its purpose the revolution must be imbued with and directed by the anarchist spirit and ideas. The end shapes the means ... the social revolution must be anarchist in method as in aim.*” [What is Anarchism?, p. 231]

This means that while acknowledging the possibility of a transitional society, anarchists reject the notion of a transitional state as confused in the extreme (and, as can be seen from the experience of Marxism, dangerous as well). An anarchist society can only be achieved by anarchist means. Hence French Syndicalist Fernand Pelloutier’s comments:



*“Nobody believes or expects that the coming revolution ... will realise unadulterated anarchist-communism... it will erupt, no doubt, before the work of anarchist education has been completed ... [and as] a result ... , while we do preach perfect communism, it is not in the certainty or expectation of [libertarian] communism’s being the social form of the future: it is in order to further men’s [and women’s] education ... so that, by the time of the day of conflagration comes, they will have attained maximum emancipation. But must the transitional state to be endured necessarily or inevitability be the collectivist [i.e. state socialist/capitalist] jail? Might it not consist of libertarian organisation confined to the needs of production and consumption alone, with all political institutions having been done away with?” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, p. 55]*

One thing is certain: an anarchist social revolution or mass movement will need to defend itself against attempts by statists and capitalists to defeat it. Every popular movement, revolt, or revolution has had to face a backlash from the supporters of the status quo. An anarchist revolution or mass movement will face (and indeed has faced) such counter-revolutionary movements. However, this does not mean that the destruction of the state and capitalism need be put off until after the forces of reaction are defeated. For anarchists, a social revolution and free society can only be defended by anti-statist means (for more discussion of this important subject see section J.7.6).

So, given an anarchist revolution which destroys the state, the type and nature of the economic system created by it will depend on local circumstances and the level of awareness in society. The individualists are correct in the sense that what we do now will determine how the future develops. Obviously, any “transition period” starts in the **here and now**, as this helps determine the future. Thus, while social anarchists usually reject the idea that capitalism can be reformed away, we agree with the individualist and mutualist anarchists that it is essential for anarchists to be active today in constructing the ideas, ideals and new liberatory institutions of the future society within the current one. The notion of waiting for the “glorious day” of total revolution is not one held by anarchists – just like the notion that we expect a perfect communist-anarchist society to emerge the day after a successful revolution. Neither position reflects anarchist ideas on social change.

### **I.2.3 How is the framework of an anarchist society created?**

Anarchists do not abstractly compare a free society with the current one. Rather, we see an **organic** connection between what is and what could be. In other words, anarchists see the initial framework of an anarchist society as being created under statism and capitalism when working class people organise themselves to resist hierarchy. As Kropotkin argued:

*“To make a revolution it is not ... enough that there should be ... [popular] risings ... It is necessary that after the risings there should be something new in the institutions [that make up society], which would permit new forms of life to be elaborated and established.” [The Great French Revolution, vol. 1, p. 200]*

Anarchists have seen these new institutions as being linked with the need of working class people to resist the evils of hierarchy, capitalism and statism, as being the product of the class

struggle and attempts by working class people to resist authority, oppression and exploitation. Thus the struggle of working class people to protect and enhance their liberty under hierarchical society will be the basis for a society **without** hierarchy. This basic insight allowed anarchists like Bakunin and Proudhon to predict future developments in the class struggle such as workers' councils (such as those which developed during the 1905 and 1917 Russian Revolutions). As Oskar Anweiler notes in his definitive work on the Russian Soviets (Workers' Councils):

*“Proudhon’s views are often directly associated with the Russian councils ... Bakunin ..., much more than Proudhon, linked anarchist principles directly to revolutionary action, thus arriving at remarkable insights into the revolutionary process that contribute to an understanding of later events in Russia ...*

*“In 1863 Proudhon declared ... ‘All my economic ideas as developed over twenty-five years can be summed up in the words: agricultural-industrial federation. All my political ideas boil down to a similar formula: political federation or decentralisation.’ ... Proudhon’s conception of a self-governing state [sic!] founded on producers’ corporations [i.e. federations of co-operatives], is certainly related to the idea of ‘a democracy of producers’ which emerged in the factory soviets. To this extent Proudhon can be regarded as an ideological precursor of the councils ...*

*“Bakunin ... suggested the formation of revolutionary committees with representatives from the barricades, the streets, and the city districts, who would be given binding mandates, held accountable to the masses, and subject to recall. These revolutionary deputies were to form the ‘federation of the barricades,’ organising a revolutionary commune to immediately unite with other centres of rebellion ...*

*“Bakunin proposed the formation of revolutionary committees to elect communal councils, and a pyramidal organisation of society ‘through free federation from the bottom upward, the association of workers in industry and agriculture — first in the communities, then through federation of communities into districts, districts into nations, and nations into international brotherhood.’ These proposals are indeed strikingly similar to the structure of the subsequent Russian system of councils ...*

*“Bakunin’s ideas about spontaneous development of the revolution and the masses’ capacity for elementary organisation undoubtedly were echoed in part by the subsequent soviet movement... Because Bakunin ... was always very close to the reality of social struggle, he was able to foresee concrete aspects of the revolution. The council movement during the Russian Revolution, though not a result of Bakunin’s theories, often corresponded in form and progress to his revolutionary concepts and predictions.” [The Soviets, pp. 8–11]*

“As early as the 1860’s and 1870’s,” Paul Avrich also noted, “the followers of Proudhon and Bakunin in the First International were proposing the formation of workers’ councils designed both as a weapon of class struggle against capitalists and as the structural basis of the future libertarian society.” [The Russian Anarchists, p. 73]

In this sense, anarchy is not some distant goal but rather an aspect of the current struggles against domination, oppression and exploitation (i.e. the class struggle, to use an all-embracing

term, although we must stress that anarchists use this term to cover all struggles against domination). “Anarchism,” argued Kropotkin, “is not a mere insight into a remote future. Already now, whatever the sphere of action of the individual, he [or she] can act, either in accordance with anarchist principles or on an opposite line.” It was “born among the people — in the struggles of real life” and “owes its origin to the constructive, creative activity of the people.” [Anarchism, p. 75, p. 150 and p. 149] Thus, “Anarchism is not ... a theory of the future to be realised by divine inspiration. It is a living force in the affairs of our life, constantly creating new conditions.” It “stands for the spirit of revolt” and so “[d]irect action against the authority in the shop, direct action against the authority of the law, of direct action against the invasive, meddling authority of our moral code, is the logical, consistent method of Anarchism.” [Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, p. 63 and p. 66]

Anarchism draws upon the autonomous self-activity and spontaneity of working class people in struggle to inform both its political theory and its vision of a free society. The struggle against hierarchy teaches us not only how to be anarchists but also gives us a glimpse of what an anarchist society would be like, what its initial framework could be and the experience of managing our own activities which is required for such a society to function successfully.

Therefore, as is clear, anarchists have long had a clear vision of what an anarchist society would look like and, equally as important, where such a society would spring from (as we proved in section H.1.4 Lenin’s assertion that anarchists “have absolutely no clear idea of *what* the proletariat will put in its [the states] place” is simply false). It would, therefore, be useful to give a quick summary of anarchist views on this subject.

Proudhon, for example, looked to the self-activity of French workers, artisans and peasants and used that as the basis of his ideas on anarchism. While seeing such activity as essentially reformist in nature, like subsequent revolutionary anarchists he saw the germs of anarchy “generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the State and subjugate them” as “it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave.” [System of Economical Contradictions, p. 399 and p. 398] Workers should follow the example of those already creating co-operatives:

*“Do not the workmen’s unions at this moment serve as the cradle for the social revolution ... ? Are they not always the open school, both theoretical and practical, where the workman learns the science of the production and distribution of wealth, where he studies, without masters and without books, by his own experience solely, the laws of ... industrial organisation ... ?”* [General Idea of the Revolution, p. 78]

Attempts to form workers associations, therefore, “should be judged, not by the more or less successful results which they obtain, but only according to their silent tendency to assert and establish the social republic.” The “importance of their work lies, not in their petty union interests, but in their denial of the rule of capitalists, money lenders and governments.” They “should take over the great departments of industry, which are their natural inheritance.” [Op. Cit., p. 98–9]

This linking of the present and the future through the self-activity and self-organisation of working class people is also found in Bakunin. Unlike Proudhon, Bakunin stressed **revolutionary** activity and so he saw the militant labour movement, and the revolution itself, as providing the

basic structure of a free society. As he put it, “*the organisation of the trade sections and their representation in the Chambers of Labour ... bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old one. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself.*” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 255]

The needs of the class struggle would create the framework of a new society, a federation of workers councils, as “*strikes indicate a certain collective strength already, a certain understanding among the workers ... each strike becomes the point of departure for the formation of new groups.*” [The Basic Bakunin, pp. 149–50] This pre-revolutionary development would be accelerated by the revolution itself:

*“the revolution must set out from the first to radically and totally destroy the State ... The natural and necessary consequence of this destruction will be ... [among others, the] dissolution of army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and priesthood... confiscation of all productive capital and means of production on behalf of workers’ associations, who are to put them to use ... the federative Alliance of all working men’s associations ... [will] constitute the Commune ... [the] Communal Council [will be] composed of ... delegates ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates... all provinces, communes and associations ... by first reorganising on revolutionary lines ... [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction ... [and for] self-defence ... [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation.”* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 170–2]

Like Bakunin, Kropotkin stressed that revolution transformed those taking part in it. As he noted in his classic account of the French Revolution, “*by degrees, the revolutionary education of the people was being accomplished by the revolution itself.*” Part of this process involved creating new organisations which allowed the mass of people to take part in the decision making of the revolution. He pointed to “*the popular Commune,*” arguing that “*the Revolution began by creating the Commune ... and through this institution it gained ... immense power.*” He stressed that it was “*by means of the ‘districts’ [of the Communes] that ... the masses, accustoming themselves to act without receiving orders from the national representatives, were practising what was to be described later as Direct Self-Government.*” Such a system did not imply isolation, for while “*the districts strove to maintain their own independence*” they also “*sought for unity of action, not in subjection to a Central Committee, but in a federative union.*” The Commune “*was thus made **from below upward**, by the federation of the district organisations; it spring up in a revolutionary way, from popular initiative.*” Thus the process of class struggle, of the needs of the fighting against the existing system, generated the framework of an anarchist society for “*the districts of Paris laid the foundations of a new, free, social organisation.*” Little wonder he argued that “*the principles of anarchism ... already dated from 1789, and that they had their origin, not in theoretical speculations, but in the **deeds** of the Great French Revolution*” and that “*the libertarians would no doubt do the same to-day.*” [The Great French Revolution, vol. 1, p. 261, p. 200, p. 203, p. 206, p. 204 and p. 206]

Similarly, as we noted in section H.2.6 we discover him arguing in **Mutual Aid** that strikes and labour unions were an expression of mutual aid in capitalist society. Elsewhere, Kropotkin argued

that “*labour combinations*” like the “*Sections*” of French revolution were one of the “*main popular anarchist currents*” in history, expressing the “*same popular resistance to the growing power of the few.*” [Anarchism, p. 159] For Kropotkin, like Bakunin, libertarian labour unions were “*natural organs for the direct struggle with capitalism and for the composition of the future social order.*” [quoted by Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, p. 81]

As can be seen, the major anarchist thinkers pointed to forms of organisation autonomously created and managed by the working class as the framework of an anarchist society. Both Bakunin and Kropotkin pointed to militant, direct action based labour unions while Proudhon pointed towards workers’ experiments in co-operative production and mutual credit. Later anarchists followed them. The anarcho-syndicalists, like Bakunin and Kropotkin, pointed to the developing labour movement as the framework of an anarchist society, as providing the basis for the free federation of workers’ associations which would constitute the commune. Others, such as the Russians Maximov, Arshinov, Voline and Makhno, saw the spontaneously created workers’ councils (soviets) of 1905 and 1917 as the basis of a free society, as another example of Bakunin’s federation of workers’ associations.

Thus, for all anarchists, the structural framework of an anarchist society was created by the class struggle, by the needs of working class people to resist oppression, exploitation and hierarchy. As Kropotkin stressed, “[d]uring a revolution new forms of life will always germinate on the ruins of the old forms ... It is impossible to legislate for the future. All we can do is vaguely guess its essential tendencies and clear the road for it.” [Evolution and Environment, pp. 101–2] These essential tendencies were discovered, in practice, by the needs of the class struggle. The necessity of practising mutual aid and solidarity to survive under capitalism (as in any other hostile environment) makes working people and other oppressed groups organise together to fight their oppressors and exploiters. Thus the co-operation necessary for a libertarian socialist society, like its organisational framework, would be generated by the need to resist oppression and exploitation under capitalism. The process of resistance produces organisation on a wider and wider scale which, in turn, can become the framework of a free society as the needs of the struggle promote libertarian forms of organisation such as decision making from the bottom up, autonomy, federalism, mandated delegates subject to instant recall and so on.

For example, a strikers’ assembly would be the basic decision-making forum in a struggle for improved wages and working conditions. It would create a strike committee to implement its decisions and send delegates to spread the strike. These delegates inspire other strikes, requiring a new organisation to co-ordinate the struggle. This results in delegates from all the strikes meeting and forming a federation (a workers’ council). The strikers decide to occupy the workplace and the strike assemblies take over the means of production. The strike committees become the basis for factory committees which could administer the workplaces, based on workers’ self-management via workplace assemblies (the former strikers’ assemblies). The federation of strikers’ delegates becomes the local communal council, replacing the existing state with a self-managed federation of workers’ associations. In this way, the class struggle creates the framework of a free society.

This, obviously, means that any suggestions of how an anarchist society would look like are based on the fact that the *actual* framework of a free society will be the product of *actual* struggles. This means that the form of the free society will be shaped by the process of social change and the organs it creates. This is an important point and worth repeating.

So, as well as changing themselves while they change the world, a people in struggle also create the means by which they can manage society. By having to organise and manage their struggles, they become accustomed to self-management and self-activity and create the possibility of a free society and the organisations which will exist within it. Anarchy is not a jump into the dark but rather a natural progression of the struggle for freedom in an unfree society. The contours of a free society will be shaped by the process of creating it and, therefore, will not be an artificial construction imposed on society. Rather, it will be created from below up by society itself as working class people start to break free of hierarchy. The class struggle thus transforms those involved as well as society **and** creates the organisational structure and people required for a libertarian society.

This clearly suggests that the **means** anarchists support are important as they have a direct impact on the ends they create. In other words, means influence ends and so our means must reflect the ends we seek and empower those who use them. As the present state of affairs is based on the oppression, exploitation and alienation of the working class, any tactics used in the pursuit of a free society must be based on resisting and destroying those evils. This is why anarchists stress tactics and organisations which increase the power, confidence, autonomy, initiative, participation and self-activity of oppressed people. As we indicate in section J (*“What Do Anarchists Do?”*) this means supporting direct action, solidarity and self-managed organisations built and run from the bottom-up. Only by fighting our own battles, relying on ourselves and our own abilities and power, in organisations we create and run ourselves, can we gain the power and confidence and experience needed to change society for the better and, hopefully, create a new society in place of the current one.

Needless to say, a revolutionary movement will never, at its start, be purely anarchist:

*“All of the workers’ and peasants’ movements which have taken place ... have been movements within the limits of the capitalist regime, and have been more or less tinged with anarchism. This is perfectly natural and understandable. The working class do not act within a world of wishes, but in the real world where they are daily subjected to the physical and psychological blows of hostile forces ... the workers continually feel the influence of all the real conditions of the capitalist regime and of intermediate groups ... Consequently it is natural that the struggle which they undertake inevitably carries the stamp of various conditions and characteristics of contemporary society. The struggle can never be born in the finished and perfected anarchist form which would correspond to all the requirements of the ideas ... When the popular masses engage in a struggle of large dimensions, they inevitably start by committing errors, they allow contradictions and deviations, and only through the process of this struggle do they direct their efforts in the direction of the ideal for which they are struggling.”* [Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, pp. 239–40]

The role of anarchists is *“to help the masses to take the right road in the struggle and in the construction of the new society”* and *“support their first constructive efforts, assist them intellectually.”* However, the working class *“once it has mastered the struggle and begins its social construction, will no longer surrender to anyone the initiative in creative work. The working class will then direct itself by its own thought; it will create its society according to its own plans.”* [Arshinov, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 240–1] All anarchists can do is help this process by being part of it, arguing our case and winning

people over to anarchist ideas (see section J.3 for more details). Thus the process of struggle and debate will, hopefully, turn a struggle **against** capitalism and statism into one **for** anarchism. In other words, anarchists seek to preserve and extend the anarchistic elements that exist in every struggle and to help them become consciously libertarian by discussion and debate as members of those struggles.

Lastly, we must stress that it is only the **initial** framework of a free society which is created in the class struggle. As an anarchist society develops, it will start to change and develop in ways we cannot predict. The forms in which people express their freedom and their control over their own lives will, by necessity, change as these requirements and needs change. As Bakunin argued:

*“Even the most rational and profound science cannot divine the form social life will take in the future. It can only determine the **negative** conditions, which follow logically from a rigorous critique of existing society. Thus, by means of such a critique, social and economic science rejected hereditary individual property and, consequently, took the abstract and, so to speak, **negative** position of collective property as a necessary condition of the future social order. In the same way, it rejected the very idea of the state or statism, meaning government of society from above downward ... Therefore, it took the opposite, or negative, position: anarchy, meaning the free and independent organisation of all the units and parts of the community and their voluntary federation from below upward, not by the orders of any authority, even an elected one, and not by the dictates of any scientific theory, but as the natural development of all the varied demands put forth by life itself.*

*“Therefore no scholar can teach the people or even define for himself how they will and must live on the morrow of the social revolution. That will be determined first by the situation of each people, and secondly by the desires that manifest themselves and operate most strongly within them.” [Statism and Anarchy, pp. 198–9]*

So while it will be reasonable to conclude that, for example, the federation of strike/factory assemblies and their councils/committees will be the framework by which production will initially be organised, this framework will mutate to take into account changing production and social needs. The actual structures created will, by necessity, be transformed as industry is transformed from below upwards to meet the real needs of society and producers as both the structure and nature of work and industry developed under capitalism bears the marks of its economic class, hierarchies and power (*“a radical social ecology not only raises traditional issues such as the re-union of agriculture with industry, but also questions the very structure of industry itself.”* [Murray Bookchin, **The Ecology of Freedom**, p. 408]). Therefore, under workers’ self-management industry, work and the whole structure and organisation of production will be transformed in ways we can only guess at today. We can point the general direction (i.e. self-managed, ecologically balanced, decentralised, federal, empowering, creative and so on) but that is all. Similarly, as cities and towns are transformed into ecologically integrated communes, the initial community assemblies and their federations will transform along with the transformation of our surroundings. What they will evolve into we cannot predict, but their fundamentals of instant recall, delegation over representation, decision making from the bottom up, and so on will remain.

So, while anarchists see *“the future in the present”* as the initial framework of a free society, we recognise that such a society will evolve and change. However, the fundamental principles of a

free society will not change and so it is useful to present a summary of how such a society could work, based on these principles.



## I.3 What could the economic structure of anarchy look like?

Here we will examine possible frameworks of a libertarian socialist economy. We stress that it is **frameworks** rather than framework because it is likely that any anarchist society will see a diverse number of economic systems co-existing in different areas, depending on what people in those areas want. *“In each locality,”* argued Diego Abad de Santillan, *“the degree of communism, collectivism or mutualism will depend on the conditions prevailing. Why dictate rules? We who make freedom our banner, cannot deny it in economy. Therefore there must be free experimentation, free show of initiative and suggestions, as well as the freedom of organisation.”* As such, anarchism *“can be realised in a multiformity of economic arrangements, individual and collective. Proudhon advocated mutualism; Bakunin, collectivism; Kropotkin, communism. Malatesta has conceived the possibility of mixed agreements, especially during the first period.”* [**After the Revolution**, p. 97 and p. 96]

Here, we will highlight and discuss the four major schools of anarchist economic thought: Individualist anarchism, mutualism, collectivism and communism. It is up to the reader to evaluate which school best maximises individual liberty and the good life (as individualist anarchist Joseph LaBadie wisely said, *“Anarchism will not dictate to them any explicit rules as to what they must do, but that it opens to them the opportunities of putting into practice their own ideas of enhancing their own happiness.”* [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 260–1]). *“Nothing is more contrary to the real spirit of Anarchy than uniformity and intolerance,”* argued Kropotkin. *“Freedom of development implies difference of development, hence difference of ideas and actions.”* Experience, then, is *“the best teacher, and the necessary experience can only be gained by entire freedom of action.”* [quoted by Ruth Kinna, *“Fields of Vision: Kropotkin and Revolutionary Change”*, pp. 67–86, **SubStance**, Vol. 36, No. 2, p. 81] There may, of course, be other economic practices but these may not be libertarian. In Malatesta’s words:

*“Admitted the basic principle of anarchism — which is that no-one should wish or have the opportunity to reduce others to a state of subjection and oblige them to work for him — it is clear that all, and only, those ways of life which respect freedom, and recognise that each individual has an equal right to the means of production and to the full enjoyment of the product of his own labour, have anything in common with anarchism.”*  
[**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 33]

In addition, it should be kept in mind that in practice it is impossible to separate the economic realm from the social and political realms, as there are numerous interconnections between them: anarchist thinkers like Bakunin argued that the “political” institutions of a free society would be based upon workplace associations while Kropotkin placed the commune at the heart of his vision of a communist-anarchist economy **and** society. Thus the division between social and economic forms is not clear cut in anarchist theory — as it should be as society is not, and cannot be,

considered as separate from or inferior to the economy. An anarchist society will try to integrate the social and economic, embedding the latter in the former in order to stop any harmful externalities associated economic activity being passed onto society. As Karl Polanyi argued, capitalism “means no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market. Instead of the economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system.” [**The Great Transformation**, p. 57] Given the negative effects of such an arrangement, little wonder that anarchism seeks to reverse it.

Also, by discussing the economy first we are not implying that dealing with economic domination or exploitation is more important than dealing with other aspects of the total system of domination, e.g. social hierarchies, patriarchal values, racism, etc. We follow this order of exposition because of the need to present one thing at a time, but it would have been equally easy to start with the social and political structure of anarchy. However, Rudolf Rocker is correct to argue that an economic transformation in the economy is an essential aspect of a social revolution:

*“[A] social development in this direction [i.e. a stateless society] was not possible without a fundamental revolution in existing economic arrangements; for tyranny and exploitation grow on the same tree and are inseparably bound together. The freedom of the individual is secure only when it rests on the economic and social well-being of all ... The personality of the individual stands the higher, the more deeply it is rooted in the community, from which arise the richest sources of its moral strength. Only in freedom does there arise in man the consciousness of responsibility for his acts and regard for the rights of others; only in freedom can there unfold in its full strength that most precious of social instinct: man’s sympathy for the joys and sorrows of his fellow men and the resultant impulse toward mutual aid and in which are rooted all social ethics, all ideas of social justice.”* [**Nationalism and Culture**, pp. 147–8]

The aim of any anarchist society would be to maximise freedom and so creative work:

*“If it is correct, as I believe it is, that a fundamental element of human nature is the need for creative work or creative inquiry, for free creation without the arbitrary limiting effects of coercive institutions, then of course it will follow that a decent society should maximise the possibilities for this fundamental human characteristic to be realised. Now, a federated, decentralised system of free associations incorporating economic as well as social institutions would be what I refer to as anarcho-syndicalism. And it seems to me that it is the appropriate form of social organisation for an advanced technological society, in which human beings do not have to be forced into the position of tools, of cogs in a machine.”* [Noam Chomsky, **Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media**, p. 31]

So, as one might expect, since the essence of anarchism is opposition to hierarchical authority, anarchists totally oppose the way the current economy is organised. This is because authority in the economic sphere is embodied in centralised, hierarchical workplaces that give an elite class (capitalists) dictatorial control over privately owned means of production, turning the majority of the population into order takers (i.e. wage slaves). In contrast, the libertarian-socialist economy will be based on decentralised, egalitarian workplaces in which workers democratically self-manage their productive activity in **socially** owned means of production.

The key principles of libertarian socialism are decentralisation, self-management, socialisation, voluntary association, and free federation. These principles determine the form and function of both the economic and political systems. In this section we will consider just the economic system. Bakunin gives an excellent overview of such an economy when he wrote that in a free society the *“land belongs to only those who cultivate it with their own hands; to the agricultural communes. The capital and all the tools of production belong to the workers; to the workers’ associations.”* These associations are often called *“co-operatives”* and *“syndicates”* (see section I.3.1). This feeds into an essential economic concept for libertarian socialists is **“workers’ self-management”** This refers to those who do the work managing it, where the land and workplaces are *“owned and operated by the workers themselves: by their freely organised federations of industrial and agricultural workers”* (see section I.3.2). For most anarchists, *“socialisation”* is the necessary foundation for a free society, as only this ensures universal self-management by allowing free access to the means of production (see section I.3.3). Thus an anarchist economy would be based on *“the land, tools of production and all other capital”* being *“converted into collective property of the whole of society and utilised only by the workers, i.e., by their agricultural and industrial associations.”* [Bakunin on Anarchy, p. 247, p. 400 and p. 427] As Berkman summarised:

*“The revolution abolishes private ownership of the means of production, distribution, and with it goes capitalistic business. Personal possession remains only in the things you use. Thus, your watch is your own, but the watch factory belongs to the people. Land, machinery, and all other public utilities will be collective property, neither to be bought nor sold. Actual use will be considered the only title [in communist anarchism] — not to ownership but to possession. The organisation of the coal miners, for example, will be in charge of the coal mines, not as owners but as the operating agency. Similarly will the railroad brotherhoods run the railroads, and so on. Collective possession, co-operatively managed in the interests of the community, will take the place of personal ownership privately conducted for profit.”* [What is Anarchism?, p. 217]

So the solution proposed by social anarchists is **society-wide** ownership of the means of production and distribution, with each workplace run co-operatively by its members. However, no workplace exists in isolation and would seek to associate with others to ensure it gets the raw materials it needs for production and to see what it produces goes to those who need it. These links would be based on the anarchist principles of free agreement and voluntary federation (see section I.3.4). For social anarchists, this would be supplemented by confederal bodies or co-ordinating councils at two levels: first, between all firms in a particular industry; and second, between all industries (including agriculture) throughout the society (section I.3.5). Such federations may, depending on the type of anarchism in question, also include people’s financial institutions.

While, for some anarcho-syndicalists, this structure is seen as enough, most communist-anarchists consider that the economic federation should be held accountable to society as a whole (i.e. the economy must be communalised). This is because not everyone in society is a worker (e.g. the young, the old and infirm) nor will everyone belong to a syndicate (e.g. the self-employed), but as they also have to live with the results of economic decisions, they should have a say in what happens. In other words, in communist-anarchism, workers make the day-to-day decisions concerning their work and workplaces, while the social criteria behind these decisions are made by

everyone. As anarchist society is based on free access and a resource is controlled by those who use it. It is a decentralised, participatory, self-managed, organisation whose members can secede at any time and in which all power and initiative arises from and flows back to the grassroots level. Such a society combines free association, federalism and self-management with communalised ownership. Free labour is its basis and socialisation exists to complement and protect it. Such a society-wide economic federation of this sort is **not** the same thing as a centralised state agency, as in the concept of nationalised or state-owned industry.

The exact dynamics of a socialised self-managed system varies between anarchist schools. Most obviously, as discussed in section I.3.6, while individualists view competition between workplaces as unproblematic and mutualists see its negative aspects but consider it necessary, collectivists and communists oppose it and argue that a free society can do without it. Moreover, socialisation should not be confused with forced collectivisation — individuals and groups will be free **not** to join a syndicate and to experiment in different forms of economy (see section I.3.7). Lastly, anarchists argue that such a system would be applicable to all economies, regardless of size and development, and aim for an economy based on appropriately sized technology (Marxist assertions **not** withstanding — see section I.3.8).

Regardless of the kind of anarchy desired, anarchists all agree on the importance of decentralisation, free agreement and free association. Kropotkin's summary of what anarchy would look like gives an excellent feel of what sort of society anarchists desire:

*“harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilised being.*

*“In a society developed on these lines ... voluntary associations ... would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international temporary or more or less permanent — for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs.*

*“Moreover, such a society would represent nothing immutable. On the contrary — as is seen in organic life at large — harmony would (it is contended) result from an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces and influences, and this adjustment would be the easier to obtain as none of the forces would enjoy a special protection from the State.” [Anarchism, p. 284]*

If this type of system sounds “utopian” it should be kept in mind that it was actually implemented and worked quite well in the collectivist economy organised during the Spanish Revolution of 1936, despite the enormous obstacles presented by an ongoing civil war as well as the relentless (and eventually successful) efforts of Republicans, Stalinists and Fascists to crush it (see section I.8 for an introduction).

As well as this (and other) examples of “***anarchy in action***” there have been other libertarian socialist economic systems described in writing. All share the common features of workers’

self-management, co-operation and so on we discuss here and in section I.4. These texts include **Syndicalism** by Tom Brown, **The Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism** by G.P. Maximoff, **Guild Socialism Restated** and **Self-Government in Industry** by G.D.H. Cole, **After the Revolution** by Diego Abad de Santillan, **Anarchist Economics and Principles of Libertarian Economy** by Abraham Guillen, **Workers Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society** by Cornelius Castoriadis among others. A short summary of Spanish Anarchist visions of the free society can be found in chapter 3 of Robert Alexander's **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War** (vol. 1). Some anarchists support what is called "*Participatory Economics*" (**Parecon**, for short) and **The Political Economy of Participatory Economics and Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the Twenty First Century** by Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel are worth reading as they contain good introductions to that project.

Fictional accounts include William Morris' **News from Nowhere**, the excellent **The Dispossessed** by Ursula Le Guin, **Women on the Edge of Time** by Marge Piercy and **The Last Capitalist** by Steve Cullen. Iain M. Banks Culture novels are about an anarcho-communist society, but as they are so technologically advanced they can only give an insight into the aims of libertarian socialism and the mentality of people living in freedom (**The State of the Art** and **The Player of Games** contrast the Culture with hierarchical societies, the Earth in 1977 in the case of the former).

### I.3.1 What is a "syndicate"?

As we will use the term, a "*syndicate*" (also called a "*producer co-operative*", or "*co-operative*", for short, sometimes a "*collective*", "*producers' commune*", "*association of producers*", "*guild factory*" or "*guild workplace*") is a democratically self-managed productive enterprise whose assets are controlled by its workers. It is a useful generic term to describe the situation aimed at by anarchists where "*associations of men and women who ... work on the land, in the factories, in the mines, and so on, [are] themselves the managers of production.*" [Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 78]

This means that where labour is collective, "*the ownership of production should also be collective.*" "*Each workshop, each factory,*" correctly suggested James Guillaume, "*will organise itself into an association of workers who will be free to administer production and organise their work as they think best, provided that the rights of each worker are safeguarded and the principles of equality and justice are observed.*" This applies to the land as well, for anarchism aims to answer "*the question of how best to work the land and what form of possession is best.*" It does not matter whether peasants "*keep their plots of land and continue to cultivate it with the help of their families*" or whether they "*take collective possession of the vast tracts of land and work them in common*" as "*the main purpose of the Revolution*" has been achieved, namely that "*the land is now the property of those who cultivate it, and the peasants no longer work for the profit of an idle exploiter who lives by their sweat.*" Any "*former hired hands*" will become "*partners and share ... the products which their common labour extracts from the land*" as "*the Revolution will have abolished agricultural wage slavery and peonage and the agricultural proletariat will consist only of free workers living in peace and plenty.*" As with industrial workplaces, the "*internal organisation ... need not necessarily be identical; organisational forms and procedures will vary greatly according to the preferences of the associated workers.*" The "*administration of the community*" could be "*entrusted either to an*

*individual or to a commission of many members,*” for example, but would always be “*elected by all the members.*” [“*On Building the New Social Order*”, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 363, p. 359, p. 360 and p. 361]

It must be noted that this libertarian goal of abolishing the hierarchical capitalist workplace and ending wage labour by associating and democratising industry is as old as anarchism itself. Thus we find Proudhon arguing in 1840 that the aim was a society of “*possessors without masters*” (rather than wage-labourers and tenants “*controlled by proprietors*”) with “*leaders, instructors, superintendents*” and so forth being “*chosen from the labourers by the labourers themselves.*” [**What is Property?**, p. 167 and p. 137]

“*Mutuality, reciprocity exists,*” Proudhon argued, “*when all the workers in an industry, instead of working for an **entrepreneur** who pays them and keeps their products, work for one another and thus collaborate in the making of a common product whose profits they share amongst themselves. Extend the principle of reciprocity as uniting the work of every group, to the Workers’ Societies as units, and you have created a form of civilisation which from all points of view — political, economic and aesthetic — is radically different from all earlier civilisations.*” In summary: “*All associated and all free*”. [quoted by Martin Buber, **Paths in Utopia**, pp. 29–30 and p. 30]

Nor was this idea invented by Proudhon and other anarchists. Rather, it was first raised by workers themselves and subsequently taken up by the likes of Proudhon and Bakunin. So working class people came up with this fundamental libertarian socialist idea by themselves. The idea that wage labour would be replaced by associated labour was raised in many different countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In France, it was during the wave of strikes and protests unleashed by the 1830 revolution. That year saw Parisian printers, for example, producing a newspaper (**L’Artisan: Journal de la classes ouvriere**) which suggested that the only way to stop being exploited by a master was for workers to form co-operatives. During the strikes of 1833, this was echoed by other skilled workers and so co-operatives were seen by many workers as a method of emancipation from wage labour. Proudhon even picked up the term **Mutualisme** from the workers in Lyon in the early 1840s and their ideas of co-operative credit, exchange and production influenced him as surely as he influenced them. In America, as Chomsky notes, “[i]f we go back to the labour activism from the early days of the industrial revolution, to the working class press in 1850s, and so on, it’s got a real anarchist strain to it. They never heard of European anarchism ... It was spontaneous. They took for granted wage labour is little different from slavery, that workers should own the mills” [**Anarchism Interview**] As we noted in section F.8.6, this was a commonplace response for working class people facing the rise of capitalism.

In many ways a syndicate is similar to a co-operative under capitalism. Indeed, Proudhon pointed to such experiments as examples of what he desired, with “*co-operative associations*” being a key part of his “*general liquidation*” of capitalist society. [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 203] Bakunin, likewise, argued that anarchists are “*convinced that the co-operative will be the preponderant form of social organisation in the future, in every branch of labour and science.*” [**Basic Bakunin**, p. 153] Therefore, even from the limited examples of co-operatives functioning in the capitalist market, the essential features of a libertarian socialist economy can be seen. The basic economic element, the workplace, will be a free association of individuals who will organise their joint work as equals. To quote Bakunin again, “[o]nly associated labour, that is, labour organised upon the principles of reciprocity and co-operation, is adequate to the task of maintaining ... civilised society.” [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 341]

**Co-operation** in this context means that the policy decisions related to their association will be based on the principle of “one member, one vote,” with administrative staff elected and held accountable to the workplace as a whole. In the words of economist David Ellerman: “Every enterprise should be legally restructured as a partnership of all who work in the enterprise. Every enterprise should be a democratic worker-owned firm.” [The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm, p. 43] Anarchists, unsurprisingly, reject the Leninist idea that state property means the end of capitalism as simplistic and confused. Ownership is a juridical relationship. The real issue is one of management. Do the users of a resource manage it? If so, then we have a real (i.e. libertarian) socialist society. If not, we have some form of class society (for example, in the Soviet Union the state replaced the capitalist class but workers still had no official control over their labour or the product of that labour).

Workplace self-management does not mean, as some apologists of capitalism suggest, that knowledge and skill will be ignored and all decisions made by everyone. This is an obvious fallacy, since engineers, for example, have a greater understanding of their work than non-engineers and under workers’ self-management will control it directly:

*“we must understand clearly wherein this Guild democracy consists, and especially how it bears on relations between different classes of workers included in a single Guild. For since a Guild includes **all** the workers by hand and brain engaged in a common service, it is clear that there will be among its members very wide divergences of function, of technical skill, and of administrative authority. Neither the Guild as a whole nor the Guild factory can determine all issues by the expedient of the mass vote, nor can Guild democracy mean that, on all questions, each member is to count as one and none more than one. A mass vote on a matter of technique understood only by a few experts would be a manifest absurdity, and, even if the element of technique is left out of account, a factory administered by constant mass votes would be neither efficient nor at all a pleasant place to work in. There will be in the Guilds technicians occupying special positions by virtue of their knowledge, and there will be administrators possessing special authority by virtue both of skill and ability and of personal qualifications.”* [G.D.H. Cole, **Guild Socialism Restated**, pp. 50–51]

The fact that some decision-making has been delegated in this manner sometimes leads people to ask whether a syndicate would not just be another form of hierarchy. The answer is that it would not be hierarchical because the workers’ assemblies and their councils, open to all workers, would decide what types of decision-making to delegate, thus ensuring that ultimate power rests at the base. Moreover, **power** would not be delegated. Malatesta clearly indicates the difference between administrative decisions and policy decisions:

*“Of course in every large collective undertaking, a division of labour, technical management, administration, etc. is necessary. But authoritarians clumsily play on words to produce a **raison d’être** for government out of the very real need for the organisation of work. Government, it is well to repeat, is the concourse of individuals who have had, or seized, the right and the means to make laws and to oblige people to obey; the administrator, the engineer, etc., instead are people who are appointed or assume the responsibility to carry out a particular job and so on. Government means the delegation*

*of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few; administration means the delegation of work, that is tasks given and received, free exchange of services based on free agreement ... Let one not confuse the function of government with that of an administration, for they are essentially different, and if today the two are often confused, it is only because of economic and political privilege.”*  
[Anarchy, pp. 41–2]

Given that power remains in the hands of the workplace assembly, it is clear that the organisation required for every collective endeavour cannot be equated with government. Also, never forget that administrative staff are elected by and accountable to the rest of an association. If, for example, it turned out that a certain type of delegated decision-making activity was being abused, it could be revoked by the whole workforce. Because of this grassroots control, there is every reason to think that crucial types of decision-making activity which could become a source of power (and so with the potential for seriously affecting all workers’ lives) would not be delegated but would remain with the workers’ assemblies. For example, powers that are now exercised in an authoritarian manner by managers under capitalism, such as those of hiring and firing, introducing new production methods or technologies, changing product lines, relocating production facilities, determining the nature, pace and rhythm of productive activity and so on would remain in the hands of the associated producers and **not** be delegated to anyone.

New syndicates will be created upon the initiative of individuals within communities. These may be the initiative of workers in an existing syndicate who desire to expand production, or members of the local community who see that the current syndicates are not providing adequately in a specific area of life. Either way, the syndicate will be a voluntary association for producing useful goods or services and would spring up and disappear as required. Therefore, an anarchist society would see syndicates developing spontaneously as individuals freely associate to meet their needs, with both local and confederal initiatives taking place.

While having a common basis in co-operative workplaces, different forms of anarchism see them work in different ways. Under mutualism, workers organise themselves into syndicates and share in its gains and losses. This means that in *“the labour-managed firm there is no profit, only income to be divided among members. Without employees the labour-managed firm does not have a wage bill, and labour costs are not counted among the expenses to be subtracted from profit, as they are in the capitalist firm.”* The *“labour-managed firm does not hire labour. It is a collective of workers that hires capital and necessary materials.”* [Christopher Eaton Gunn, **Workers’ Self-Management in the United States**, pp. 41–2] In this way, Proudhon and his followers argued, exploitation would end and workers would receive the full-product of their labour. This, it should be noted, does not mean that workers consume all the proceeds of sales in personal consumption (i.e., no investment). It means that labour **controls** what to do with the sales income, i.e., how much to invest and how much to allocate to consumption:

*“If Labour appropriated the whole product, that would include appropriating the liabilities for the property used up in the production process in addition to appropriating the produced outputs. Present Labour would have to pay input suppliers (e.g., past labour) to satisfy those liabilities.”* [Ellerman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24]

So under mutualism, surpluses (profits) would be either equally divided between all members of the co-operative or divided unequally on the basis of the type of work done, with the per-



centages allotted to each type being decided by democratic vote, on the principle of one worker, one vote. Worker co-operatives of this type do have the virtue of preventing the exploitation and oppression of labour by capital, since workers are not hired for wages but, in effect, become partners in the firm. This means that the workers control both the product of their labour (so that the value-added that they produce is not appropriated by a privileged elite) and the work process itself (and so they no longer sell their liberty to others). However, such a limited form of co-operation is rejected by most anarchists. Non-mutualist anarchists argue that this, at best, is but a step in the right direction and the ultimate aim is distribution according to need.

Production for use rather than profit/money is the key concept that distinguishes collectivist and communist forms of anarchism from the competitive mutualism advocated by Proudhon. This is for two reasons. First, because of the harmful effects of markets we indicated in section I.1.3 could make co-operatives become, in effect, “collective capitalists” and compete against each other in the market as ferociously as actual capitalists. As Kropotkin put it, while co-operation had “*at its origin ... an essentially mutual aid character*”, it “*is often described as ‘joint-stock individualism’*” and “*such as it is now, it undoubtedly tends to breed a co-operative egotism, not only towards the community at large, but also among the co-operators themselves.*” [Mutual Aid, p. 214] While he was discussing co-operatives under capitalism, his worries are equally applicable to a mutualist system of competing syndicates. This would also lead to a situation where market forces ensured that the workers involved made irrational decisions (from both a social and individual point of view) in order to survive in the market. For mutualists, this “*irrationality of rationality*” is the price to be paid to ensure workers receive the full product of their labour and, moreover, any attempt to overcome this problem holds numerous dangers to freedom. Other social anarchists disagree. They think co-operation between workplaces can increase, not reduce, freedom. Second, as discussed in section I.1.4, distribution according to work does not take into account the different needs of the workers (nor non-workers like the ill, the young and the old). As such, mutualism does not produce what most anarchists would consider a decent society, one where people co-operate to make a decent life for all.

What about entry into a syndicate? In the words of Cole, guilds (syndicates) are “*open associations which any man [or woman] may join*” but “*this does not mean, of course, that any person will be able to claim admission, as an absolute right, into the guild of his choice.*” This means that there may be training requirements (for example) and obviously “*a man [or woman] clearly cannot get into a Guild unless it needs fresh recruits for its work. [The worker] will have free choice, but only of the available openings.*” [Op. Cit., p. 75] As David Ellerman notes, it is important to remember that “*the labour market would not exist*” in a self-managed economy as labour would “*always be the residual claimant.*” This means that capital would not be hiring labour as under capitalism, rather workers would be seeking out associations to join. “*There would be a job market in the sense of people looking for firms they could join,*” Ellerman continues, “*but it would not be a labour market in the sense of the selling of labour in the employment contract.*” [Op. Cit., p. 91]

All schools of social anarchism, therefore, are based on the use rights resting in the specific syndicate while ownership would be socialised rather than limited to the syndicate’s workers. This would ensure free access to the means of production as new members of a syndicate would have the same rights and power as existing members. If this were not the case, then the new members would be the wage slaves of existing ones and it is **precisely** to avoid this that anarchists argue for socialisation (see section I.3.3). With socialisation, free access is guaranteed and so

all workers are in the same position so ensuring self-management and no return to workplace hierarchy.

Obviously, as in any society, an individual may not be able to pursue the work they are most interested in (although given the nature of an anarchist society they would have the free time to pursue it as a hobby). However, we can imagine that an anarchist society would take an interest in ensuring a fair distribution of work and so would try to arrange work sharing if a given work placement is popular (see section I.4.13 on the question of who will do unpleasant work, and for more on work allocation generally, in an anarchist society).

Of course there may be the danger of a syndicate or guild trying to restrict entry from an ulterior motive, as such the exploitation of monopoly power vis-à-vis other groups in society. However, in an anarchist society individuals would be free to form their own syndicates and this would ensure that such activity is self-defeating. In addition, in a non-individualist anarchist system, syndicates would be part of a confederation (see section I.3.4). It is a responsibility of the inter-syndicate congresses to assure that membership and employment in the syndicates is not restricted in any anti-social way. If an individual or group of individuals felt that they had been unfairly excluded from a syndicate then an investigation into the case would be organised at the congress. In this way any attempts to restrict entry would be reduced (assuming they occurred to begin with). And, of course, individuals are free to form new syndicates or leave the confederation if they so desire.

With the question of entry into syndicates comes the question of whether there would be enough places for those seeking to work (what could be termed “unemployment”). Ultimately, there are always an objective number of places available in a workplace: there is little point having people join a syndicate if there are no machines or materials for them to work on! Would a self-managed economy ensure that there are enough places available for those who seek them?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, neo-classical economics says no and equally unsurprisingly this conclusion is based not on empirical evidence of real co-operatives but rather on an abstract model developed in 1958. The model is based on deducing the implications of assuming that a labour-managed (“*Illyrian*”) firm will seek to maximise net income per worker rather than, in a capitalist firm, maximising net profit. This results in various perverse results compared to a capitalist firm. This makes a co-operative-based economy extremely unstable and inefficient, as well as leading to co-operatives firing workers when prices rise as this maximises income per (remaining) worker. Thus a co-operative system ends in “*producing less output and using less labour than its capitalist counterpart.*” [Benjamin Ward, “*The Firm in Illyria: Market Syndicalism*”, pp. 566–589, *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 48, No. 4, p. 580]

Of course, it would be churlish to note that, unlike the theory, actual capitalism is marked by extensive unemployment (as noted in section C.1.5, this is not surprising as it is required to secure bosses’ power over their wage slaves). It would be equally churlish to note that, to quote one Yugoslav economist, this is “*a theory whose predictions have absolutely nothing to do with the observed facts.*” [Branko Horvat, “*The Theory of the Worker-Managed Firm Revisited*”, pp. 9–25, *Journal of Comparative Economics*, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 9] As David Ellerman summarises:

*“It might be noted parenthetically that there is a whole academic literature on what is called the ‘Illyrian firm’ ... The main peculiarity of this model is that it assumes the firm would expel members when that would increase the net income of the surviving members. The resulting short-run perversities have endeared the model to cap-*

*italist economists. Yet the Illyrian model had been an academic toy in the grand tradition of much of modern economics. The predicted short-run behaviour has not been observed in Yugoslavia or elsewhere, and worker-managed firms such as the Mondragon co-operatives take membership as a short-run fixed factor ... Hence we will continue to treat the Illyrian model with its much-deserved neglect.*” [Op. Cit., p. 150]

The experience of self-managed collectives during the Spanish Revolution also confirms this, with collectives sharing work equitably in order to avoid laying people off during the harsh economic conditions caused by the Civil War (for example, one collective “*adopted a three-day workweek, dividing available work among all those who had worked at the plant – thereby avoiding unemployment – and continued to pay everyone his or her basic salary*” [Martha A. Ackelsberg, **Free Women of Spain**, p. 101]).

We need, therefore, to “*appeal to empirical reality and common sense*” when evaluating the claim of neo-classical economics on the issue of co-operatives. The “*empirical evidence supports*” the argument that this model is flawed. There “*has been no tendency for workers to lay off co-workers when times are good, neither in Mondragon nor in Yugoslavia. Even in bad times, layoffs are rare.*” Unsurprisingly, “*in the short run, a worker-managed firm responds in the same fashion as a capitalist firm*” and workers are added to the collective to meet increases in demand. [David Schweickart, **Against Capitalism**, p. 91, p. 92 and p. 93] A conclusion shared by economist Geoffrey M. Hodgson:

*“Much of the evidence we do have about the behaviour of real-world worker co-operatives is that they respond to changes in market prices in a similar manner to the capitalist firm ... Accordingly, the basic assumptions in the model are questioned by the evidence.”* [**Economics and Utopia**, pp. 223–4]

So, as Branko Horvat observes, in spite of the neo-classical analysis producing specific predictions the “*mere fact that nothing of the kind has ever been observed in real-world economies leaves them undisturbed.*” At most they would say that a “*self-managed firm may not behave as the theory predicts, but this is because it behaves irrationally. If something is wrong, it is not the theory but the reality.*” Interestingly, though, if you assume that capitalist firms “*maximise the rate of profit, profit per unit invested*” rather than total profit then neo-classical theory “*generates equally absurd results.*” That is why the distinction between short and long runs was invented, so that in the short run the amount of capital is fixed. If this is applied to a co-operative, so that “*in the short run, the work force is fixed*” then the alleged problems with labour-managed workplaces disappear. Needless to say, a real co-operative acts on the assumption that the work force is fixed and as “*the workers are no longer hired*” this means that the worker-managers “*do not fire their colleagues when business is slack; they reduce work time or work for inventories. When the demand temporarily increases, they work overtime or contract outside work.*” [Op. Cit., pp. 11–13]

In summary, the neo-classical theory of the labour-managed firm has as much relation to a real co-operative as neo-classical economics generally does to capitalism. Significantly, “Austrian” economists generally accept the neo-classical theory of co-operatives (in part, undoubtedly, as it confirms their dislike of all forms of socialism). Even one as sympathetic to self-management as David L. Prychitko accepts it, simply criticising because it “*reduces the firm to a short-run objective function*” and “*as long as market entry is allowed, the labour-managed market sheds*

*any possible instability problem.*” [Markets, Planning and Democracy, p. 81] While correct, this criticism totally misses the point. Yes, in the long run other co-operatives would be set up and this would increase supply of goods, increase employment and so forth, yet this should not blind us to the limitations of the assumptions which drives the neo-classical theory.

To sum up, syndicates are voluntary associations of workers who manage their workplace and their own work. Within the syndicate, the decisions which affect how the workplace develops and changes are in the hands of those who work there. In addition, it means that each section of the workforce manages its own activity and sections and that all workers placed in administration tasks (i.e. “*management*”) are subject to election and recall by those who are affected by their decisions. The workers’ self-management is discussed in the next section.

Finally, two things. First, as noted in section G.1.3 a few individualist anarchists, although not all, were not opposed to (non-exploitative) wage labour and so did not place co-operatives at the centre of their ideas. This position is very much a minority in the anarchist tradition as it is not consistent with libertarian principles nor likely to end the exploitation of labour (see section G.4.1), so making most anarchists think such individualism is inconsistent anarchism (see section G.4.2). Secondly, it is important to note that individuals who do not wish to join syndicates will be able to work for themselves. There is no “*forced collectivisation*” under **any** form of libertarian socialism, because coercing people is incompatible with the basic principles of anarchism. Those who wish to be self-employed will have free access to the productive assets they need, provided that they neither attempt to monopolise more of those assets than they and their families can use by themselves nor attempt to employ others for wages (see section I.3.7).

### I.3.2 What is workers’ self-management?

Quite simply, workers’ self-management (sometimes called “*workers’ control*”) means that all workers affected by a decision have an equal voice in making it, on the principle of “one worker, one vote.” Thus “*revolution has launched us on the path of industrial democracy.*” [Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, p. 63] That is, workers “*ought to be the real managers of industries.*” [Peter Kropotkin, **Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 157] This is essential to ensure “*a society of equals, who will not be compelled to sell their hands and their brains to those who choose to employ them ... but who will be able to apply their knowledge and capacities to production, in an organism so constructed as to combine all the efforts for procuring the greatest possible well-being for all, while full, free scope will be left for every individual initiative.*” [Kropotkin, **Kropotkin: Selections from his Writings**, pp. 113–4] As Chomsky put it:

*“Compassion, solidarity, friendship are also human needs. They are driving needs, no less than the desire to increase one’s share of commodities or to improve working conditions. Beyond this, I do not doubt that it is a fundamental human need to take an active part in the democratic control of social institutions. If this is so, then the demand for industrial democracy should become a central goal of any revitalised left with a working-class base.”* [Radical Priorities, p. 191]

As noted earlier, however, we need to be careful when using the term “*workers’ control*,” as others use it and give it an entirely different meaning from the one intended by anarchists. Like the

terms “*anarchist*” and “*libertarian*,” it has been co-opted by others to describe less than libertarian schemes.

The first to do so were the Leninists, starting with Lenin, who have used the term “workers’ control” to describe a situation where workers have a limited supervision over either the capitalists or the appointed managers of the so-called workers’ state. These do not equate to what anarchists aim for and, moreover, such limited experiments have not lasted long (see section H.3.14). More recently, “workers’ control” have been used by capitalists to describe schemes in which workers’ have more say in how their workplaces are run while maintaining wage slavery (i.e. capitalist ownership, power and ultimate control). So, in the hands of capitalists, “workers’ control” is now referred to by such terms as “participation”, “co-determination”, “consensus”, “empowerment”, “Japanese-style management,” etc. *“For those whose function it is solve the new problems of boredom and alienation in the workplace in advanced industrial capitalism, workers’ control is seen as a hopeful solution”*; Sam Dolgoff noted, *“a solution in which workers are given a modicum of influence, a strictly limited area of decision-making power, a voice at best secondary in the control of conditions of the workplace. Workers’ control, in a limited form sanctioned by the capitalists, is held to be the answer to the growing non-economic demands of the workers.”* [The Anarchist Collectives, p. 81]

The new managerial fad of “quality circles” — meetings where workers are encouraged to contribute their ideas on how to improve the company’s product and increase the efficiency with which it is made — is an example of “workers’ control” as conceived by capitalists. However, when it comes to questions such as what products to make, where to make them, and (especially) how revenues from sales should be divided, capitalists and managers do not ask for or listen to workers’ “input.” So much for “democratisation,” “empowerment,” and “participation”! In reality, capitalistic “workers control” is merely another insidious attempt to make workers more willing and “co-operative” partners in their own exploitation. Needless to say, such schemes are phoney as they never place **real** power in the hands of workers. In the end, the owners and their managers have the final say (and so hierarchy remains) and, of course, profits are still extracted from the workforce.

Hence anarchists prefer the term **workers’ self-management**, a concept which refers to the exercise of workers’ power through collectivisation and federation. It means *“a transition from private to collective ownership”* which, in turn, *“call[s] for new relationships among the members of the working community.”* [Abel Paz, **The Spanish Civil War**, p. 55] Self-management in this sense *“is not a new form of mediation between the workers and their capitalist bosses, but instead refers to the very process by which the workers themselves overthrow their managers and take on their own management and the management of production in their own workplace. Self-management means the organisation of all workers ... into a workers’ council or factory committee (or agricultural syndicate), which makes all the decisions formerly made by the owners and managers.”* [Dolgoff, **Op. Cit.**, p. 81] Self-management means the end of hierarchy and authoritarian social relationships in workplace and their replacement by free agreement, collective decision-making, direct democracy, social equality and libertarian social relationships.

As anarchists use the term, workers’ self-management means collective worker ownership, control and direction of all aspects of production, distribution and investment. This is achieved through participatory-democratic workers’ assemblies, councils and federations, in both agriculture and industry. These bodies would perform all the functions formerly reserved for capitalist owners, managers, executives and financiers where these activities actually relate to productive activity rather than the needs to maximise minority profits and power (in which case they would

disappear along with hierarchical management). These workplace assemblies will be complemented by people's financial institutions or federations of syndicates which perform all functions formerly reserved for capitalist owners, executives, and financiers in terms of allocating investment funds or resources.

Workers' self-management is based around general meetings of the whole workforce, held regularly in every industrial or agricultural syndicate. These are the source of and final authority over decisions affecting policy within the workplace as well as relations with other syndicates. These meetings elect workplace councils whose job is to implement the decisions of these assemblies and to make the day to day administration decisions that will crop up. These councils are directly accountable to the workforce and its members subject to re-election and instant recall. It is also likely that membership of these councils will be rotated between all members of the syndicate to ensure that no one monopolises an administrative position. In addition, smaller councils and assemblies would be organised for divisions, units and work teams as circumstances dictate.

In this way, workers would manage their own collective affairs together, as free and equal individuals. They would associate together to co-operate without subjecting themselves to an authority over themselves. Their collective decisions would remain under their control and power. This means that self-management creates *"an organisation so constituted that by affording everyone the fullest enjoyment of his [or her] liberty, it does not permit anyone to rise above the others nor dominate them in any way but through the natural influence of the intellectual and moral qualities which he [or she] possesses, without this influence ever being imposed as a right and without leaning upon any political institution whatever."* [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 271] Only by convincing your fellow associates of the soundness of your ideas can those ideas become the agreed plan of the syndicate. No one is in a position to impose their ideas simply because of the post they hold or the work they do.

Most anarchists think that it is likely that purely administrative tasks and decisions would be delegated to elected individuals in this way, freeing workers and assemblies to concentrate on important activities and decisions rather than being bogged down in trivial details. As Bakunin put it:

*"Is not administrative work just as necessary to production as is manual labour — if not more so? Of course, production would be badly crippled, if not altogether suspended, without efficient and intelligent management. But from the standpoint of elementary justice and even efficiency, the management of production need not be exclusively monopolised by one or several individuals. And managers are not at all entitled to more pay. The co-operative workers associations have demonstrated that the workers themselves, choosing administrators from their own ranks, receiving the same pay, can efficiently control and operate industry. The monopoly of administration, far from promoting the efficiency of production, on the contrary only enhances the power and privileges of the owners and their managers."* [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 424]

What is important is that what is considered as important or trivial, policy or administration rests with the people affected by the decisions and subject to their continual approval. Anarchists do not make a fetish of direct democracy and recognise that there are more important things in life than meetings and voting! While workers' assemblies play the key role in self-management, it is not the focal point of all decisions. Rather it is the place where all the important policy decisions

are made, administrative decisions are ratified or rejected and what counts as a major decision determined. Needless to say, what is considered as important issues will be decided upon by the workers themselves in their assemblies.

Unsurprisingly, anarchists argue that, as well as being more free, workers self-management is more efficient and productive than the hierarchical capitalist firm (efficiency here means accomplishing goals without wasting valued assets). Capitalist firms fail to tap humanity's vast reservoir of practical knowledge, indeed they block it as any application of that knowledge is used to enrich the owners rather than those who generate and use it. Thus the hierarchical firm disenfranchises employees and reduces them to the level of order-takers with an obvious loss of information, knowledge and insight (as discussed in section I.1.1). With self-management, that vast source of knowledge and creativity can be expressed. Thus, self-management and worker ownership "*should also reap other rewards through the greater motivation and productivity of the workers.*" [David Ellerman, **The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm**, p. 139]

This explains why some firms try to simulate workers' control (by profit-sharing or "participation" schemes). For, as market socialist David Schweickart notes, "*the empirical evidence is overwhelming*" and supports those who argue for workers' participation. The "*evidence is strong that both worker participation in management and profit sharing tend to enhance productivity and that worker-run enterprises often are more productive than their capitalist counterparts.*" [**Against Capitalism**, p. 100] In fact, 94% of 226 studies into this issue showed a positive impact, with 60% being statistically significant, and so the empirical evidence is "*generally supportive of a positive link between profit sharing and productivity.*" This applies to co-operatives as well. [Martin L. Weitzman and Douglas L. Kruse, "*Profit Sharing and Productivity*", pp. 95–140, **Paying for Productivity**, Alan S. Blinder (ed.), p. 137, p. 139 and pp. 131–2] Another study concludes that the "*available evidence is strongly suggestive that for employee ownership ... to have a strong impact on performance, it needs to be accompanied by provisions for worker participation in decision making.*" In addition, "*narrow differences in wages and status*", as anarchists have long argued, "*increase productivity*". [David I. Levine and Laura D'Andrea Tyson, "*Participation, Productivity, and the Firm's Environment*", pp. 183–237, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210 and p. 211]

This should be unsurprising, for as Geoffrey M. Hodgson notes, the neo-classical model of co-operatives "*wrongly assume[s] that social relations and technology are separable ... Yet we have much evidence ... to support the contention that participation and co-operation can increase technological efficiency. Production involves people — their ideas and aspirations — and not simply machines operating under the laws of physics. It seems that, in their search for pretty diagrams and tractable mathematical models, mainstream economists often forget this.*" [**Economics and Utopia**, p. 223]

Therefore anarchists have strong evidence to support Herbert Read's comment that libertarian socialism would "*provide a standard of living far higher than that realised under any previous form of social organisation.*" [**Anarchy and Order**, p. 49] It confirms Cole's comment that the "*key to real efficiency is self-government; and any system that is not based upon self-government is not only servile, but also inefficient. Just as the labour of the wage-slave is better than the labour of the chattel-slave, so ... will the labour of the free man [and woman] be better than either.*" [**Self-Government in Industry**, p. 157] Yet it is important to remember, as important as this evidence is, real social change comes not from "efficiency" concerns but from ideals and principles. While anarchists are confident that workers' self-management will be more efficient and productive than capitalism, this is a welcome side-effect of the deeper goal of increasing freedom. The evidence confirms

that freedom is the best solution for social problems but if, for example, slavery or wage-labour proved to be more productive than free, associated, labour it does not make them more desirable!

A self-managed workplace, like a self-managed society in general, does not mean that specialised knowledge (where it is meaningful) will be neglected or not taken into account. Quite the opposite. Specialists (i.e. workers who are interested in a given area of work and gain an extensive understanding of it) are part of the assembly of the workplace, just like other workers. They can and have to be listened to, like anyone else, and their expert advice included in the decision making process. Anarchists do not reject the idea of expertise nor the rational authority associated with it. As we indicated in section B.1, anarchists recognise the difference between being *an* authority (i.e. having knowledge of a given subject) and being *in* authority (i.e. having power over someone else). as discussed in section H.4, we reject the latter and respect the former.

Such specialisation does not imply the end of self-management, but rather the opposite. “*The greatest intelligence,*” Bakunin argued, “*would not be equal to a comprehension of the whole. Thence results, for science as well as industry, the necessity of the division and association of labour.*” [God and the State, p. 33] Thus specialised knowledge is part of the associated workers and not placed above them in positions of power. The other workers in a syndicate can compliment the knowledge of the specialists with the knowledge of the work process they have gained by working and so enrich the decision. Knowledge is distributed throughout society and only a society of free individuals associated as equals and managing their own activity can ensure that it is applied effectively (part of the inefficiency of capitalism results from the barriers to knowledge and information flow created by its hierarchical workplace).

A workplace assembly is perfectly able to listen to an engineer, for example, who suggests various ways of reaching various goals (i.e. if you want X, you would have to do A or B. If you do A, then C, D and E is required. If B is decided upon, then F, G, H and I are entailed). But it is the assembly, **not** the engineer, that decides what goals and methods to be implemented. As Cornelius Castoriadis put it: “*We are not saying: people will have to decide **what** to do, and then technicians will tell them **how** to do it. We say: after listening to technicians, people will decide what to do **and** how to do it. For the **how** is not neutral — and the **what** is not disembodied. What and how are neither **identical**, nor **external** to each other. A ‘neutral’ technique is, of course, an illusion. A conveyor belt is linked to a type of product **and** a type of producer — and vice versa.*” [Social and Political Writings, vol. 3, p. 265]

However, we must stress that while an anarchist society would “inherit” a diverse level of expertise and specialisation from class society, it would not take this as unchangeable. Anarchists argue for “**all-round**” (or integral) education as a means of ensuring that everyone has a basic knowledge or understanding of science, engineering and other specialised tasks. As Bakunin argued, “*in the interests of both labour and science ... there should no longer be either workers or scholars but only human beings.*” Education must “*prepare every child of each sex for the life of thought as well as for the life of labour.*” [The Basic Bakunin, p. 116 and p. 119] This does not imply the end of all specialisation (individuals will, of course, express their individuality and know more about certain subjects than others) but it does imply the end of the artificial specialisation developed under capitalism which tries to deskill and disempower the wage worker by concentrating knowledge into hands of management.

And, just to state the obvious, self-management does not imply that the mass of workers decide on the application of specialised tasks. Self-management implies the autonomy of those who do the work as well as collective decision making on collective issues. For example, in a self-managed



hospital the cleaning staff would not have a say in the doctors' treatment of patients just as the doctors would not tell the cleaners how to do their work (of course, it is likely that an anarchist society will **not** have people whose work is simply to clean and nothing else, we just use this as an example people will understand). All members of a syndicate would have a say in what happens in the workplace as it affects them collectively, but individual workers and groups of workers would manage their own activity within that collective.

Needless to say, self-management abolishes the division of labour inherent in capitalism between order takers and order givers. It integrates (to use Kropotkin's words) brain work and manual work by ensuring that those who do the work also manage it and that a workplace is managed by those who use it. Such an integration of labour will, undoubtedly, have a massive impact in terms of productivity, innovation and efficiency. As Kropotkin argued, the capitalist firm has a negative impact on those subject to its hierarchical and alienating structures:

*"The worker whose task has been specialised by the permanent division of labour has lost the intellectual interest in his [or her] labour, and it is especially so in the great industries; he has lost his inventive powers. Formerly, he [or she] invented very much ... But since the great factory has been enthroned, the worker, depressed by the monotony of his [or her] work, invents no more."* [Fields, **Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 171]

Must all the skills, experience and intelligence that very one has be swept away or crushed by hierarchy? Or could it not become a new fertile source of progress under a better organisation of production? Self-management would ensure that the independence, initiative and inventiveness of workers (which disappears under wage slavery) comes to the fore and is applied. Combined with the principles of "all-round" (or integral) education (see section J.5.13) who can deny that working people could transform the current economic system to ensure "well-being for all"? And we must stress that by "well-being" we mean well-being in terms of meaningful, productive activity in humane surroundings and using appropriate technology, in terms of goods of utility and beauty to help create strong, healthy bodies and in terms of surroundings which are inspiring to live in and ecologically integrated.

Little wonder Kropotkin argued that self-management and the "erasing [of] the present distinction between the brain workers and manual worker" would see "social benefits" arising from "the concordance of interest and harmony so much wanted in our times of social struggles" and "the fullness of life which would result for each separate individual, if he [or she] were enabled to enjoy the use of both ... mental and bodily powers." This is in addition to the "increase of wealth which would result from having ... educated and well-trained producers." [Op. Cit., p. 180]

Let us not forget that today workers **do** manage their own working time to a considerable extent. The capitalist may buy a hour of a workers' time but they have to ensure that the worker follows their orders during that time. Workers resist this imposition and this results in considerable shop-floor conflict. Frederick Taylor, for example, introduced his system of "scientific management" in part to try and stop workers managing their own working activity. As David Noble notes, workers "paced themselves for many reason: to keep time for themselves, to avoid exhaustion, to exercise authority over their work, to avoid killing so-called gravy piece-rate jobs by overproducing and risking a pay cut, to stretch out available work for fear of layoffs, to exercise their creativity, and, last but not least, to express their solidarity and their hostility to management." These were

*“[c]oupled with collective co-operation with their fellows on the floor” and “labour-prescribed norms of behaviour” to achieve “shop floor control over production.” [Forces of Production, p. 33] This is why working to rule” is such an efficient weapon in the class struggle (see section H.4.4) In other words, workers naturally tend towards self-management anyway and it is this natural movement towards liberty during work hours which is combated by bosses (who wins, of course, depends on objective and subjective pressures which swing the balance of power towards labour or capital).*

Self-management will built upon this already existing unofficial workers control over production and, of course, our knowledge of the working process which actually doing it creates. The conflict over who controls the shop floor — either those who do the work or those who give the orders — not only shows that self-management is possible but also show how it can come about as it brings to the fore the awkward fact that while the bosses need us, we do not need them!

### I.3.3 What does socialisation mean?

A key aspect of anarchism is the socialisation of the means of life. This means that the land, housing, workplaces and so forth become common property, usable by all who need them. Thus Emma Goldman’s summary:

*“That each and every individual is and ought to be free to own himself and to enjoy the full fruit of his labour; that man is absolved from all allegiance to the kings of authority and capital; that he has, by the very fact of his being, free access to the land and all means of production, and entire liberty of disposing of the fruits of his efforts; that each and every individual has the unquestionable right of free and voluntary association with other equally sovereign individuals for economic, political, social, and other purposes, and that to achieve this end man must emancipate himself from the sacredness of property, the respect for man-made law, the fear of the Church, the cowardice of public opinion, the stupid arrogance of national, racial, religious, and sex superiority, and from the narrow puritanical conception of human life.” [A Documentary History of the American Years, vol. 2, pp. 450–1]*

This is required because private ownership of collectively used “property” (such as workplaces and land) results in a situation where the many have to sell their labour (i.e., liberty) to the few who own it. This creates hierarchical and authoritarian social relationships as well as economic classes. For anarchists, society cannot be divided into “a possessing and a non-possessing” class system as this is “a condition of social injustice” as well as making the state “indispensable to the possessing minority for the protection of its privileges.” [Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, p. 11] In other words, “as long as land and capital are unappropriated, the workers are free, and that, when these have a master, the workers also are slaves.” [Charlotte M. Wilson, *Anarchist Essays*, p. 21]

While there is a tendency by state socialists and the right to equate socialisation with nationalisation, there are key differences which the different names signify. Nationalisation, in practice and usually in theory, means that the means of life become state property. This means that rather than those who need and use a specific part of the co-operative commonwealth deciding what to do with it, the government does. As we discussed in section B.3.5 this would just be state capitalism, with the state replacing the current capitalist and landlords.

As Emma Goldman argued, there is a clear difference between socialisation and nationalisation. *“The first requirement of Communism,”* she argued, *“is the socialisation of the land and of the machinery of production and distribution. Socialised land and machinery belong to the people, to be settled upon and used by individuals and groups according to their needs.”* Nationalisation, on the other hand, means that a resource *“belongs to the state; that is, the government has control of it and may dispose of it according to its wishes and views.”* She stressed that *“when a thing is socialised, every individual has free access to it and may use it without interference from anyone.”* When the state owned property, *“[s]uch a state of affairs may be called state capitalism, but it would be fantastic to consider it in any sense communistic.”* [Red Emma Speaks, pp. 406–7]

Socialisation aims at replacing property rights by use rights. The key to understanding socialisation is to remember that it is about **free access**. In other words, that every one has the same rights to the means of life as everyone else, that no one is exploited or oppressed by those who own the means of life. In the words of Herbert Read:

*“The essential principle of anarchism is that mankind has reached a stage of development at which it is possible to abolish the old relationship of master-man (capitalist-proletarian) and substitute a relationship of egalitarian co-operation. This principle is based, not only on ethical ground, but also on economic grounds.”* [Anarchy and Order, p. 92]

This implies two things. Firstly, that the means of life are common property, without an owning class. Secondly, there is free association between equals within any association and so industrial democracy (or self-management).

This has been an anarchist position as long as anarchism has been called anarchism. Thus we find Proudhon arguing in 1840 that *“the land is indispensable to our existence”* and *“consequently a common thing, consequently insusceptible of appropriation”* and that *“all accumulated capital being social property, no one can be its exclusive proprietor.”* This means *“the farmer does not appropriate the field which he sows”* and *“all capital ... being the result of collective labour”* is *“collective property.”* Without this there is inequality and a restriction of freedom as *“the working-man holds his labour by the condescension and necessities of the master and proprietor.”* The *“civilised labourer who bakes a loaf that he may eat a slice of bread ... is not free. His employer ... is his enemy.”* In fact, *“neither a commercial, nor an industrial, nor an agricultural association can be conceived of in the absence of equality.”* The aim was a society of *“possessors without masters”* rather than wage-labourers and tenants *“controlled by proprietors.”* Within any economic association there would be democracy, with *“leaders, instructors, superintendents”* and so forth being *“chosen from the labourers by the labourers themselves, and must fulfil the conditions of eligibility. It is the same with all public functions, whether of administration or instruction.”* [What is Property?, p. 107, p. 130, p. 153, p. 128, p. 142, p. 227, p. 167 and p. 137]

This meant *“democratically organised workers associations”* and *“[u]nder the law of association, transmission of wealth does not apply to the instruments of labour, so cannot become a cause of inequality.”* [Proudhon, No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1., p. 62] Thus workplaces *“are the common and undivided property of all those who take part therein”* rather than *“companies of stockholders who plunder the bodies and souls of the wage workers.”* This meant free access, with *“every individual employed in the association”* having *“an undivided share in the property of the company”* and has *“a right to fill any position”* as *“all positions are elective, and the by-laws subject to the approval*

of the members.” Each member “shall participate in the gains and in the losses of the company, in proportion to his [or her] services.” [Proudhon, **General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 219 and p. 222] Proudhon’s idea of free credit from a People’s Bank, it should be noted, is another example of free access, of socialisation. Needless to say, anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin based their arguments for socialisation on this vision of self-managed workplaces and free access to the means of life. For Bakunin, for example, “the land, the instruments of work and all other capital may become the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, on other words, by the agricultural and industrial associations.” [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 174]

So the means of production are socialised in the mutualism, collectivism and communism and all rest on the same principle of equal access. So when someone joins an existing workers association they become full members of the co-operative, with the same rights and duties as existing members. In other words, they participate in the decisions on a basis of one person, one vote. How the products of that association are distributed vary in different types of anarchism, but the associations that create them are rooted in the free association of equals. In contrast, a capitalist society places the owner in the dominant position and new members of the workforce are employees and so subordinate members of an organisation which they have no say in (see section B.1).

Socialisation would mean that workplaces would become “little republics of workingmen.” [Proudhon, quoted by Dorothy W. Douglas, “Proudhon: A Prophet of 1848: Part II”, pp. 35–59, **The American Journal of Sociology**, Vol. 35, No. 1, p. 45] As economist David Ellerman explains, the democratic workplace “is a social community, a community of work rather than a community residence. It is a republic, or **res publica** of the workplace. The ultimate governance rights are assigned as personal rights ... to the people who work in the firm ... This analysis shows how a firm can be socialised and yet remain ‘private’ in the sense of not being government-owned.” As noted in section I.3.1, this means the end of the labour market as there would be free access to workplaces and so workers would not be wage-labourers employed by bosses. Instead, there would be a people seeking associations to join and associations seeking new associates to work with. “Instead of abolishing the employment relation,” Ellerman argues, “state socialism nationalised it ... Only the democratic firm — where the workers are jointly self-employed — is a genuine alternatives to private or public employment.” [**The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm**, p. 76 and p. 209]

So libertarian socialism is based on decentralised decision making within the framework of socially-owned but independently-run and worker-self-managed syndicates. The importance of socialisation should not be downplayed. This is because the self-management of work is not sufficient in and of itself to ensure an anarchist society. Under feudalism, the peasants managed their own labour but such a regime was hardly libertarian for, at a minimum, the peasants paid the landlord rent. An industrial equivalent can be imagined, where workers hire workplaces and land from capitalists and landlords. As left-wing economist Geoffrey M. Hodgson suggests:

*“Assume that the workers are self-employed but do not own all the means of production. In this case there still may be powerful owners of factories, offices and machines ... the owners of the means of production would still receive an income, emanating from that ownership. In bargaining with these owners, the workers would be required to concede the claim of these owners to an income, as they would be unable to produce without making use of the means of production owned by others. Hence the workers would still*

*be deprived of... 'surplus value'. Profits would still derive from ownership of the means of production.” [Economics and Utopia, p. 168]*

This would not be (libertarian) socialism (as workers would still be exploited) nor would it be capitalism (as there is no wage labour as such, although there would be a proletariat). Thus genuine anarchism requires socialisation of the means of life, which ensures free access (no usury). In other words, self-management (while an essential part of anarchism) is not sufficient to make a society anarchistic. Without socialism (free access to the means of life) it would be yet another class system and rooted in exploitation. To eliminate all exploitation, social anarchists propose that productive assets such as workplaces and land be owned by society as a whole and run by syndicates and self-employed individuals. Thus Kropotkin: *“Free workers, on free land, with free machinery, and freely using all the powers given to man by science.” [Act for Yourselves, p. 102]*

This vision of socialisation, of free access, also applies to housing. Proudhon, for example, suggested that payments of rent in housing under capitalism would be *“carried over to the account of the purchase of the property”* and once paid for the house *“shall pass under the control of the town administration ... in the name of all the tenants, and shall guarantee them all a domicile, in perpetuity, at the cost of the building.”* Rented farm land would be the same and would, once paid for, *“revert immediately to the town, which shall take the place of the former proprietor.”* Provision *“shall be made for the supervision of the towns, for the installation of cultivators, and for the fixing of the boundaries of possessions.” [General Idea of the Revolution, p. 194 and p. 199]* Kropotkin had a similar end in mind, namely *“the abolition of rent”*, but by different means, namely by *“the expropriation of houses”* during a social revolution. This would be *“the communalising of houses and the right of each family to a decent dwelling.” [The Conquest of Bread, p. 91 and p. 95]*

It is important to note here that while anarchists tend to stress communes (see section I.5) this does **not** imply communal living in the sense of one-big family. As Kropotkin, for example, was at pains to stress such continual communal living is *“repugnant to millions of human beings. The most reserved man [and woman] certainly feels the necessity of meeting his [or her] fellows for the pursue of common work ... But it is not so for the hours of leisure, reserved for rest and intimacy.”* Communal living in the sense of a human bee-hive *“can please some, and even all at a certain period of their life, but the great mass prefers family life (family life of the future, be it understood). They prefer isolated apartments.”* A community living together under one roof *“would be hateful, were it the general rule. Isolation, alternating with time spent in society, is the normal desire of human nature.” [Op. Cit., pp. 123–4]* Thus the aim is *“Communism, but not the monastic or barrack-room Communism formerly advocated [by state socialists], but the free Communism which places the products reaped or manufactured at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his [or her] own home.” [The Place of Anarchism in the Evolution of Socialist Thought, p. 7]* Needless to say, each household, like each workplace, would be under the control of its users and socialisation exists to ensure that remains the case (i.e., that people cannot become tenants/subjects of landlords).

See section I.6 for a discussion of how socialisation and free access could work.

Beyond this basic vision of self-management and socialisation, the schools of anarchism vary. Mutualism eliminates wage labour and unites workers with the means of production they use. Such a system is socialist as it is based on self-management and workers' control/ownership of the means of production. However, other social anarchists argue that such a system is little more than *“petit-bourgeois co-operativism”* in which the worker-owners of the co-operatives

compete in the marketplace with other co-operatives for customers, profits, raw materials, etc. – a situation that could result in many of the same problems that arise under capitalism or even a return to capitalism (see section I.1.3). Some Mutualists recognise this danger. Proudhon, as discussed in section I.3.5, advocated an agro-industrial federation to combat the effects of market forces in generating inequality and wage labour. In addition, supporters of mutualism can point to the fact that existing co-operatives rarely fire their members and are far more egalitarian in nature than corresponding capitalist firms. This they argue will ensure that mutualism will remain socialist, with easy credit available to those who are made unemployed to start their own co-operatives again.

In contrast, within anarcho-collectivism and anarcho-communism society as a whole owns the means of life, which allows for the elimination of both competition for survival and the tendency for workers to develop a proprietary interest in the enterprises in which they work. As Kropotkin argued, “[t]here is no reason why the factory ... should not belong to the community ... It is evident that now, under the capitalist system, the factory is the curse of the village, as it comes to overwork children and to make paupers of its male inhabitants; and it is quite natural that it should be opposed by all means by the workers ... But under a more rational social organisation, the factory would find no such obstacles; it would be a boon to the village.” Needless to say, such a workplace would be based on workers’ self-management, as “the workers ... ought to be the real managers of industries.” [Fields, *Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*, p. 152 and p. 157] This “socially organised industrial production” (to use Kropotkin’s term) would ensure a decent standard of living without the problems associated with a market, even a non-capitalist one.

In other words, the economy is communalised, with land and the means of production being turned into common “property”. The community determines the social and ecological framework for production while the workforce makes the day-to-day decisions about what to produce and how to do it. This is because a system based purely on workplace assemblies effectively disenfranchises those individuals who do not work but live with the effects of production (e.g., ecological disruption). In Murray Bookchin’s words, the aim would be to advance “a holistic approach to an ecologically oriented economy” with key policy decisions “made by citizens in face-to-face assemblies — as **citizens**, not simply as workers, farmers, or professionals ... As citizens, they would function in such assemblies by their highest level — their **human** level — rather than as socially ghettoised beings. They would express their general human interests, not their particular status interests.” These communalised economies would join with others “into a regional confederal system. Land, factories, and workshops would be controlled by the popular assemblies of free communities, not by a nation-state or by worker-producers who might very well develop a proprietary interest in them.” [Remaking Society, p. 194]

An important difference between workplace and community assemblies is that the former can be narrow in focus while the latter can give a hearing to solutions that bring out the common ground of people as people rather than as workers in a specific workplace or industry. This would be in the context of communal participation, through face-to-face voting of the whole community in local neighbourhood and confederal assemblies, which will be linked together through voluntary federations. It does **not** mean that the state owns the means of production, as under Marxism-Leninism or social democracy, because there is no state under libertarian socialism (for more on community assemblies, see section I.5).

This means that when a workplace is communalised workers’ self-management is placed within the broader context of the community, becoming an aspect of community control. This

does not mean that workers' do not control what they do or how they do it. Rather, it means that the framework within which they make their decisions is determined by the community. For example, the local community may decide that production should maximise recycling and minimise pollution, and workers informed of this decision make investment and production decisions accordingly. In addition, consumer groups and co-operatives may be given a voice in the confederal congresses of syndicates or even in the individual workplaces (although it would be up to local communities to decide whether this would be practical or not). In these ways, consumers could have a say in the administration of production and the type and quality of the product, adding their voice and interests in the creation as well as the consumption of a product.

Given the general principle of social ownership and the absence of a state, there is considerable leeway regarding the specific forms that collectivisation might take – for example, in regard to methods of distribution, the use or non-use of money, etc. – as can be seen by the different systems worked out in various areas of Spain during the Revolution of 1936–39. Nevertheless, freedom is undermined when some communities are poor while others are wealthy. Therefore the method of surplus distribution must insure that all communities have an adequate share of pooled revenues and resources held at higher levels of confederation as well as guaranteed minimum levels of public services and provisions to meet basic human needs. That is why anarchists have supported the need for syndicates and communities to federate (see next section)

Finally, one key area of disagreement between anarchist schools is how far socialisation should go. Mutualists think that it should only include the means of production while communist-anarchists argue that socialisation, to be consistent, must embrace what is produced as well as what produced it. Collectivist-anarchists tend to agree with mutualists on this, although many think that, over time, the economy would evolve into communism as the legacies of capitalism and scarcity are overcome. Proudhon spoke for the mutualists:

*“This, then, is the first point settled: property in product, if we grant so much, does not carry with it property in the means of production; that seems to me to need no further demonstration ... all ... are proprietors of their products – not one is proprietor of the means of production. The right to product is exclusive – **jus in re**; the right to means is common – **jus ad rem**.”* [What is Property?, pp. 120–1]

For libertarian communists, socialisation should be extended to the products of labour as well. This means that as well as having free access to the means of production, people would also have free access to the goods and services produced by them. Again, this does not imply people having to share the possessions they use. Rather it means that instead of having to buy the goods in question they are distributed freely, according to need. To maintain socialisation of the means of product but not in goods means basing society “*on two absolutely opposed principles, two principles that contradict one another continually.*” [Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 163] The need is to go beyond the abolition of wage labour into the abolition of money (the wages system). This is because any attempt at measuring a person's contribution to society will be flawed and, more importantly, people “*differ from one another by the amount of their **needs**. There is the young unmarried woman and the mother of a family of five or six children. For the employer of our days there is no consideration of the needs of*” each and “*the labour cheque ... acts in the same way.*” [Kropotkin, **Act For Yourselves**, pp. 108–9]

Regardless of precisely which mode of distribution specific individuals, workplaces, communes or areas picks, socialisation would be underlying all. Free access to the means of production will

ensure free individuals, including the freedom to experiment with different anarchistic economic systems.

### I.3.4 What relations would exist between individual syndicates?

Just as individuals associate together to work on and overcome common problems, so would syndicates. Few, if any, workplaces are totally independent of others. They require raw materials as inputs and consumers for their products. Therefore there will be links between different syndicates. These links are twofold: firstly, free agreements between individual syndicates; secondly, confederations of syndicates (within branches of industry and regionally).

Combined with this desire for free co-operation is a desire to end centralised systems. The opposition to centralisation is often framed in a distinctly false manner. This can be seen when Alex Nove, a leading market socialist, argued that “*there are horizontal links (market), there are vertical links (hierarchy). What other dimension is there?*” [**The Economics of Feasible Socialism**, p. 226] In other words, to oppose central planning means to embrace the market. This is not true: horizontal links need not be market based any more than vertical links need be hierarchical. An anarchist society must be based essentially on horizontal links between individuals and associations, freely co-operating together as they (not a central body) sees fit. This co-operation will be source of many links in an anarchist economy. When a group of individuals or associations meet together and discuss common interests and make common decisions they will be bound by their own decisions. This is radically different from a central body giving out orders because those affected will determine the content of these decisions. In other words, instead of decisions being handed down from the top, they will be created from the bottom up.

Let us consider free agreement. Anarchists recognise the importance of letting people organise their own lives. This means that they reject central planning and instead urge direct links between workers’ associations. In the words of Kropotkin, “[f]ree workers would require a free organisation, and this cannot have any other basis than free agreement and free co-operation, without sacrificing the autonomy of the individual.” Those directly involved in production (and in consumption) know their needs far better than any bureaucrat. Thus voluntary agreement is the basis of a free economy, such agreements being “*entered by free consent, as a free choice between different courses equally open to each of the agreeing parties.*” [**Anarchism**, p. 52 and p. 69] Without the concentration of wealth and power associated with capitalism, free agreement will become real and no longer a mask for hierarchy.

The anarchist economy “*starts from below, not from above. Like an organism, this free society grows into being from the simple unit up to the complex structure. The need for ... the individual struggle for life*” is “*sufficient to set the whole complex social machinery in motion. Society is the result of the individual struggle for existence; it is not, as many suppose, opposed to it.*” So anarchists think that “[i]n the same way that each free individual has associated with his brothers [and sisters!] to produce ... all that was necessary for life, driven by no other force than his [or her] desire for the full enjoyment of life, so each institution is free and self-contained, and co-operates and enters into agreements with others because by so doing it extends its own possibilities.” This suggests a decentralised economy — even more decentralised than capitalism (which is decentralised only in capitalist mythology, as shown by big business and transnational corporations, for example)



— one “growing ever more closely bound together and interwoven by free and mutual agreements.” [George Barrett, **The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 18]

An anarchist economy would be based on spontaneous order as workers practised mutual aid and free association. For communist anarchists, this would take the form of “free exchange without the medium of money and without profit, on the basis of requirement and the supply at hand.” [Alexander Berkman, **What is Anarchism?**, p. 217] “Anarchists”, summarised Rocker, “desire a federation of free communities which shall be bound to one another by their common economic and social interest and shall arrange their affairs by mutual agreement and free contract.” [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 1] An example of one such agreement would be orders for products and services:

*“This factory of ours is, then, to the fullest extent consistent with the character of its service, a self-governing unit, managing its own productive operations, and free to experiment to the heart’s content in new methods, to develop new styles and products... This autonomy of the factory is the safeguard... against the dead level of mediocrity, the more than adequate substitute for the variety which the competitive motive was once supposed to stimulate, the guarantee of liveliness, and of individual work and workmanship.”* [G.D.H. Cole, **Guild Socialism Restated**, p. 59]

This means that free agreement will ensure that customers would be able to choose their own suppliers, meaning that production units would know whether they were producing what their customers wanted, when they wanted it (i.e., whether they were meeting individual and social needs). If they were not, customers would go elsewhere, to other production units within the same branch of production. We should stress that in addition to this negative check (i.e. “exit” by consumers) it is likely, via consumer groups and co-operatives as well as communes, that workplaces will be subject to positive checks on what they produced. Consumer groups, by formulating and communicating needs to producer groups, will have a key role in ensuring the quality of production and goods and that it satisfies their needs (see section I.4.7 for more details of this).

These direct horizontal links between syndicates are essential to ensure that goods are produced which meet the needs of those who requested them. Without specific syndicates requesting specific goods at specific times to meet specific requirements, an economy will not meet people’s needs. A central plan, for example, which states that 1 million tonnes of steel or 25 million shirts need to be produced in a year says nothing about what specifically needs to be produced and when, which depends on how it will be used and the needs of those using it. As Malatesta argued, “it would be an absurd waste of energy to produce blindly for all possible needs, rather than calculating the actual needs and organising to satisfy them with as little effort as possible ... the solution lies in accord between people and in the agreements ... that will come about” between them. [**At the Café**, pp. 62–3] Hence the pressing need for the classic anarchist ideas on free association, free agreement and mutual aid! These direct links between producer and consumer can communicate the information required to produce the right thing at the right time! As Kropotkin argued (based on his firsthand experience of state capitalism in Russia under Lenin):

*“production and exchange represent an undertaking so complicated that the plans of the state socialists ... would prove to be absolutely ineffective as soon as they were applied to life. No government would be able to organise production if the workers themselves*

*through their unions did not do it in each branch of industry; for in all production there arise daily thousands of difficulties which no government can solve or foresee. It is certainly impossible to foresee everything. Only the efforts of thousands of intelligences working on the problems can co-operate in the development of a new social system and find the best solutions for the thousands of local needs.”* [Anarchism, pp. 76–77]

This brings us to the second form of relationships between syndicates, namely confederations of syndicates in the same industry or geographical area. It should be noted that inter-workplace federations are not limited to collectivist, syndicalist and communist anarchists. The idea of federations of syndicates goes back to Proudhon’s agro-industrial federation, first raised during the 1848 revolution and named as such in his 1863 book, **The Principle of Federation**. The French mutualist suggested an “agro-industrial federation” as the structural support organisation for his system of self-managed co-operatives. These confederations of syndicates, are necessary to aid communication between workplaces. No syndicate exists in isolation, and so there is a real need for a means by which syndicates can meet together to discuss common interests and act on them. Thus confederations are complementary to free agreement and also reflect anarchist ideas of free association and decentralised organisation as well as concern for practical needs:

*“Anarchists are strenuously opposed to the authoritarian, centralist spirit ... So they picture a future social life in the basis of federalism, from the individual to the municipality, to the commune, to the region, to the nation, to the international, on the basis of solidarity and free agreement. And it is natural that this ideal should be reflected also in the organisation of production, giving preference as far as possible, to a decentralised sort of organisation; but this does not take the form of an absolute rule to be applied in every instance. A libertarian order would be in itself ... rule out the possibility of imposing such a unilateral solution.”* [Luigi Fabbri, “Anarchy and ‘Scientific Communism’”, pp. 13–49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 23]

A confederation of syndicates (called a “guild” by some libertarian socialists, or “industrial union” by others) works on two levels: within an industry and across industries. The basic operating principle of these confederations is the same as that of the syndicate itself – voluntary co-operation between equals in order to meet common needs. In other words, each syndicate in the confederation is linked by horizontal agreements with the others, and none owe any obligations to a separate entity above the group (see section A.2.11 for more on the nature of anarchist confederation). As Herbert Read summarised:

*“The general principle is clear: each industry forms itself into a federation of self-governing collectives; the control of each industry is wholly in the hands of the workers in that industry, and these collectives administer the whole economic life of the country.”* [Anarchy and Order, p. 49]

Kropotkin’s comments on federalism between communes indicate this (a syndicate can be considered as a producers’ commune). “The Commune of tomorrow,” he argued “will know that it cannot admit any higher authority; above it there can only be the interests of the Federation, freely accepted by itself as well as other communes.” So federalism need not conflict with autonomy, as

each member would have extensive freedom of action within its boundaries and so each “*Commune will be absolutely free to adopt all the institutions it wishes and to make all the reforms and revolutions it finds necessary.*” [Words of a Rebel, p. 83] Moreover, these federations would be diverse and functional. Economic federation would produce a complex inter-networking between associations and federations:

*“Our needs are in fact so various, and they emerge with such rapidity, that soon a single federation will not be sufficient to satisfy them all. The Commune will then feel the need to contract other alliances, to enter into other federations. Belonging to one group for the acquisition of food supplies, it will have to join a second group to obtain other goods, such as metals, and then a third and a fourth group for textiles and works of art.”* [Op. Cit., p. 87]

Therefore, a confederation of syndicates would be adaptive to its members needs. As Tom Brown argued, the “*syndicalist mode of organisation is extremely elastic, therein is its chief strength, and the regional confederations can be formed, modified, added to or reformed according to local conditions and changing circumstances.*” [Syndicalism, p. 58]

As would be imagined, these confederations are voluntary associations and “[j]ust as factory autonomy is vital in order to keep the Guild system alive and vigorous, the existence of varying democratic types of factories in independence of the National Guilds may also be a means of valuable experiment and fruitful initiative of individual minds. In insistently refusing to carry their theory to its last ‘logical’ conclusion, the Guildsmen [and anarchists] are true to their love of freedom and varied social enterprise.” [G.D.H. Cole, Op. Cit., p. 65] This, it must be stressed does not mean centralised control from the top:

*“But when we say that ownership of the tools of production, including the factory itself, should revert to the corporation [i.e. confederation] we do not mean that the workers in the individual workshops will be ruled by any kind of industrial government having power to do what it pleases with the tools of production. No, the workers in the various factories have not the slightest intention of handing over their hard-won control ... to a superior power ... What they will do is ... to guarantee reciprocal use of their tools of production and accord their fellow workers in other factories the right to share their facilities, receiving in exchange the same right to share the facilities of the fellow workers with whom they have contracted the pact of solidarity.”* [James Guillaume, “On Building the New Social Order”, pp. 356–79, Bakunin on Anarchism, pp. 363–364]

So collectivist and communist anarchism, like mutualism, is rooted in self-management in the workplace. This implies the ability of workers to pick the kinds of productive tasks they want to do. It would not be the case of workplaces simply being allocated tasks by some central body and expected to fulfil them (a task which, ignoring the real issues of bureaucracy and freedom, would be difficult to implement in any large and complex economy). Rather, workplaces would have the power to select tasks submitted to them by other associations (economic and communal) and control how the work required to achieve them was done. In this type of economic system, workers’ assemblies and councils would be the focal point, formulating policies for their individual workplaces and deliberating on industry-wide or economy-wide issues through general meetings of the whole workforce in which everyone would participate in decision making. Voting in

the councils would be direct, whereas in larger confederal bodies, voting would be carried out by temporary, unpaid, mandated, and instantly recallable delegates, who would resume their status as ordinary workers as soon as their mandate had been carried out.

**Mandated** here means that the delegates from workers' assemblies and councils to meetings of higher confederal bodies would be instructed, at every level of confederation, by the workers who elected them on how to deal with any issue. They would be delegates, not representatives, and so would attend any confederal meeting with specific instructions on how to vote on a particular issue. **Recallable** means that if they do not vote according to that mandate they will be replaced and the results of the vote nullified. The delegates, in other words, would be given imperative mandates (binding instructions) that committed them to a framework of policies within which they would have to act, and they could be recalled and their decisions revoked at any time for failing to carry out the mandates they were given (this support for mandated delegates has existed in anarchist theory since at least 1848, when Proudhon argued that it was "*a consequence of universal suffrage*" to ensure that "*the people ... do not ... abjure their sovereignty.*" [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 63]). Because of this right of mandating and recalling their delegates, the workers' assemblies at the base would be the source of, and final "authority" (so to speak) over, policy for all higher levels of confederal co-ordination of the economy. Delegates will be ordinary workers rather than paid full-time representatives or union leaders, and they will return to their usual jobs as soon as the mandate for which they have been elected has been carried out. In this way, decision-making power remains with the workers' councils and does not become concentrated at the top of a bureaucratic hierarchy in an elite class of professional administrators or union leaders. What these confederations could do is discussed in the next section.

In summary, a free society "*is freely organised, from the bottom to top, starting from individuals that unite in associations which slowly grow bit by bit into ever more complex federations of associations*". [Malatesta, **At the Cafe**, p. 65]

### I.3.5 What would confederations of syndicates do?

Voluntary confederation among syndicates is considered necessary by social anarchists for numerous reasons but mostly in order to decide on the policies governing relations between syndicates and to co-ordinate their activities. This could vary from agreeing technical standards, to producing guidelines and policies on specific issues, to agreeing major investment decisions or prioritising certain large-scale economic projects or areas of research. In addition, they would be the means by which disputes could be solved and any tendencies back towards capitalism or some other class society identified and acted upon.

This can be seen from Proudhon, who was the first to suggest the need for such federations. "*All my economic ideas developed over the last twenty-five years,*" he stated, "*can be defined in three words: **Agro-industrial federation***" This was required because "*[h]owever impeccable in its basic logic the federal principle may be ... it will not survive if economic factors tend persistently to dissolve it. In other words, political right requires to be buttressed by economic right*". A free society could not survive if "*capital and commerce*" existed, as it would be "*divided into two classes — one of landlords, capitalists, and entrepreneurs, the other of wage-earning proletarians, one rich, the other poor.*" Thus "*in an economic context, confederation may be intended to provide reciprocal security in commerce and industry ... The purpose of such specific federal arrangements is to protect the*

*citizens ... from capitalist and financial exploitation, both from within and from the outside; in their aggregate they form ... an agro-industrial federation*” [The Principle of Federation, p. 74, p. 67 and p. 70]

While capitalism results in “*interest on capital*” and “*wage-labour or economic servitude, in short inequality of condition*”, the “*agro-industrial federation ... will tend to foster increasing equality ... through mutualism in credit and insurance ... guaranteeing the right to work and to education, and an organisation of work which allows each labourer to become a skilled worker and an artist, each wage-earner to become his own master.*” The “*industrial federation*” will apply “*on the largest scale*” the “*principles of mutualism*” and “*economic solidarity*”. As “*industries are sisters*”, they “*are parts of the same body*” and “*one cannot suffer without the others sharing in its suffering. They should therefore federate ... in order to guarantee the conditions of common prosperity, upon which no one has an exclusive claim.*” Thus mutualism sees “*all industries guaranteeing one another mutually*” as well as “*organising all public services in an economical fashion and in hands other than the state’s.*” [Op. Cit., p. 70, p. 71, p. 72 and p. 70]

Later anarchists took up, built upon and clarified these ideas of economic federation. There are two basic kinds of confederation: an industrial one (i.e., a federation of all workplaces of a certain type) and a regional one (i.e. a federation of all syndicates within a given economic area). Thus there would be a federation for each industry and a federation of all syndicates in a geographical area. Both would operate at different levels, meaning there would be confederations for both industrial and inter-industrial associations at the local and regional levels and beyond. The basic aim of this inter-industry and cross-industry networking is to ensure that the relevant information is spread across the various parts of the economy so that each can effectively co-ordinate its plans with the others in a way which minimises ecological and social harm. Thus there would be a railway workers confederation to manage the rail network but the local, regional and national depots and stations would send a delegate to meet regularly with the other syndicates in the same geographical area to discuss general economic issues.

However, it is essential to remember that each syndicate within the confederation is autonomous. The confederations seek to co-ordinate activities of joint interest (in particular investment decisions for new plant and the rationalisation of existing plant in light of reduced demand). They do not determine what work a syndicate does or how they do it:

*“With the factory thus largely conducting its own concerns, the duties of the larger Guild organisations [i.e. confederations] would be mainly those of co-ordination, or regulation, and of representing the Guild in its external relations. They would, where it was necessary, co-ordinate the production of various factories, so as to make supply coincide with demand... they would organise research ... This large Guild organisation... must be based directly on the various factories included in the Guild.”* [Cole, **Guild Socialism Restated**, pp. 59–60]

So it is important to note that the lowest units of confederation — the workers’ assemblies — will control the higher levels, through their power to elect mandated and recallable delegates to meetings of higher confederal units. It would be fair to make the assumption that the “higher” up the federation a decision is made, the more general it will be. Due to the complexity of life it would be difficult for federations which cover wide areas to plan large-scale projects in any detail and so would be, in practice, more forums for agreeing guidelines and priorities than planning

actual specific projects or economies. As Russian anarcho-syndicalist G.P. Maximov put it, the aim “was to co-ordinate all activity, all local interest, to create a centre but not a centre of decrees and ordinances but a centre of regulation, of guidance — and only through such a centre to organise the industrial life of the country.” [quoted by M. Brinton, **For Workers’ Power**, p. 330]

So this is a decentralised system, as the workers’ assemblies and councils at the base having the final say on **all** policy decisions, being able to revoke policies made by those with delegated decision-making power and to recall those who made them:

*“When it comes to the material and technical method of production, anarchists have no preconceived solutions or absolute prescriptions, and bow to what experience and conditions in a free society recommend and prescribe. What matters is that, whatever the type of production adopted, it should be the free choice of the producers themselves, and cannot possibly be imposed, any more than any form is possible of exploitations of another’s labour... Anarchists do not **a priori** exclude any practical solution and likewise concede that there may be a number of different solutions at different times.”* [Luigi Fabbri, “Anarchy and ‘Scientific’ Communism”, pp. 13–49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 22]

Confederations would exist for specific reasons. Mutualists, as can be seen from Proudhon, are aware of the dangers associated with even a self-managed, socialistic market and create support structures to defend workers’ self-management. Moreover, it is likely that industrial syndicates would be linked to mutual banks (a credit syndicate). Such syndicates would exist to provide interest-free credit for self-management, new syndicate expansion and so on. And if the experience of capitalism is anything to go by, mutual banks will also reduce the business cycle as “[c]ountries like Japan and Germany that are usually classified as bank-centred — because banks provide more outside finance than markets, and because more firms have long-term relationships with their banks — show greater growth in and stability of investment over time than the market-centred ones, like the US and Britain ... Further, studies comparing German and Japanese firms with tight bank ties to those without them also show that firms with bank ties exhibit greater stability in investment over the business cycle.” [Doug Henwood, **Wall Street**, pp. 174–5]

One argument against co-operatives is that they do not allow the diversification of risk (all the worker’s eggs are on one basket). Ignoring the obvious point that most workers today do not have shares and are dependent on their job to survive, this objection can be addressed by means of “**the horizontal association or grouping of enterprises to pool their business risk. The Mondragon co-operatives are associated together in a number of regional groups that pool their profits in varying degrees. Instead of a worker diversifying his or her capital in six companies, six companies partially pool their profits in a group or federation and accomplish the same risk-reduction purpose without transferable equity capital.**” Thus “risk-pooling in federations of co-operatives” ensure that “transferable equity capital is not necessary to obtain risk diversification in the flow of annual worker income.” [David Ellerman, **The Democratic Worker-Owned Firm**, p. 104] Moreover, as the example of many isolated co-operatives under capitalism have shown, support networks are essential for co-operatives to survive. It is no co-incidence that the Mondragon co-operative complex in the Basque region of Spain has a credit union and mutual support networks between its co-operatives and is by far the most successful co-operative system in the world. The “agro-industrial federation” exists precisely for these reasons.

Under collectivist and communist anarchism, the federations would have additional tasks. There are two key roles. Firstly, the sharing and co-ordination of information produced by the syndicates and, secondly, determining the response to the changes in production and consumption indicated by this information.

Confederations (negotiated-co-ordination bodies) would be responsible for clearly defined branches of production, and in general, production units would operate in only one branch of production. These confederations would have direct links to other confederations and the relevant communal confederations, which supply the syndicates with guidelines for decision making (see section I.4.4) and ensure that common problems can be highlighted and discussed. These confederations exist to ensure that information is spread between workplaces and to ensure that the industry responds to changes in social demand. In other words, these confederations exist to co-ordinate major new investment decisions (i.e. if demand exceeds supply) and to determine how to respond if there is excess capacity (i.e. if supply exceeds demand).

It should be pointed out that these confederated investment decisions will exist along with the investments associated with the creation of new syndicates, plus internal syndicate investment decisions. We are not suggesting that **every** investment decision is to be made by the confederations. (This would be particularly impossible for **new** industries, for which a confederation would not exist!) Therefore, in addition to co-ordinated production units, an anarchist society would see numerous small-scale, local activities which would ensure creativity, diversity, and flexibility. Only after these activities had spread across society would confederal co-ordination become necessary. So while production will be based on autonomous networking, the investment response to consumer actions would, to some degree, be co-ordinated by a confederation of syndicates in that branch of production. By such means, the confederation can ensure that resources are not wasted by individual syndicates over-producing goods or over-investing in response to changes in production. By communicating across workplaces, people can overcome the barriers to co-ordinating their plans which one finds in market systems (see section C.7.2) and so avoid the economic and social disruptions associated with them.

Thus, major investment decisions would be made at congresses and plenums of the industry's syndicates, by a process of horizontal, negotiated co-ordination. Major investment decisions are co-ordinated at an appropriate level, with each unit in the confederation being autonomous, deciding what to do with its own productive capacity in order to meet social demand. Thus we have self-governing production units co-ordinated by confederations (horizontal negotiation), which ensures local initiative (a vital source of flexibility, creativity, and diversity) and a rational response to changes in social demand. As links between syndicates are non-hierarchical, each syndicate remains self-governing. This ensures decentralisation of power and direct control, initiative, and experimentation by those involved in doing the work.

It should be noted that during the Spanish Revolution successfully federated in different ways. Gaston Leval noted that these forms of confederation did not harm the libertarian nature of self-management:

*“Everything was controlled by the syndicates. But it must not therefore be assumed that everything was decided by a few higher bureaucratic committees without consulting the rank and file members of the union. Here libertarian democracy was practised. As in the C.N.T. there was a reciprocal double structure; from the grass roots at the base ... upwards, and in the other direction a reciprocal influence from the federation of these*

*same local units at all levels downwards, from the source back to the source.*” [The Anarchist Collectives, p. 105]

The exact nature of any confederal responsibilities will vary, although we “*prefer decentralised management; but ultimately, in practical and technical problems, we defer to free experience.*” [Luigi Fabbri, *Op. Cit.*, p. 24] The specific form of organisation will obviously vary as required from industry to industry, area to area, but the underlying ideas of self-management and free association will be the same. Moreover, the “*essential thing ... is that its [the confederation or guild] function should be kept down to the minimum possible for each industry.*” [Cole, *Op. Cit.*, p. 61]

Another important role for inter-syndicate federations is to even-out inequalities. After all, each area will not be identical in terms of natural resources, quality of land, situation, accessibility, and so on. Simply put, social anarchists “*believe that because of natural differences in fertility, health and location of the soil it would be impossible to ensure that every individual enjoyed equal working conditions.*” Under such circumstances, it would be “*impossible to achieve a state of equality from the beginning*” and so “*justice and equity are, for natural reasons, impossible to achieve ... and that freedom would thus also be unachievable.*” [Malatesta, *The Anarchist Revolution*, p. 16 and p. 21]

This was recognised by Proudhon, who saw the need for economic federation due to differences in raw materials, quality of land and so on, and as such argued that a portion of income from agricultural produce be paid into a central fund which would be used to make equalisation payments to compensate farmers with less favourably situated or less fertile land. As he put it, economic rent “*in agriculture has no other cause than the inequality in the quality of land ... if anyone has a claim on account of this inequality ... [it is] the other land workers who hold inferior land. That is why in our scheme for liquidation [of capitalism] we stipulated that every variety of cultivation should pay a proportional contribution, destined to accomplish a balancing of returns among farm workers and an assurance of products.*” In addition, “*all the towns of the Republic shall come to an understanding for equalising among them the quality of tracts of land, as well as accidents of culture.*” [General Idea of the Revolution, p. 209 and p. 200]

By federating together, workers can ensure that “*the earth will ... be an economic domain available to everyone, the riches of which will be enjoyed by all human beings.*” [Malatesta, *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, p. 93] Local deficiencies of raw materials, in the quality of land, and, therefore, supplies would be compensated from outside, by the socialisation of production and consumption. This would allow all of humanity to share and benefit from economic activity, so ensuring that well-being for all is possible.

Federation would eliminate the possibility of rich and poor collectives and syndicates co-existing side by side. As Kropotkin argued, “[c]ommon possession of the necessities for production implies the common enjoyment of the fruits of common production ... when everybody, contributing for the common well-being to the full extent of his [or her] capacities, shall enjoy also from the common stock of society to the fullest possible extent of his [or her] needs.” [Anarchism, p. 59] Hence we find the CNT arguing in its 1936 resolution on libertarian communism that “[a]s far as the interchange of produce between communes is concerned, the communal councils are to liaise with the regional federations of communes and with the confederal council of production and distribution, applying for whatever they may need and [giving] any available surplus stocks.” [quoted by Jose Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 107] This clearly followed Kropotkin’s



comments that the “socialising of production, consumption, and exchange” would be based on workplaces “belong[ing] to federated Communes.” [The Conquest of Bread, p. 136]

The legacy of capitalism, with its rich and poor areas, its rich and poor workplaces, will be a problem any revolution will face. The inequalities produced by centuries of class society will take time to change. This is one of the tasks of the confederation, to ensure the socialisation of both production and consumption so that people are not penalised for the accidents of history and that each commune can develop itself to an adequate level. In the words of the CNT during the Spanish Revolution:

*“Many arguments are used against the idea of socialisation; one of these — the most delightful — says that by socialising an industry we simply take it over and run it with the consequence that we have flourishing industries where the workers are privileged, and unfortunate industries where the workers get less benefits but have to work harder than workers elsewhere ... There are differences between the workers in prosperous industries and those which barely survive... Such anomalies, which we don’t deny exist, are attributed to the attempts at socialisation. We firmly assert that the opposite is true; such anomalies are the logical result of the absence of socialisation.*

*“The socialisation which we propose will resolve these problems which are used to attack it. Were Catalan industry socialised, everything would be organically linked — industry, agriculture, and the trade union organisations, in accordance with the council for the economy. They would become normalised, the working day would become more equal or what comes to the same thing, the differences between workers of different activities would end ...*

*“Socialisation is — and let its detractors hear it — the genuine authentic organisation of the economy. Undoubtedly the economy has to be organised; but not according to the old methods, which are precisely those which we are destroying, but in accordance with new norms which will make our people become an example to the world proletariat.”* [Solidaridad Obrera, 30 April 1937, p. 12]

Workers’ self-management does not automatically mean that all forms of economic domination and exploitation would be eliminated. After all, in a market economy firms can accrue super-profits simply because of their size or control over a specific technology or resource. Hence Proudhon’s suggestion that “advocates of mutualism” would “regulate the market” to ensure “an honest breakdown of cost prices”, fix “after amicable discussion of a **maximum** and **minimum** profit margin” and “the organising of regulating societies.” [Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, p. 70] It seems likely that the agro-industrial federation would be the body which ensures that. Similarly, the federation would be the means by which to air, and deal with, suggestions that syndicates are monopolising their resources, i.e., treating them as private property rather than socialised possessions. Thus the federation would unite workers “to guarantee the mutual use of the tools of production” which are, “by a reciprocal contract”, the “collective property of the whole.” [James Guillaume, “On Building the New Social Order”, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 376]

The inter-industry confederations help ensure that when the members of a syndicate change work to another syndicate in another (or the same) branch of industry, they have the same rights

as the members of their new syndicate. In other words, by being part of the confederation, a worker ensures that s/he has the same rights and an equal say in whatever workplace is joined. This is essential to ensure that a co-operative society remains co-operative, as the system is based on the principle of “one person, one vote” by all those involved the work process. If specific syndicates are restricting access and so producing wage-labour, monopolising resources and so charging monopoly prices, the federation would be forum to publicly shame such syndicates and organise boycotts of them. Such anti-social activity is unlikely to be tolerated by a free people seeking to protect that freedom.

However, it could again be argued that these confederations are still centralised and that workers would still be following orders coming from above. This is incorrect, for any decisions concerning an industry or plant are under the direct control of those involved. For example, the steel industry confederation may decide to rationalise itself at one of its congresses. Murray Bookchin sketches the response to this situation as follows:

*“[L]et us suppose that a board of highly qualified technicians is established [by this congress] to propose changes in the steel industry. This board ... advances proposals to rationalise the industry by closing down some plants and expanding the operation of others ... Is this a ‘centralised’ body or not? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, only in the sense that the board is dealing with problems that concern the country as a whole; no, because it can make no decision that **must** be executed for the country as a whole. The board’s plan must be examined by all the workers in the plants [that are affected] ... The board itself has no power to enforce ‘decisions’; it merely makes recommendations. Additionally, its personnel are controlled by the plant in which they work and the locality in which they live ... they would have no decision-making powers. The adoption, modification or rejection of their plans would rest entirely with ... [those] involved.”*  
[Post Scarcity Anarchism, p. 180]

Therefore, confederations would not be in positions of power over the individual syndicates. No attempt is made to determine which plants produce which steel for which customers in which manner. Thus, the confederations of syndicates ensure a decentralised, spontaneous economic order without the negative side-effects of capitalism (namely power concentrations within firms and in the market, periodic crises, etc.).

As one can imagine, an essential feature of these confederations will be the collection and processing of information in order to determine how an industry is developing. This does not imply bureaucracy or centralised control at the top. Taking the issue of centralisation first, the confederation is run by delegate assemblies, meaning that any officers elected at a congress only implement the decisions made by the delegates of the relevant syndicates. It is in the congresses and plenums of the confederation that new investment decisions, for example, are made. The key point to remember is that the confederation exists purely to co-ordinate joint activity and share information, it does not take an interest in how a workplace is run or what orders from consumers it fills. (Of course, if a given workplace introduces policies which other syndicates disapprove of, it can be expelled). As the delegates to these congresses and plenums are mandated and their decisions subject to rejection and modification by each productive unit, the confederation is not centralised.

As far as bureaucracy goes, the collecting and processing of information does necessitate an administrative staff to do the work. However, this problem affects capitalist firms as well; and

since syndicates are based on bottom-up decision making, its clear that, unlike a centralised capitalist corporation, administration would be smaller. In fact, it is likely that a fixed administration staff for the confederation would not exist in the first place! At the regular congresses, a particular syndicate may be selected to do the confederation's information processing, with this job being rotated regularly around different syndicates. In this way, a specific administrative body and equipment can be avoided and the task of collating information placed directly in the hands of ordinary workers. Further, it prevents the development of a bureaucratic elite by ensuring that **all** participants are versed in information-processing procedures.

Lastly, what information would be collected? That depends on the context. Individual syndicates would record inputs and outputs, producing summary sheets of information. For example, total energy input, in kilowatts and by type, raw material inputs, labour hours spent, orders received, orders accepted, output, and so forth. This information can be processed into energy use and labour time per product (for example), in order to give an idea of how efficient production is and how it is changing over time. For confederations, the output of individual syndicates can be aggregated and local and other averages can be calculated. In addition, changes in demand can be identified by this aggregation process and used to identify when investment will be needed or plants closed down. In this way the chronic slumps and booms of capitalism can be avoided without creating a system which is even more centralised than capitalism.

### I.3.6 What about competition between syndicates?

This is a common question, particularly from defenders of capitalism. They argue that syndicates will not co-operate together unless forced to do so, and will compete against each other for raw materials, skilled workers, and so on. The result of this process, it is claimed, will be rich and poor syndicates, inequality within society and within the workplace, and (possibly) a class of unemployed workers from unsuccessful syndicates who are hired by successful ones. In other words, they argue that libertarian socialism will need to become authoritarian to prevent competition, and that if it does not do so it will become capitalist very quickly.

For individualist anarchists and mutualists, competition is not viewed as a problem. They think that competition, based around co-operatives and mutual banks, would minimise economic inequality, as the new economic structure based around free credit and co-operation would eliminate non-labour (i.e. unearned) income such as profit, interest and rent and give workers enough bargaining power to eliminate exploitation. For these anarchists it is a case of capitalism perverting competition and so are not against competition itself. Other anarchists think that whatever gains might accrue from competition (assuming there are, in fact, any) would be more than offset by its negative effects, which are outlined in section I.1.3. It is to these anarchists that the question is usually asked.

Before continuing, we would like to point out that individuals trying to improve their lot in life is not against anarchist principles. How could it be? *"Selfish is not a crime,"* John Most and Emma Goldman noted, *"it only becomes a crime when conditions are such as to give an individual the opportunity to satisfy his selfishness to the detriment of others. In an anarchistic society everyone will seek to satisfy his ego"* but in order to do so he *"will extend his aid to those who will aid him, and then selfishness will no more be a curse but a blessing."* [*"Talking about Anarchy"*, **Black Flag**,

no. 228, p. 28] Thus anarchists see co-operation and mutual aid as an expression of “self-interest”, in that working with people as equals is in our joint benefit. In the words of John O’Neill:

*“[F]or it is the institutions themselves that define what counts as one’s interests. In particular, the market encourages egoism, not primarily because it encourages an individual to be ‘self-interested’ — it would be unrealistic not to expect individuals to act for the greater part in a ‘self-interested’ manner — but rather because it defines an individual’s interests in a particularly narrow fashion, most notably in terms of possession of certain material goods. In consequence, where market mechanism enter a particular sphere of life, the pursuit of goods outside this narrow range of market goods is institutionally defined as an act of altruism.”* [The Market, p. 158]

As such, anarchists would suggest that we should not confuse competition with self-interest and that a co-operative society would tend to promote institutions and customs which would ensure that people recognised that co-operation between equals maximises individual freedom and self-interest far more than individualistic pursuit to material wealth at the expense of all other goals. Ultimately, what use would it be to gain the world and lose what makes life worth living?

Of course, such a society would not be based on exactly equal shares of everything. Rather, it would mean equal opportunity and free, or equal, access to resources (for example, that only ill people use medical resources is unproblematic for egalitarians!). So a society with unequal distributions of resources is not automatically a non-anarchist one. What is against anarchist principles is centralised power, oppression, and exploitation, all of which flow from large inequalities of income and private property. This is the source of anarchist concern about equality — concern that is not based on some sort of “*politics of envy*.” Anarchists oppose inequality because it soon leads to the few oppressing the many (a relationship which distorts the individuality and liberty of all involved as well as the health and very lives of the oppressed).

Anarchists desire to create a society in which such relationships are impossible, believing that the most effective way to do this is by empowering all, by creating an egoistic concern for liberty and equality among the oppressed, and by developing social organisations which encourage self-management. As for individuals’ trying to improve their lot, anarchists maintain that co-operation is the best means to do so, **not** competition. And there is substantial evidence to support this claim (see, for example, Alfie Kohn’s **No Contest: The Case Against Competition** and Robert Axelrod’s **The Evolution of Co-operation** present abundant evidence that co-operation is in our long term interests and provides better results than short term competition). This suggests that, as Kropotkin argued, mutual aid, not mutual struggle, will be in an individual’s self-interest and so competition in a free, sane society would be minimised and reduced to sports and other individual pastimes. As Stirner argued, co-operation is just as egoistic as competition (a fact sometimes lost on many due to the obvious ethical superiority of co-operation):

*“But should competition some day disappear, because concerted effort will have been acknowledged as more beneficial than isolation, then will not every single individual inside the associations be equally egoistic and out for his own interests?”* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 22]

Now to the “competition” objection, which we’ll begin to answer by noting that it ignores a few key points.

Firstly, the assumption that a libertarian society would “become capitalist” in the absence of a state is obviously false. If competition did occur between collectives and did lead to massive wealth inequalities, then the newly rich would have to create a state to protect their private property against the dispossessed. So inequality, not equality, leads to the creation of states. It is no co-incidence that the anarchic communities that existed for millennia were also egalitarian.

Secondly, as noted in section A.2.5, anarchists do not consider “equal” to mean “identical.” Therefore, to claim that wage differences mean the end of anarchism makes sense only if one thinks that “equality” means everyone getting **exactly** equal shares. As anarchists do not hold such an idea, wage differences in an otherwise anarchistically organised syndicate do not indicate a lack of equality. How the syndicate is **run** is of far more importance, because the most pernicious type of inequality from the anarchist standpoint is inequality of **power**, i.e. unequal influence on political and economic decision making.

Under capitalism, wealth inequality translates into such an inequality of power, and vice versa, because wealth can buy private property (and state protection of it), which gives owners authority over that property and those hired to produce with it; but under libertarian socialism, minor or even moderate differences in income among otherwise equal workers would not lead to this kind of power inequality, because self-management and socialisation severs the link between wealth and power. Moreover, when labour becomes free in a society of rebels (and, surely, an anarchist society could be nothing but) few would tolerate relatively minor income inequalities becoming a source of power.

Thirdly, anarchists do not pretend that an anarchist society will be perfect. Hence there may be periods, particularly just after capitalism has been replaced by self-management, when differences in skill, etc., leads to some people exploiting their position and getting more wages, better hours and conditions, and so forth. This problem existed in the industrial collectives in the Spanish Revolution. As Kropotkin pointed out, “[b]ut, when all is said and done, some inequalities, some inevitable injustice, undoubtedly will remain. There are individuals in our societies whom no great crisis can lift out of the deep mire of egoism in which they are sunk. The question, however, is not whether there will be injustices or no, but rather how to limit the number of them.” [The Conquest of Bread, p. 94]

In other words, these problems will exist, but there are a number of things that anarchists can do to minimise their impact. There will be a “*gestation period*” before the birth of an anarchist society, in which social struggle, new forms of education and child-rearing, and other methods of consciousness-raising increase the number of anarchists and decrease the number of authoritarians.

The most important element in this gestation period is social struggle. Such self-activity will have a major impact on those involved in it (see section J.2). By direct action and solidarity, those involved develop bounds of friendship and support with others, develop new forms of ethics and new ideas and ideal. This radicalisation process will help to ensure that any differences in education and skill do not develop into differences in power in an anarchist society by making people less likely to exploit their advantages nor, more importantly, for others to tolerate them doing so!

In addition, education within the anarchist movement should aim, among other things, to give its members familiarity with technological skills so that they are not dependent on “experts” and can thus increase the pool of skilled workers who will be happy working in conditions of liberty and equality. This will ensure that differentials between workers can be minimised. In the

long run, however, popularisation of non-authoritarian methods of child-rearing and education (see section J.6) are particularly important because, as we suggested in section B.1.5, secondary drives such as greed and the desire to exercise power over others are products of authoritarian upbringing based on punishments and fear. Only if the prevalence of such drives is reduced among the general population can we be sure that an anarchist revolution will not degenerate into some new form of domination and exploitation.

However, there are other reasons why economic inequality – say, in differences of income levels or working conditions, which may arise from competition for “better” workers – would be far less severe under any form of anarchist society than it is under capitalism.

Firstly, the syndicates would be democratically managed. This would result in much smaller wage differentials, because there is no board of wealthy directors setting wage levels for their own gain. So without hierarchies in the workplace no one would be in a position to monopolise the work of others and grow rich as a result:

*“Poverty is the symptom: slavery the disease. The extremes of riches and destitution follow inevitably upon the extremes of license and bondage. The many are not enslaved because they are poor, they are poor because they are enslaved. Yet Socialists have all too often fixed their eyes upon the material misery of the poor without realising that it rests upon the spiritual degradation of the slave.”* [G.D.H. Cole, **Self-Government in Industry**, p. 41]

Empirical evidence supports anarchist claims as co-operatives have a far more egalitarian wage structure than capitalist firms. This can be seen from the experience of the Mondragon co-operatives, where the wage difference between the highest paid and lowest paid worker was 4 to 1. This was only increased when they had to compete with large capitalist companies, and even then the new ratio of 9 to 1 is far smaller than those in capitalist companies (in America the ratio is 200 to 1 and beyond!). Thus, even under capitalism, “[t]here is evidence that the methods of distribution chosen by worker-controlled or self-managed firms are more egalitarian than distribution according to market precepts.” [Christopher Eaton Gunn, **Workers’ Self-Management in the United States**, p. 45] Given that market precepts fail to take into account power differences, this is unsurprising. Thus we can predict that a fully self-managed economy would be just, if not, more egalitarian as differences in power would be eliminated, as would unemployment (James K. Galbraith, in his book **Created Unequal**, has presented extensive evidence that unemployment increases inequality, as would be expected).

It is a common myth that managers, executives and so on are paid so highly because of their unique abilities. Actually, they are so highly paid because they are bureaucrats in command of large hierarchical institutions. It is the hierarchical nature of the capitalist firm that ensures inequality, **not** exceptional skills. Even enthusiastic supporters of capitalism provide evidence to support this claim. In the 1940s Peter Drucker, a supporter of capitalism, brushed away the claim that corporate organisation brings managers with exceptional ability to the top when he noted that “[n]o institution can possibly survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organised in such a way as to be able to get along under a leadership of average human beings.” For Drucker, “the things that really count are not the individual members but the relations of command and responsibility among them.” [**Concept of the Corporation**, p. 35 and p. 34] Little has changed, beyond the power of PR to personalise the bureaucratic structures of corporations.

Secondly, having no means of unearned income (such as rent, interest and intellectual property rights), anarchism will reduce income differentials substantially.

Thirdly, management positions would be rotated, ensuring that everyone gets experience of the work, thus reducing the artificial scarcity created by the division of labour. Also, education would be extensive, ensuring that engineers, doctors, and other skilled workers would do the work because they **enjoyed** doing it and not for financial reward.

Fourthly, we should like to point out that people work for many reasons, not just for high wages. Feelings of solidarity, empathy, friendship with their fellow workers would also help reduce competition between syndicates.

Of course, the “competition” objection assumes that syndicates and members of syndicates will place financial considerations above all else. This is not the case, and few individuals are the economic robots assumed in capitalist dogma. Indeed, the evidence from co-operatives refutes such claims (ignoring, for the moment, the vast evidence of our own senses and experiences with real people rather than the insane “*economic man*” of capitalist economic ideology). As noted in section I.3.1 neo-classical economic theory, deducing from its basic assumptions, argues that members of co-operatives will aim to maximise profit per worker and so, perversely, fire their members during good times. Reality contradicts these claims. In other words, the underlying assumption that people are economic robots cannot be maintained – there is extensive evidence pointing to the fact that different forms of social organisation produce different considerations which motivate people accordingly.

So, while recognising that competition could exist, anarchists think there are plenty of reasons not to worry about massive economic inequality being created, which in turn would re-create the state. The apologists for capitalism who put forward this argument forget that the pursuit of self-interest is universal, meaning that everyone would be interested in maximising his or her liberty, and so would be unlikely to allow inequalities to develop which threatened that liberty. It would be in the interests of communes and syndicates which to share with others instead of charging high prices for them as they may find themselves boycotted by others, and so denied the advantages of social co-operation. Moreover, they may be subject to such activities themselves and so it would wise for them to remember to “*treat others as you would like them to treat you under similar circumstances.*” As anarchism will never come about unless people desire it and start to organise their own lives, it is clear that an anarchist society would be inhabited by individuals who followed that ethical principle.

So it is doubtful that people inspired by anarchist ideas would start to charge each other high prices, particularly since the syndicates and community assemblies are likely to vote for a wide basis of surplus distribution, precisely to avoid this problem and to ensure that production will be for use rather than profit. In addition, as other communities and syndicates would likely boycott any syndicate or commune that was acting in non-co-operative ways, it is likely that social pressure would soon result in those willing to exploit others rethinking their position. Co-operation does not imply a willingness to tolerate those who desire to take advantage of you. In other words, neither mutual aid nor anarchist theory implies people are naive indiscriminate altruists but rather people who, while willing to work with others co-operatively, will act to stop others taking advantage of them. Mutual aid, in other words is based on reciprocal relationships. If someone or a syndicate does not co-operate but rather seeks to take advantage of others, then the others are well within their rights to boycott them and otherwise protest against them. A free society is based on **all** people pursuing their self-interest, not just the few. This suggests that

anarchists reject the assumption that those who lose by competition should be altruistic and let competition ruin their lives.

Moreover, given the experience of the neo-liberal period from the 1980s onwards (with rising inequality marked by falling growth, lower wage growth, rising unemployment and increased economic instability) the impact of increased competition and inequality harms the vast majority. It is doubtful that people aware of these tendencies (and that, as we argued in section F.3, “*free exchange*” in an unequal society tends to **increase**, not decrease, inequality) would create such a regime.

Unsurprisingly, examples of anarchism in action show that there is working together to reduce the dangers of isolation and competition. One thing to remember is that anarchy will not be created “overnight” and so potential problems will be worked out over time. Underlying all these kinds of objections is the assumption that co-operation will **not** be more beneficial to all involved than competition. However, in terms of quality of life, co-operation will soon be seen to be the better system, even by the most highly paid workers. There is far more to life than the size of one’s pay packet, and anarchism exists in order to ensure that life is far more than the weekly grind of boring work and the few hours of hectic consumption in which people attempt to fill the “spiritual hole” created by a way of life which places profits above people.

### I.3.7 What about people who do not want to join a syndicate?

In this case, they are free to work alone, by their own labour. Anarchists have no desire to force people to join a syndicate. Emma Goldman spoke for all anarchists when she stated that “[w]e believe in every person living his own life in his own way and not in coercing others to follow any one’s dictation.” [A **Documentary History of the American Years**, vol. 2, p. 324]

Therefore, the decision to join a syndicate will be a free one, with the potential for living outside it guaranteed for non-exploitative and non-oppressive individuals and groups. Malatesta stressed this when he argued that in an anarchist revolution “*what has to be destroyed at once ... is **capitalistic property**, that is, the fact that a few control the natural wealth and the instruments of production and can thus oblige others to work for them*” but one must have a “*right and the possibility to live in a different regime, collectivist, mutualist, individualist — as one wishes, always on the condition that there is no oppression or exploitation of others.*” [Errico Malatesta: **Life and Ideas**, p. 102] In other words, different forms of social life will be experimented with, depending on what people desire.

Of course some people ask how anarchists can reconcile individual freedom with expropriation of capital. All we can say is that these critics subscribe to the idea that one should not interfere with the “individual freedom” of those in positions of authority to oppress others, and that this premise turns the concept of individual freedom on its head, making oppression a “right” and the denial of freedom a form of it!

However, it is a valid question to ask if anarchism would result in self-employed people being forced into syndicates as the result of a popular movement. The answer is no. This is because the destruction of title deeds would not harm the independent worker, whose real title is possession and the work done. What anarchists want to eliminate is not possession but capitalist **property**. Thus such workers “*may prefer to work alone in his own small shop*” rather than join an association



or a federation. [James Guillaume, “On Building the New Social Order”, pp. 356–79, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 362]

This means that independent producers will still exist within an anarchist society, and some workplaces — perhaps whole areas — will not be part of a confederation. This is natural in a free society, for different people have different ideas and ideals. Nor does such independent producers imply a contradiction with libertarian socialism, for “[w]hat we concerned with is the destruction of the titles of proprietors who exploit the labour of others and, above all, of expropriating them in fact in order to put ... all the means of production at the disposal of those who do the work.” [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 103] Such freedom to work independently or associate as desired does **not** imply any support for private property (as discussed in section I.6.2). Thus any individual in a libertarian socialist economy “always has the liberty to isolate himself and work alone, without being considered a bad citizen or a suspect.” [Proudhon, quoted by K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 145]

In summary, in a free society people need not join syndicates nor does a co-operative need to confederate with others. Given we have discussed the issue of freedom of economic arrangements at length in section G.2.1 we will leave this discussion here.

### I.3.8 Do anarchists seek “*small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production*”?

No. The idea that anarchism aims for small, self-sufficient, communes is a Leninist slander. They misrepresent anarchist ideas on this matter, suggesting that anarchists seriously want society based on “*small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production.*” In particular, they point to Kropotkin, arguing that he “*looked backwards for change*” and “*witnessed such communities among Siberian peasants and watchmakers in the Swiss mountains.*” [Pat Stack, “Anarchy in the UK?”, **Socialist Review**, no. 246] Another Leninist, Donny Gluckstein, makes a similar assertion about Proudhon wanting a federation of “*tiny economic units*”. [**The Paris Commune**, p. 75]

While it may be better to cover this issue in section H.2, we discuss it here simply because it relates directly to what an anarchist society could look like and so it allows us to that more fully.

So what do anarchists make of the assertion that we aim for “*small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production*”? Simply put, we think it is nonsense (as would be quickly obvious from reading anarchist theory). Indeed, it is hard to know where this particular anarchist “vision” comes from. As Luigi Fabbri noted, in his reply to an identical assertion by the leading Bolshevik Nikolai Bukharin, “[i]t would be interesting to learn in what anarchist book, pamphlet or programme such an ‘ideal’ is set out, or even such a hard and fast rule!” [“Anarchy and ‘Scientific’ Communism”, pp. 13–49, **The Poverty of Statism**, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 21]

If we look at, say, Proudhon, we soon see no such argument for “*small scale*” production. For Proudhon, “[l]arge industry ... come to us by big monopoly and big property: it is necessary in the future to make them rise from the [workers] association.” [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, **Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 156] In fact, The Frenchman explicitly rejected the position Stack inflicts on him by arguing that it “*would be to retrograde*” and “*impossible*” to wish “*the division of labour, with machinery and manufactures, to be abandoned, and each family to return to the system of primitive indivision, — that is, to each one by himself, each one for*

*himself*, in the most literal meaning of the words.” [System of Economic Contradictions, p. 206] As historian K. Steven Vincent correctly summarises:

*“On this issue, it is necessary to emphasise that, contrary to the general image given in the secondary literature, Proudhon was not hostile to large industry. Clearly, he objected to many aspects of what these large enterprises had introduced into society. For example, Proudhon strenuously opposed the degrading character of ... work which required an individual to repeat one minor function continuously. But he was not opposed in principle to large-scale production. What he desired was to humanise such production, to socialise it so that the worker would not be the mere appendage to a machine. Such a humanisation of large industries would result, according to Proudhon, from the introduction of strong workers’ associations. These associations would enable the workers to determine jointly by election how the enterprise was to be directed and operated on a day-to-day basis.” [Op. Cit., p. 156]*

Moreover, Proudhon did not see an anarchist society as one of isolated communities or workplaces. Like other anarchists, as we discussed in section I.3.4, Proudhon saw a free society’s productive activity centred around federations of syndicates.

This vision of a federation of workplaces can also be found in Bakunin’s writings: *“The future organisation of society must proceed from the bottom up only, through free association or federations of the workers, into their associations to begin with, then into communes, regions, nations and, finally, into a great international and universal federation.”* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 176] Like Proudhon, Bakunin also explicitly rejected the idea of seeking small-scale production, arguing that *“if [the workers] tried to divide among themselves the capital that exists, they would ... reduce to a large degree its productive power.”* Therefore the need was for *“the collective property of capital”* to ensure *“the emancipation of labour and of the workers.”* [The Basic Bakunin, p. 91] Bakunin, again like Proudhon, considered that *“[i]ntelligent free labour will necessarily be associated labour”* as under capitalism the worker *“works for others”* and her labour is *“bereft of liberty, leisure and intelligence.”* Under anarchism, *“the free productive associations”* would become *“their own masters and the owners of the necessary capital”* and *“amalgamate among themselves”* and *“sooner or later”* will *“expand beyond national frontiers”* and *“form one vast economic federation.”* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 81–3]

Nor can such a vision be attributed to Kropotkin. While, of course, supporting decentralisation of power and decision making as did Proudhon and Bakunin, he did not reject the necessity of federations to co-ordinate activity. As he put it, the *“commune of tomorrow will know that it cannot admit any higher authority; above it there can only be the interests of the Federation, freely accepted by itself as well as the other communes”*/ For anarchists the commune *“no longer means a territorial agglomeration; it is rather a generic name, a synonym for the grouping of equals which knows neither frontiers nor walls ... Each group in the Commune will necessarily be drawn towards similar groups in other communes; they will come together and the links that federate them will be as solid as those that attach them to their fellow citizens.”* [Words of a Rebel, p. 83 and p. 88] Nor did he reject industry or machinery, stating he *“understood the poetry of machinery”* and that while in *“our present factories, machinery work is killing for the worker”* this was *“a matter of bad organisation, and has nothing to do with the machine itself.”* [Memiors of a Revolutionist, p. 111]

Kropotkin’s vision was one of federations of decentralised communities in which production would be based on the *“scattering of industries over the country — so as to bring the factory amidst*

*the fields ... agriculture ... combined with industry ... to produce a combination of industrial with agricultural work.*” He considered this as “surely the next step to be made, as soon as a reorganisation of our present conditions is possible” and “is imposed by the very necessity of **producing for the producers themselves.**” [Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow, pp. 157–8] He based this vision on a detailed analysis of current economic statistics and trends.

Kropotkin did not see such an anarchist economy as being based around the small community, taking the basic unit of a free society as one “large enough to dispose of a certain variety of natural resources — it may be a nation, or rather a region — produces and itself consumes most of its own agricultural and manufactured produce.” Such a region would “find the best means of combining agriculture with manufacture — the work in the field with a decentralised industry.” Moreover, he recognised that the “geographical distribution of industries in a given country depends ... to a great extent upon a complexus of natural conditions; it is obvious that there are spots which are best suited for the development of certain industries ... The[se] industries always find some advantages in being grouped, to some extent, according to the natural features of separate regions.” [Op. Cit., p. 26, p. 27 and pp. 154–5]

Kropotkin stressed that agriculture “cannot develop without the aid of machinery and the use of a perfect machinery cannot be generalised without industrial surroundings ... The village smith would not do.” He supported the integration of agriculture and industry, with “the factory and workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens” in which a “variety of agricultural, industrial and intellectual pursuits are combined in each community” to ensure “the greatest sum total of well-being.” He thought that “large establishments” would still exist, but these would be “better placed at certain spots indicated by Nature.” He stressed that it “would be a great mistake to imagine industry ought to return to its hand-work stage in order to be combined with agriculture. Whenever a saving of human labour can be obtained by means of a machine, the machine is welcome and will be resorted to; and there is hardly one single branch of industry into which machinery work could not be introduced with great advantage, at least at some of the stages of the manufacture.” [Op. Cit., p. 156, p. 197, p. 18, pp. 154–5 and pp. 151–2]

Clearly Kropotkin was **not** opposed to large-scale industry for “if we analyse the modern industries, we soon discover that for some of them the co-operation of hundred, even thousands, of workers gathered at the same spot is really necessary. The great iron works and mining enterprises decidedly belong to that category; oceanic steamers cannot be built in village factories.” However, he stressed that this objective necessity was not the case in many other industries and centralised production existed in these purely to allow capitalists “to hold command of the market” and “to suit the temporary interests of the few — by no means those of the nation.” Kropotkin made a clear division between economic tendencies which existed to aid the capitalist to dominate the market and enhance their profits and power and those which indicated a different kind of future. Once we consider the “moral and physical advantages which man would derive from dividing his work between field and the workshop” we must automatically evaluate the structure of modern industry with the criteria of what is best for the worker (and society and the environment) rather than what was best for capitalist profits and power. [Op. Cit., p. 153, p. 147 and p. 153]

Clearly, Leninist summaries of Kropotkin’s ideas on this subject are nonsense. Rather than seeing “small-scale” production as the basis of his vision of a free society, he saw production as being geared around the economic unit of a nation or region: “Each region will become its own producer and its own consumer of manufactured goods ... [and] its own producer and consumer of agricultural produce.” Industry would come to the village “not in its present shape of a capitalist

factory” but “in the shape of a socially organised industrial production, with the full aid of machinery and technical knowledge.” [Op. Cit., p. 40 and p. 151]

Industry would be decentralised and integrated with agriculture and based around communes, but these communes would be part of a federation and so production would be based around meeting the needs of these federations. A system of rational decentralisation would be the basis of Kropotkin’s communist-anarchism, with productive activity and a free society’s workplaces geared to the appropriate level. For those forms of industry which would be best organised on a large-scale would continue to be so organised, but for those whose current (i.e., capitalist) structure had no objective need to be centralised would be broken up to allow the transformation of work for the benefit of both workers and society. Thus we would see a system of workplaces geared to local and district needs complementing larger factories which would meet regional and wider needs.

Anarchism rejects the idea of small-scale production and isolated communes and, as we discussed in section H.2.3, it does **not** look backwards for its ideal. The same applies to other forms of libertarian socialism with, for example, G.D.H. Cole arguing that we “cannot go back to ‘town economy’, a general regime of handicraft and master-craftmanship, tiny-scale production. We can neither pull up our railways, fill our mines, and dismantle our factories nor conduct our large-scale enterprises under a system developed to fit the needs of a local market and a narrowly-restricted production.” The aim is “to reintroduce into industry the communal spirit, by re-fashioning industrialism in such a way as to set the communal motives free to co-operate.” [Guild Socialism Reststed, pp. 45–6 and p. 46]

The obvious implication of Leninist comments arguments against anarchist ideas on industrial transformation after a revolution is that they think that a socialist society will basically be the same as capitalism, using the technology, industry and industrial structure developed under class society without change (as noted in section H.3.12, Lenin did suggest that was the case). Needless to say, capitalist industry, as Kropotkin was aware, has not developed neutrally nor purely because of technical needs. Rather it has been distorted by the twin requirements to maintain capitalist profits and power. One of the first tasks of a social revolution will be to transform the industrial structure, not keep it as it is. You cannot use capitalist means for socialist ends. So while we will “inherent” an industrial structure from capitalism it would be the greatest possible error to leave it unchanged and an even worse one to accelerate the processes by which capitalists maintain and increase their power (i.e. centralisation and concentration) in the name of “socialism.”

We are sorry to have laboured this point, but this issue is one which arises with depressing frequency in Marxist accounts of anarchism. It is best that we indicate that those who make the claim that anarchists seek “small scale” production geared for “small autonomous communities” simply show their ignorance. In actually, anarchists see production as being geared to whatever makes most social, economic and ecological sense. Some production and workplaces will be geared to the local commune, some will be geared to the district federation, some to the regional federation, and so on. It is for this reason anarchists support the federation of workers’ associations as the means of combining local autonomy with the needs for co-ordination and joint activity. To claim otherwise is simply to misrepresent anarchist theory.

Finally, it must be psychologically significant that Leninists continually go on about anarchists advocating “small” and “tiny” workplaces. Apparently size **does** matter and Leninists think their productive units are much, much bigger than anarchist ones. As has been proven, anarchists

advocate **appropriately sized** workplaces and are not hung-up about their size. Why Leninists are could be a fruitful area of research...

## I.4 How could an anarchist economy function?

This is an important question facing all opponents of a given system – what will you replace it with? We can say, of course, that it is pointless to make blueprints of how a future anarchist society will work as the future will be created by everyone, not just the few anarchists and libertarian socialists who write books and FAQs. This is very true, we cannot predict what a free society will actually be like or develop and we have no intention to do so here. However, this reply (whatever its other merits) ignores a key point, people need to have some idea of what anarchism aims for before they decide to spend their lives trying to create it.

So, how would an anarchist system function? That depends on the economic ideas people have. A mutualist economy will function differently than a communist one, for example, but they will have similar features. As Rudolf Rocker put it:

*“Common to all Anarchists is the desire to free society of all political and social coercive institutions which stand in the way of the development of a free humanity. In this sense, Mutualism, Collectivism, and Communism are not to be regarded as closed systems permitting no further development, but merely assumptions as to the means of safeguarding a free community. There will even probably be in the society of the future different forms of economic co-operation existing side-by-side, since any social progress must be associated with that free experimentation and practical testing-out for which in a society of free communities there will be afforded every opportunity.”*  
[Anarcho-Syndicalism, p. 16]

So, given the common aims of anarchists, it's unsurprising that the economic systems they suggest will have common features such as workers' self-management, federation, free agreement and so on. For all anarchists, the “economy” is seen as a “*voluntary association that will organise labour, and be the manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities*” and this “*is to make what is useful. The individual is to make what is beautiful.*” [Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, p. 1183] For example, the machine “*will supersede hand-work in the manufacture of plain goods. But at the same time, hand-work very probably will extend its domain in the artistic finishing of many things which are made entirely in the factory.*” [Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workplaces Tomorrow*, p. 152] Murray Bookchin, decades later, argued for the same idea: “*the machine will remove the toil from the productive process, leaving its artistic completion to man.*” [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 134]

This “*organisation of labour touches only such labours as others can do for us... the rest remain egoistic, because no one can in your stead elaborate your musical compositions, carry out your projects of painting, etc.; nobody can replace Raphael's labours. The latter are labours of a unique person, which only he is competent to achieve.*” [Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, p. 268] Stirner goes on to ask “*for whom is time to be gained [by association]? For what does man require more time than is necessary to refresh his wearied powers of labour? Here Communism is silent.*” He then answers

his own question by arguing it is gained for the individual “[t]o take comfort in himself as unique, after he has done his part as man!” [Op. Cit., p. 269] Which is exactly what Kropotkin also argued:

*“He [sic!] will discharge his task in the field, the factory, and so on, which he owes to society as his contribution to the general production. And he will employ the second half of his day, his week, or his year, to satisfy his artistic or scientific needs, or his hobbies.”*  
[Conquest of Bread, p. 111]

Thus, while **authoritarian** Communism ignores the unique individual (and that was the only kind of Communism existing when Stirner wrote his classic book) **libertarian** communists agree with Stirner and are not silent. Like him, they consider the whole point of organising labour as the means of providing the individual the time and resources required to express their individuality. In other words, to pursue “labours of a unique person.” Thus all anarchists base their arguments for a free society on how it will benefit actual individuals, rather than abstracts or amorphous collectives (such as “society”). Hence chapter 9 of **The Conquest of Bread**, “The Need for Luxury” and, for that matter, chapter 10, “Agreeable Work.”

Or, to bring this ideal up to day, as Chomsky put it, “[t]he task for a modern industrial society is to achieve what is now technically realisable, namely, a society which is really based on free voluntary participation of people who produce and create, live their lives freely within institutions they control, and with limited hierarchical structures, possibly none at all.” [quoted by Albert and Hahnel in **Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the Twenty First Century**, p. 62]

In other words, anarchists desire to organise voluntary workers associations which will try to ensure a minimisation of mindless labour in order to maximise the time available for creative activity both inside and outside “work.” This is to be achieved by free co-operation between equals, for while competition may be the “law of the jungle”, co-operation is the law of civilisation.

This co-operation is **not** based on “altruism,” but self-interest. As Proudhon argued, “[m]utuality, reciprocity exists when all the workers in an industry instead of working for an entrepreneur who pays them and keeps their products, work for one another and thus collaborate in the making of a common product whose profits they share amongst themselves. Extend the principle of reciprocity as uniting the work of every group, to the Workers’ Societies as units, and you have created a form of civilisation which from all points of view — political, economic and aesthetic — is radically different from all earlier civilisations.” [quoted by Martin Buber, **Paths in Utopia**, pp. 29–30] In other words, solidarity and co-operation allows us time to enjoy life and to gain the benefits of our labour ourselves — Mutual Aid results in a better life than mutual struggle and so “the **association for struggle** will be a much more effective support for civilisation, progress, and evolution than is the **struggle for existence** with its savage daily competitions.” [Luigi Geallani, **The End of Anarchism**, p. 26]

In the place of the rat race of capitalism, economic activity in an anarchist society would be one of the means to humanise and individualise ourselves and society, to move from **surviving** to **living**. Productive activity should become a means of self-expression, of joy, of art, rather than something we have to do to survive. Ultimately, “work” should become more akin to play or a hobby than the current alienated activity. The priorities of life should be towards individual self-fulfilment and humanising society rather than “running society as an adjunct to the market,” to use Polanyi’s expression, and turning ourselves into commodities on the labour market. Thus anarchists agree with John Stuart Mill when he wrote:

*“I confess I am not charmed with an ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other’s heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress.” [Collected Works, vol. III, p. 754]*

The aim of anarchism is far more than the end of poverty. Hence Proudhon’s comment that socialism’s “*underlying dogma*” is that the “*objective of socialism is the emancipation of the proletariat and the eradication of poverty.*” This emancipation would be achieved by ending “*wage slavery*” via “*democratically organised workers’ associations.*” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 57 and p.62] Or, in Kropotkin’s words, “*well-being for all*” – physical, mental and moral! Indeed, by concentrating on just poverty and ignoring the emancipation of the proletariat, the real aims of socialism are obscured. As Kropotkin argued:

*“The ‘right to well-being’ means the possibility of living like human beings, and of bringing up children to be members of a society better than ours, whilst the ‘right to work’ only means the right to be a wage-slave, a drudge, ruled over and exploited by the middle class of the future. The right to well-being is the Social Revolution, the right to work means nothing but the Treadmill of Commercialism. It is high time for the worker to assert his right to the common inheritance, and to enter into possession of it.” [The Conquest of Bread, p. 44]*

Combined with this desire for free co-operation is a desire to end centralised systems. The opposition to centralisation is often framed in a distinctly false manner. This can be seen when Alex Nove, a leading market socialist, argues that “*there are horizontal links (market), there are vertical links (hierarchy). What other dimension is there?*” [Alex Nove, **The Economics of Feasible Socialism**, p. 226] In other words, Nove states that to oppose central planning means to embrace the market. This, however, is not true. Horizontal links need not be market based any more than vertical links need be hierarchical. But the core point in his argument is very true, an anarchist society must be based essentially on horizontal links between individuals and associations, freely co-operating together as they (not a central body) sees fit. This co-operation will be source of any “*vertical*” links in an anarchist economy. When a group of individuals or associations meet together and discuss common interests and make common decisions they will be bound by their own decisions. This is radically different from a central body giving out orders because those affected will determine the content of these decisions. In other words, instead of decisions being handed down from the top, they will be created from the bottom up.

So, while refusing to define exactly how an anarchist system will work, we will explore the implications of how the anarchist principles and ideals outlined above could be put into practice. Bear in mind that this is just a possible framework for a system which has few historical examples to draw upon as evidence. This means that we can only indicate the general outlines of what an anarchist society could be like. Those seeking “*recipes*” and exactness should look elsewhere. In all likelihood, the framework we present will be modified and changed (even ignored) in light of the real experiences and problems people will face when creating a new society.

Lastly we should point out that there may be a tendency for some to compare this framework with the **theory** of capitalism (i.e. perfectly functioning “*free*” markets or quasi-perfect ones) as



opposed to its reality. A perfectly working capitalist system only exists in text books and in the heads of ideologues who take the theory as reality. No system is perfect, particularly capitalism, and to compare “perfect” capitalism with any system is a pointless task. In addition, there will be those who seek to apply the “scientific” principles of the neo-classical economics to our ideas. By so doing they make what Proudhon called “*the radical vice of political economy*”, namely “*affirming as a definitive state a transitory condition — namely, the division of society into patricians and proletares.*” [System of Economical Contradictions, p. 67] Thus any attempt to apply the “laws” developed from theorising about capitalism to anarchism will fail to capture the dynamics of a non-capitalist system (given that neo-classical economics fails to understand the dynamics of capitalism, what hope does it have of understanding non-capitalist systems which reject the proprietary despotism and inequalities of capitalism?).

John Crump stresses this point in his discussion of Japanese anarchism:

*“When considering the feasibility of the social system advocated by the pure anarchists, we need to be clear about the criteria against which it should be measured. It would, for example, be unreasonable to demand that it be assessed against such yardsticks of a capitalist economy as annual rate of growth, balance of trade and so forth ... evaluating anarchist communism by means of the criteria which have been devised to measure capitalism’s performance does not make sense ... capitalism would be ... baffled if it were demanded that it assess its operations against the performance indicators to which pure anarchists attached most importance, such as personal liberty, communal solidarity and the individual’s unconditional right to free consumption. Faced with such demands, capitalism would either admit that these were not yardsticks against which it could sensibly measure itself or it would have to resort to the type of grotesque ideological subterfuges which it often employs, such as identifying human liberty with the market and therefore with wage slavery... The pure anarchists’ confidence in the alternative society they advocated derived not from an expectation that it would **quantitatively** outperform capitalism in terms of GNP, productivity or similar capitalist criteria. On the contrary, their enthusiasm for anarchist communism flowed from their understanding that it would be **qualitatively** different from capitalism. Of course, this is not to say that the pure anarchists were indifferent to questions of production and distribution ... they certainly believed that anarchist communism would provide economic well-being for all. But neither were they prepared to give priority to narrowly conceived economic expansion, to neglect individual liberty and communal solidarity, as capitalism regularly does.”* [Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan, pp. 191–3]

As Kropotkin argued, “*academic political economy has been only an enumeration of what happens under the ... conditions [of capitalism] — without distinctly stating the conditions themselves. And then, having described **the facts** [academic neo-classical economics usually does not even do that, we must stress, but Kropotkin had in mind the likes of Adam Smith and Ricardo, **not** modern neo-classical economics] which arise in our societies under these conditions, they represent to use these **facts** as rigid, **inevitable economic laws.**”* [Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 179] So, by changing the conditions we change the “economic laws” of a society and so capitalist economics is not applicable to post (or pre) capitalist society (nor are its justifications for existing inequalities in wealth and power).

## I.4.1 What is the point of economic activity in anarchy?

The basic point of economic activity in an anarchist society is to ensure that we produce what we desire to consume and that our consumption is under our own control and not vice versa. The second point may seem strange; how can consumption control us — we consume what we desire and no one forces us to do so! It may come as a surprise that the idea that we consume only what we desire is not quite true under a capitalist economy. Capitalism, in order to survive, **must** expand, **must** create more and more profits. This leads to irrational side effects, for example, the advertising industry. While it goes without saying that producers need to let consumers know what is available for consumption, capitalism ensures advertising goes beyond this by creating needs that did not exist.

Therefore, the point of economic activity in an anarchist society is to produce as and when required and not, as under capitalism, to organise production for the sake of production. Production, to use Kropotkin's words, is to become "*the mere servant of consumption; it must mould itself on the wants of the consumer, not dictate to him [or her] conditions.*" [Act For Yourselves, p. 57] However, while the basic aim of economic activity in an anarchist society is, obviously, producing wealth — i.e. of satisfying individual needs — without enriching capitalists or other parasites in the process, it is far more than that. Yes, an anarchist society will aim to create society in which everyone will have a standard of living suitable for a fully human life. Yes, it will aim to eliminate poverty, inequality, individual want and social waste and squalor, but it aims for far more than that. It aims to create free individuals who express their individuality within and without "*work.*" After all, what is the most important thing that comes out of a workplace? Pro-capitalists may say profits, others the finished commodity or good. In fact, the most important thing that comes out of a workplace is the **worker**. What happens to them in the workplace will have an impact on all aspects of their life and so cannot be ignored.

Therefore, for anarchists, "[r]eal wealth consists of things of utility and beauty, in things that help create strong, beautiful bodies and surroundings inspiring to live in." Anarchism's "goal is the freest possible expression of all the latent powers of the individual ... [and this] is only possible in a state of society where man [and woman] is free to choose the mode of work, the conditions of work, and the freedom to work. One whom making a table, the building of a house, or the tilling of the soil is what the painting is to the artist and the discovery to the scientist — the result of inspiration, of intense longing, and deep interest in work as a creative force." [Emma Goldman, **Red Emma Speaks**, p. 53 and p. 54]

To value "*efficiency*" above all else, as capitalism says it does (it, in fact, values **profits** above all else and hinders developments like workers' control which increase efficiency but harm power and profits), is to deny our own humanity and individuality. Without an appreciation for grace and beauty there is no pleasure in creating things and no pleasure in having them. Our lives are made drearier rather than richer by "*progress.*" How can a person take pride in their work when skill and care are considered luxuries (if not harmful to "*efficiency*" and, under capitalism, the profits and power of the capitalist and manager)? We are not machines. We have a need for craftspersonship and anarchist recognises this and takes it into account in its vision of a free society.

This means that, in an anarchist society, economic activity is the process by which we produce what is both useful **and** beautiful in a way that empowers the individual. As Oscar Wilde put it, individuals will produce what is beautiful. Such production will be based upon the "*study of the*

*needs of mankind, and the means of satisfying them with the least possible waste of human energy.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 175] This means that anarchist economic ideas are the same as what Political Economy should be, not what it actually is, namely the *"essential basis of all Political Economy, the study of the most favourable conditions for giving society the greatest amount of useful products with the least waste of human energy"* (and, we must add today, the least disruption of nature). [Op. Cit., p. 144]

The anarchists charge capitalism with wasting human energy and time due to its irrational nature and workings, energy that could be spent creating what is beautiful (both in terms of individualities and products of labour). Under capitalism we are *"toiling to live, that we may live to toil."* [William Morris, **Useful Work Versus Useless Toil**, p. 37]

In addition, we must stress that the aim of economic activity within an anarchist society is **not** to create equality of outcome – i.e. everyone getting exactly the same goods. As we noted in section A.2.5, such a *"vision"* of *"equality"* attributed to socialists by pro-capitalists indicates more the poverty of imagination and ethics of the critics of socialism than a true account of socialist ideas. Anarchists, like other socialists, support equality in order to maximise freedom, including the freedom to choose between options to satisfy ones needs.

To treat people equally, as equals, means to respect their desires and interests, to acknowledge their right to equal liberty. To make people consume the same as everyone else does not respect the equality of all to develop ones abilities as one sees fit. Thus it means equality of opportunity to satisfy desires and interests, not the imposition of an abstract minimum (or maximum) on unique individuals. To treat unique individuals equally means to acknowledge that uniqueness, not to deny it.

Thus the **real** aim of economic activity within an anarchy is to ensure *"that every human being should have the material and moral means to develop his humanity."* [Michael Bakunin, **The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 295] And you cannot develop your humanity if you cannot express yourself freely. Needless to say, to treat unique people *"equally"* (i.e. identically) is simply evil. You cannot, say, have a 70 year old woman do the same work in order to receive the same income as a 20 year old man. No, anarchists do not subscribe to such *"equality,"* which is a product of the *"ethics of mathematics"* of capitalism and **not** of anarchist ideas. Such a scheme is alien to a free society. The equality anarchists desire is a social equality, based on control over the decisions that affect you. The aim of anarchist economic activity, therefore, is provide the goods required for *"equal freedom for all, an equality of conditions such as to allow everyone to do as they wish."* [Errico Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 49] Thus anarchists *"demand not natural but social equality of individuals as the condition for justice and the foundations of morality."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 249]

Under capitalism, instead of humans controlling production, production controls them. Anarchists want to change this and desire to create an economic network which will allow the maximisation of an individual's free time in order for them to express and develop their individuality (or to *"create what is beautiful"*). So instead of aiming just to produce because the economy will collapse if we did not, anarchists want to ensure that we produce what is useful in a manner which liberates the individual and empowers them in all aspects of their lives. They share this desire with (some of) the classical Liberals and agree totally with Humbolt's statement that *"the end of man ... is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole."* [quoted by J.S. Mill in **On Liberty and Other Essays**, p. 64]

This desire means that anarchists reject the capitalist definition of “efficiency.” Anarchists would agree with Albert and Hahnel when they argue that “since people are conscious agents whose characteristics and therefore preferences develop over time, to access long-term efficiency we must access the impact of economic institutions on people’s development.” [**The Political Economy of Participatory Economics**, p. 9] Capitalism, as we have explained before, is highly inefficient in this light due to the effects of hierarchy and the resulting marginalisation and disempowerment of the majority of society. As Albert and Hahnel go on to note, “self-management, solidarity, and variety are all legitimate valuative criteria for judging economic institutions ... Asking whether particular institutions help people attain self-management, variety, and solidarity is sensible.” [**Ibid.**]

In other words, anarchists think that any economic activity in a free society is to do useful things in such a way that gives those doing it as much pleasure as possible. The point of such activity is to express the individuality of those doing it, and for that to happen they must control the work process itself. Only by self-management can work become a means of empowering the individual and developing his or her powers.

In a nutshell, to use William Morris’ expression, useful work will replace useless toil in an anarchist society.

## I.4.2 Why do anarchists desire to abolish work?

Anarchists desire to see humanity liberate itself from “work.” This may come as a shock for many people and will do much to “prove” that anarchism is essentially utopian. However, we think that such an abolition is not only necessary, it is possible. This is because “work” is one of the major dangers to freedom we face.

If by freedom we mean self-government, then it is clear that being subjected to hierarchy in the workplace subverts our abilities to think and judge for ourselves. Like any skill, critical analysis and independent thought have to be practised continually in order to remain at their full potential. However, as well as hierarchy, the workplace environment created by these power structures also helps to undermine these abilities. This was recognised by Adam Smith:

*“The understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments.”* That being so, *“the man whose life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or nearly the same, has no occasion to extend his understanding ... and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to be ... But in every improved and civilised society this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes pains to prevent it.”* [Adam Smith, quoted by Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 18]

Smith’s argument (usually ignored by those who claim to follow his ideas) is backed up by extensive evidence. The different types of authority structures and different technologies have different effects on those who work within them. Carole Pateman (in **Participation and Democratic Theory**) notes that the evidence suggests that “[o]nly certain work situations were found to be conducive to the development of the psychological characteristics [suitable for freedom, such as] ... the feelings of personal confidence and efficacy that underlay the sense of political efficacy.” [p. 51] She quotes one expert (R. Blauner from his **Freedom and Alienation**) who argues that within capitalist companies based upon highly rationalised work environment, extensive division of labour and “no control over the pace or technique of his [or her] work, no room to exercise

skill or leadership” [Op. Cit., p. 51] workers, according to a psychological study, is “resigned to his lot ... more dependent than independent ... he lacks confidence in himself ... he is humble ... the most prevalent feeling states ... seem to be fear and anxiety.” [p. 52]

However, in workplaces where “the worker has a high degree of personal control over his work ... and a very large degree of freedom from external control ...[or has] collective responsibility of a crew of employees ...[who] had control over the pace and method of getting the work done, and the work crews were largely internally self-disciplining” [p. 52] a different social character is seen. This was characterised by “a strong sense of individualism and autonomy, and a solid acceptance of citizenship in the large society ...[and] a highly developed feeling of self-esteem and a sense of self-worth and is therefore ready to participate in the social and political institutions of the community.” [p. 52] She notes that R. Blauner states that the “nature of a man’s work affects his social character and personality” and that an “industrial environment tends to breed a distinct social type.” [cited by Pateman, Op. Cit., p. 52]

As Bob Black argues:

*“You are what you do. If you do boring, stupid, monotonous work, chances are you’ll end up boring, stupid, and monotonous. Work is a much better explanation for the creeping cretinisation all around us than even such significant moronising mechanisms as television and education. People who are regimented all their lives, handed to work from school and bracketed by the family in the beginning and the nursing home in the end, are habituated to hierarchy and psychologically enslaved. Their aptitude for autonomy is so atrophied that their fear of freedom is among their few rationally grounded phobias. Their obedience training at work carries over into the families they start, thus reproducing the system in more ways than one, and into politics, culture and everything else. Once you drain the vitality from people at work, they’ll likely submit to hierarchy and expertise in everything. They’re used to it.” [The Abolition of Work]*

For this reason anarchists desire, to use Bob Black’s phrase, “the abolition of work.” “Work,” in this context, does not mean any form of productive activity. Far from it. “Work” (in the sense of doing necessary things) will always be with us. There is no getting away from it; crops need to be grown, schools built, homes fixed, and so on. No, “work” in this context means any form of labour in which the worker does not control his or her own activity. In other words, **wage labour** in all its many forms. As Kropotkin put it, “the right to work” simply “means the right to be always a wage-slave, a drudge, ruled over and exploited by the middle class of the future” and he contrasted this to the “right to well-being” which meant “the possibility of living like human beings, and of bringing up children to be members of a society better than ours.” [The Conquest of Bread, p. 44]

A society based upon wage labour (i.e. a capitalist society) will result in a society within which the typical worker uses few of their abilities, exercise little or no control over their work because they are governed by a boss during working hours. This has been proved to lower the individual’s self-esteem and feelings of self-worth, as would be expected in any social relationship that denied self-government to workers. Capitalism is marked by an extreme division of labour, particularly between mental labour and physical labour. It reduces the worker to a mere machine operator, following the orders of his or her boss. Therefore, a libertarian that does not support economic liberty (i.e. self-management) is no libertarian at all.

Capitalism bases its rationale for itself on consumption. However, this results in a viewpoint which minimises the importance of the time we spend in productive activity. Anarchists consider that it is essential for individual's to use and develop their unique attributes and capacities in all walks of life, to maximise their powers. Therefore, the idea that "work" should be ignored in favour of consumption is totally mad. Productive activity is an important way of developing our inner-powers and express ourselves; in other words, be creative. Capitalism's emphasis on consumption shows the poverty of that system. As Alexander Berkman argues:

*"We do not live by bread alone. True, existence is not possible without opportunity to satisfy our physical needs. But the gratification of these by no means constitutes all of life. Our present system of disinheriting millions, made the belly the centre of the universe, so to speak. But in a sensible society ... [t]he feelings of human sympathy, of justice and right would have a chance to develop, to be satisfied, to broaden and grow."*  
[ABC of Anarchism, p. 15]

Therefore, capitalism is based on a constant process of alienated consumption, as workers try to find the happiness associated within productive, creative, self-managed activity in a place it does not exist — on the shop shelves. This can partly explain the rise of both mindless consumerism and of religions, as individuals try to find meaning for their lives and happiness, a meaning and happiness frustrated in wage labour and hierarchy.

Capitalism's impoverishment of the individual's spirit is hardly surprising. As William Godwin argued, *"[t]he spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility, and the spirit of fraud, these are the immediate growth of the established administration of property. They are alike hostile to intellectual and moral improvement."* [The Anarchist Reader, p. 131] In other words, any system based in wage labour or hierarchical relationships in the workplace will result in a deadening of the individual and the creation of a "servile" character. This crushing of individuality springs **directly** from what Godwin called *"the third degree of property"* namely *"a system... by which one man enters into the faculty of disposing of the produce of another man's industry"* in other words, capitalism. [Op. Cit., p. 129]

Anarchists desire to change this and create a society based upon freedom in all aspects of life. Hence anarchists desire to abolish work, simply because it restricts the liberty and distorts the individuality of those who have to do it. To quote Emma Goldman:

*"Anarchism aims to strip labour of its deadening, dulling aspect, of its gloom and compulsion. It aims to make work an instrument of joy, of strength, of colour, of real harmony, so that the poorest sort of a man should find in work both recreation and hope."*  
[Anarchism and Other Essays, p. 61]

Anarchists do not think that by getting rid of work we will not have to produce necessary goods and so on. Far from it, an anarchist society *"doesn't mean we have to stop doing things. It does mean creating a new way of life based on play; in other words, a ludic revolution ... a collective adventure in generalised joy and freely interdependent exuberance. Play isn't passive."* [Bob Black, Op. Cit.]

This means that in an anarchist society every effort would be made to reduce boring, unpleasant activity to a minimum and ensure that whatever productive activity is required to be done is

as pleasant as possible and based upon voluntary labour. However, it is important to remember Cornelius Castoriadis point that a *“Socialist society will be able to reduce the length of the working day, and will have to do so, but this will not be the fundamental preoccupation. Its first task will be to ...transform the very nature of work. The problem is not to leave more and more ‘free’ time to individuals — which might well be empty time — so that they may fill it at will with ‘poetry’ or the carving of wood. The problem is to make all time a time of liberty and to allow concrete freedom to find expression in creative activity.”* Essentially, *“the problem is to put poetry into work.”* [**Workers’ Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society**, p. 14 and p. 15]

This is why anarchists desire to abolish “work” (i.e. wage labour), to ensure that whatever “work” (i.e. economic activity) is required to be done is under the direct control of those who do it. In this way it can be liberated and so become a means of self-realisation and not a form of self-negation. In other words, anarchists want to abolish work because *“[l]ife, the art of living, has become a dull formula, flat and inert.”* [A. Berkman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 27] Anarchists want to bring the spontaneity and joy of life back into productive activity and save humanity from the dead hand of capital.

All this does not imply that anarchists think that individuals will not seek to “specialise” in one form of productive activity rather than another. Far from it, people in a free society will pick activities which interest them as the main focal point of their means of self-expression. *“It is evident,”* noted Kropotkin, *“that all men and women cannot equally enjoy the pursuit of scientific work. The variety of inclinations is such that some will find more pleasure in science, some others in art, and other again in some of the numberless branches of the production of wealth.”* This “division of work” is commonplace in humanity and can be seen under capitalism — most children and teenagers pick a specific line of work because they are interested, or at least desire to do a specific kind of work. This natural desire to do what interests you and what you are good at will be encouraged in an anarchist society. As Kropotkin argued, anarchists *“fully recognise the necessity of specialisation of knowledge, but we maintain that specialisation must follow general education, and that general education must be given in science and handicraft alike. To the division of society into brain workers and manual workers we oppose the combination of both kinds of activities ... we advocate the **education integrale** [integral education], or complete education, which means the disappearance of that pernicious division.”* He was aware, however, that both individuals and society would benefit from a diversity of activities and a strong general knowledge. In his words, *“[b]ut whatever the occupations preferred by everyone, everyone will be the more useful in his [or her] branch is he [or she] is in possession of a serious scientific knowledge. And, whosoever he [or she] might be ... he would be the gainer if he spent a part of his life in the workshop or the farm (the workshop **and** the farm), if he were in contact with humanity in its daily work, and had the satisfaction of knowing that he himself discharges his duties as an unprivileged producer of wealth.”* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 186, p. 172 and p. 186]

However, while specialisation would continue, the permanent division of individuals into manual or brain workers would be eliminated. Individuals will manage all aspects of the “work” required (for example, engineers will also take part in self-managing their workplaces), a variety of activities would be encouraged and the strict division of labour of capitalism will be abolished.

In other words, anarchists want to replace the division of labour by the division of work. We must stress that we are not playing with words here. John Crump presents a good summary of the ideas of the Japanese anarchist Hatta Shuzo on this difference:

*“[W]e must recognise the distinction which Hatta made between the ‘division of labour’ ... and the ‘division of work’ ... he did not see anything sinister in the division of work ... On the contrary, Hatta believed that the division of work was a benign and unavoidable feature of any productive process: ‘it goes without saying that within society, whatever the kind of production, there has to be a division of work.’” [Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan, pp. 146–7]*

As Kropotkin argued:

*“while a **temporary** division of functions remains the surest guarantee of success in each separate undertaking, the **permanent** division is doomed to disappear, and to be substituted by a variety of pursuits — intellectual, industrial, and agricultural — corresponding to the different capacities of the individual, as well as to the variety of capacities within every human aggregate.” [Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow, p. 26]*

As an aside, supporters of capitalism argue that **integrated** labour must be more inefficient than **divided** labour as capitalist firms have not introduced it. This is false for numerous reasons.

Firstly, we have to put out the inhuman logic of the assertion. After all, few would argue in favour of slavery if it were, in fact, **more** productive than wage labour but such is the logical conclusion of this argument. If someone did argue that the only reason slavery was not the dominant mode of labour simply because it was inefficient we would consider them as less than human. Simply put, it is a sick ideology which happily sacrifices individuals for the sake of slightly more products. Sadly, that is what many defenders of capitalism do, ultimately, argue for.

Secondly, capitalist firms are not neutral structures but rather a system of hierarchies, with entrenched interests and needs. Managers will only introduce a work technique that maintains their power (and so their profits). As we argue in section J.5.12, while workers’ participation generally see a rise in efficiency managers generally stop the project simply because it undercuts their power by empowering workers who then can fight for a greater slice of the value they produce. So the lack of integrated labour under capitalism simply means that it does not empower management, not that it is less efficient.

Thirdly, the attempts by managers and bosses to introduce “*flexibility*” by eliminating trade unions suggests that integration is more efficient. After all, one of the major complaints directed towards trade union contracts were that they explicitly documented what workers could and could not do. For example, union members would refuse to do work which was outside their agreed job descriptions. This is usually classed as an example of the evil of regulations.

However, if we look at it from the viewpoint of contract, it exposes the inefficiency and inflexibility of contract as a means of co-operation. After all, what is this refusal actually mean? It means that the worker refuses to do what is not specified in his or her contract! Their job description indicates what they have been contracted to do and anything else has not been agreed upon in advance. It specifies the division of labour in a workplace by means of a contract between worker and boss.

While being a wonderful example of a well-designed contract, managers discovered that they could not operate their workplaces because of them. Rather, they needed a general “*do what you are told*” contract (which of course is hardly an example of contract reducing authority)



and such a contract **integrates** numerous work tasks into one. The managers diatribe against union contracts suggests that production needs some form of integrated labour to actually work (as well as showing the hypocrisy of the labour contract under capitalism as labour “*flexibility*” simply means labour “*commodification*” — a machine does not question what its used for, the ideal for labour under capitalism is a similar unquestioning nature for labour). The union job description indicates that not only is the contract not applicable to the capitalist workplace but that production needs the integration of labour while demanding a division of work. As Cornelius Caastoriadis argued:

*“Modern production has destroyed many traditional professional qualifications. It has created automatic or semi-automatic machines. It has thereby itself demolished its own traditional framework for the industrial division of labour. It has given birth to a universal worker who is capable, after a relatively short apprenticeship, of using most machines. Once one gets beyond its class aspects, the ‘posting’ of workers to particular jobs in a big modern factory corresponds less and less to a genuine division of **labour** and more and more to a simple division of tasks. Workers are not allocated to given areas of the productive process and then riveted to them because their ‘occupational skills’ invariably correspond to the ‘skills required’ by management. They are placed there ... just because a particular vacancy happened to exist.”* [Political and Social Writings, vol. 2, p. 117]

Of course, the other option is to get rid of capitalism by self-management. If workers managed their own time and labour, they would have no reason to say “*that is not my job*” as they have no contract with someone who tells them what to do. Similarly, the process of labour integration forced upon the worker would be freely accepted and a task freely accepted always produces superior results than one imposed by coercion (or its threat). This means that “[u]nder socialism, factories would have no reason to accept the artificially rigid division of labour now prevailing. There will be every reason to encourage a rotation of workers **between shops and departments** and between production and office areas.” The “residues of capitalism’s division of labour gradually will have to be eliminated” as “socialist society cannot survive unless it demolishes this division.” [Ibid.]

Division of tasks (or work) will replace division of labour in a free society. “The main subject of social economy,” argued Kropotkin, is “the **economy** of energy required for the satisfaction of **human needs**.” These needs obviously expressed both the needs of the producers for empowering and interesting work and their need for a healthy and balanced environment. Thus Kropotkin discussed the “advantages” which could be “derive[d] from a combination of industrial pursuits with intensive agriculture, and of brain work with manual work.” The “greatest sum total of well-being can be obtained when a variety of agricultural, industrial and intellectual pursuits are combined in each community; and that man [and woman] shows his best when he is in a position to apply his usually-varied capacities to several pursuits in the farm, the workshop, the factory, the study or the studio, instead of being riveted for life to one of these pursuits only.” [Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow, pp. 17–8]

By replacing the division of labour with the division of work, productive activity can be transformed into an enjoyable task (or series of tasks). By integrating labour, all the capacities of the producer can be expressed so eliminating a major source of alienation and unhappiness in society.

One last point on the abolition of work. May 1<sup>st</sup> — International Workers’ Day — which, as we discussed in section A.5.2, was created to commemorate the Chicago Anarchist Martyrs. Anarchists then, as now, think that it should be celebrated by strike action and mass demonstrations. In other words, for anarchists, International Workers’ Day should be a non-work day! That sums up the anarchist position to work nicely — that the celebration of workers’ day should be based on the rejection of work.

### I.4.3 How do anarchists intend to abolish work?

Basically by workers’ self-management of production and community control of the means of production. It is hardly in the interests of those who do the actual “work” to have bad working conditions, boring, repetitive labour, and so on. Therefore, a key aspect of the liberation from work is to create a self-managed society, “a society in which everyone has equal means to develop and that all are or can be at the time intellectual and manual workers, and the only differences remaining between men [and women] are those which stem from the natural diversity of aptitudes, and that all jobs, all functions, give an equal right to the enjoyment of social possibilities.” [Errico Malatesta, *Anarchy*, p. 40]

Essential to this task is decentralisation and the use of appropriate technology. Decentralisation is important to ensure that those who do work can determine how to liberate it. A decentralised system will ensure that ordinary people can identify areas for technological innovation, and so understand the need to get rid of certain kinds of work. Unless ordinary people understand and control the introduction of technology, then they will never be fully aware of the benefits of technology and resist advances which may be in their best interests to introduce. This is the full meaning of appropriate technology, namely the use of technology which those most affected feel to be best in a given situation. Such technology may or may not be technologically “advanced” but it will be of the kind which ordinary people can understand and, most importantly, control.

The potential for rational use of technology can be seen from capitalism. Under capitalism, technology is used to increase profits, to expand the economy, not to liberate **all** individuals from useless toil (it does, of course, liberate a few from such “activity”). As Ted Trainer argues:

*“Two figures drive the point home. In the long term, productivity (i.e. output per hour of work) increases at about 2 percent per annum, meaning that each 35 years we could cut the work week by half while producing as much as we were at the beginning. A number of OECD ... countries could actually have cut from a five-day work week to around a one-day work week in the last 25 years while maintaining their output at the same level. In this economy we must therefore double the annual amount we consume per person every 35 years just to prevent unemployment from rising and to avoid reduction in outlets available to soak up investable capital.*

*“Second, according to the US Bureau for Mines, the amount of capital per person available for investment in the United States will increase at 3.6 percent per annum (i.e. will double in 20-year intervals). This indicates that unless Americans double the volume of goods and services they consume every 20 years, their economy will be in serious difficulties*

*“Hence the ceaseless and increasing pressure to find more business opportunities”*  
[“What is Development”, p 57–90, *Society and Nature*, Issue No. 7, p. 49]

And, remember, these figures include production in many areas of the economy that would not exist in a free society — state and capitalist bureaucracy, weapons production, and so on. In addition, it does not take into account the labour of those who do not actually produce anything useful and so the level of production for useful goods would be higher than Trainer indicates. In addition, goods will be built to last and so much production will become sensible and not governed by an insane desire to maximise profits at the expense of everything else.

The decentralisation of power will ensure that self-management becomes universal. This will see the end of division of labour as mental and physical work becomes unified and those who do the work also manage it. This will allow *“the free exercise of **all** the faculties of man”* both inside and outside “work.” [Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p. 148] The aim of such a development would be to turn productive activity, as far as possible, into an enjoyable experience. In the words of Murray Bookchin it is the **quality** and **nature** of the work process that counts:

*“If workers’ councils and workers’ management of production do not transform the work into a joyful activity, free time into a marvellous experience, and the workplace into a community, then they remain merely formal structures, in fact, **class** structures. They perpetuate the limitations of the proletariat as a product of bourgeois social conditions. Indeed, no movement that raises the demand for workers’ councils can be regarded as revolutionary unless it tries to promote sweeping transformations in the environment of the work place.”* [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 146]

Work will become, primarily, the expression of a person’s pleasure in what they are doing and become like an art — an expression of their creativity and individuality. Work as an art will become expressed in the workplace as well as the work process, with workplaces transformed and integrated into the local community and environment (see section I.4.15 — *“What will the workplace of tomorrow be like?”*). This will obviously apply to work conducted in the home as well, otherwise the *“revolution, intoxicated with the beautiful words, Liberty, Equality, Solidarity, would not be a revolution if it maintained slavery at home. Half [of] humanity subjected to the slavery of the hearth would still have to rebel against the other half.”* [Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, p. 128]

In other words, anarchists desire *“to combine the best part (in fact, the only good part) of work — the production of use-values — with the best of play ... its freedom and its fun, its voluntariness and its intrinsic gratification”* — the transformation of what economists call production into productive play. [Bob Black, *Smokestack Lightning*]

In addition, a decentralised system will build up a sense of community and trust between individuals and ensure the creation of an ethical economy, one based on interactions between individuals and not commodities caught in the flux of market forces. This ideal of a **“moral economy”** can be seen in both social anarchists desire for the end of the market system and the individualists insistence that *“cost be the limit of price.”* Anarchists recognise that the *“traditional local market ... is essentially different from the market as it developed in modern capitalism. Bartering on a local market offered an opportunity to meet for the purpose of exchanging commodities. Producers and customers became acquainted; they were relatively small groups ... The modern market is no*

*longer a meeting place but a mechanism characterised by abstract and impersonal demand. One produces for this market, not for a known circle of customers; its verdict is based on laws of supply and demand.” [Man for Himself, pp. 67–68]*

Anarchists reject the capitalist notion that economic activity should be based on maximising profit as the be all and end all of such work (buying and selling on the “*impersonal market*”). As markets only work through people, individuals, who buy and sell (but, in the end, control them – in the “*free market*” only the market is free) this means that for the market to be “*impersonal*” as it is in capitalism it implies that those involved have to be unconcerned about personalities, including their own. Profit, not ethics, is what counts. The “*impersonal*” market suggests individuals who act in an impersonal, and so unethical, manner. The morality of what they produce, why they produce it and how they produce it is irrelevant, as long as profits are produced.

Instead, anarchists consider economic activity as an expression of the human spirit, an expression of the innate human need to express ourselves and to create. Capitalism distorts these needs and makes economic activity a deadening experience by the division of labour and hierarchy. Anarchists think that “*industry is not an end in itself, but should only be a means to ensure to man his material subsistence and to make accessible to him the blessings of a higher intellectual culture. Where industry is everything and man is nothing begins the realm of a ruthless economic despotism whose workings are no less disastrous than those of any political despotism. The two mutually augment one another, and they are fed from the same source.*” [Rudolph Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, p. 11]

Anarchists think that a decentralised social system will allow “*work*” to be abolished and economic activity humanised and made a means to an end (namely producing useful things and liberated individuals). This would be achieved by, as Rudolf Rocker puts it, the “*alliance of free groups of men and women based on co-operative labour and a planned administration of things in the interest of the community.*” [Op. Cit., p. 62]

However, as things are produced by people, it could be suggested that a “*planned administration of things*” implies a “*planned administration of people*” (although few who suggest this danger apply it to capitalist firms which are like mini-centrally planned states). This objection is false simply because anarchism aims “*to reconstruct the economic life of the peoples from the ground up and build it up anew in the spirit of Socialism*” and, moreover, “*only the producers themselves are fitted for this task, since they are the only value-creating element in society out of which a new future can arise.*” Such a reconstructed economic life would be based on anarchist principles, that is “*based on the principles of federalism, a free combination from below upwards, putting the right of self-determination of every member above everything else and recognising only the organic agreement of all on the basis of like interests and common convictions.*” [Op. Cit., p. 61 and p. 53]

In other words, those who produce also administer and so govern themselves in free association (and it should be pointed out that any group of individuals in association will make “*plans*” and “*plan,*” the important question is who does the planning and who does the work. Only in anarchy are both functions united into the same people). Rocker emphasises this point when he writes that:

*“Anarcho-syndicalists are convinced that a Socialist economic order cannot be created by the decrees and statutes of a government, but only by the solidaric collaboration of the workers with hand and brain in each special branch of production; that is, through the taking over of the management of all plants by the producers themselves under*

*such form that the separate groups, plants, and branches of industry are independent members of the general economic organism and systematically carry on production and the distribution of the products in the interest of the community on the basis of free mutual agreements.” [Op. Cit., p. 55]*

In other words, the “*planned administration of things*” would be done by the producers **themselves**, in independent groupings. This would likely take the form (as we indicated in section I.3) of confederations of syndicates who communicate information between themselves and respond to changes in the production and distribution of products by increasing or decreasing the required means of production in a co-operative (i.e. “*planned*”) fashion. No “*central planning*” or “*central planners*” governing the economy, just workers co-operating together as equals (as Kropotkin argued, free socialism “*must result from thousands of separate local actions, all directed towards the same aim. It cannot be dictated by a central body: it must result from the numberless local needs and wants.*” [Act for Yourselves, p. 54]).

Therefore, an anarchist society would abolish work by ensuring that those who do the work actually control it. They would do so in a network of self-managed associations, a society “*composed of a number of societies banded together for everything that demands a common effort: federations of producers for all kinds of production, of societies for consumption ... All these groups will unite their efforts through mutual agreement ... Personal initiative will be encouraged and every tendency to uniformity and centralisation combated.*” [Peter Kropotkin, quoted by Buber in Paths in Utopia, p. 42]

In response to consumption patterns, syndicates will have to expand or reduce production and will have to attract volunteers to do the necessary work. The very basis of free association will ensure the abolition of work, as individuals will apply for “*work*” they enjoy doing and so would be interested in reducing “*work*” they did not want to do to a minimum. Such a decentralisation of power would unleash a wealth of innovation and ensure that unpleasant work be minimised and fairly shared (see section I.4.13).

Now, any form of association requires agreement. Therefore, even a society based on the communist-anarchist maxim “*from each according to their ability, to each according to their need*” will need to make agreements in order to ensure co-operative ventures succeed. In other words, members of a co-operative commonwealth would have to make and keep to their agreements between themselves. This means that the members of a syndicate would agree joint starting and finishing times, require notice if individuals want to change “*jobs*” and so on within and between syndicates. Any joint effort requires some degree of co-operation and agreement. Moreover, between syndicates, an agreement would be reached (in all likelihood) that determined the minimum working hours required by all members of society able to work. How that minimum was actually organised would vary between workplace and commune, with work times, flexi-time, job rotation and so on determined by each syndicate (for example, one syndicate may work 8 hours a day for 2 days, another 4 hours a day for 4 days, one may use flexi-time, another more rigid starting and stopping times).

As Kropotkin argued, an anarchist-communist society would be based upon the following kind of “*contract*” between its members:

*“We undertake to give you the use of our houses, stores, streets, means of transport, schools, museums, etc., on condition that, from twenty to forty-five or fifty years of*

*age, you consecrate four or five hours a day to some work recognised as necessary to existence. Choose yourself the producing group which you wish to join, or organise a new group, provided that it will undertake to produce necessities. And as for the remainder of your time, combine together with whomsoever you like, for recreation, art, or science, according to the bent of your taste ... Twelve or fifteen hundred hours of work a year ... is all we ask of you. For that amount of work we guarantee to you the free use of all that these groups produce, or will produce.” [The Conquest of Bread, pp. 153–4]*

With such work “*necessary to existence*” being recognised by individuals and expressed by demand for labour from productive syndicates. It is, of course, up to the individual to decide which work he or she desires to perform from the positions available in the various associations in existence. A union card would be the means by which work hours would be recorded and access to the common wealth of society ensured. And, of course, individuals and groups are free to work alone and exchange the produce of their labour with others, including the confederated syndicates, if they so desired. An anarchist society will be as flexible as possible.

Therefore, we can imagine a social anarchist society being based on two basic arrangements – firstly, an agreed minimum working week of, say, 20 hours, in a syndicate of your choice, plus any amount of hours doing “*work*” which you feel like doing – for example, art, experimentation, DIY, playing music, composing, gardening and so on. The aim of technological progress would be to reduce the basic working week more and more until the very concept of necessary “*work*” and free time enjoyments is abolished. In addition, in work considered dangerous or unwanted, then volunteers could trade doing a few hours of such activity for more free time (see section I.4.13 for more on this).

It can be said that this sort of agreement is a restriction of liberty because it is “*man-made*” (as opposed to the “*natural law*” of “*supply and demand*”). This is a common defence of the free market by individualist anarchists against anarcho-communism, for example. However, while in theory individualist-anarchists can claim that in their vision of society, they don’t care when, where, or how a person earns a living, as long as they are not invasive about it the fact is that any economy is based on interactions between individuals. The law of “*supply and demand*” easily, and often, makes a mockery of the ideas that individuals can work as long as they like – usually they end up working as long as required by market forces (i.e. the actions of other individuals, but turned into a force outwith their control, see section I.1.3). This means that individuals do not work as long as they like, but as long as they have to in order to survive. Knowing that “*market forces*” is the cause of long hours of work hardly makes them any nicer.

And it seems strange to the communist-anarchist that certain free agreements made between equals can be considered authoritarian while others are not. The individualist-anarchist argument that social co-operation to reduce labour is “*authoritarian*” while agreements between individuals on the market are not seems illogical to social anarchists. They cannot see how it is better for individuals to be pressured into working longer than they desire by “*invisible hands*” than to come to an arrangement with others to manage their own affairs to maximise their free time.

Therefore, free agreement between free and equal individuals is considered the key to abolishing work, based upon decentralisation of power and the use of appropriate technology.

## I.4.4 What economic decision making criteria could be used in anarchy?

Firstly, it should be noted that anarchists do not have any set idea about the answer to this question. Most anarchists are communists, desiring to see the end of money, but that does not mean they want to impose communism onto people. Far from it, communism can only be truly libertarian if it is organised from the bottom up. So, anarchists would agree with Kropotkin that it is a case of not “*determining in advance what form of distribution the producers should accept in their different groups — whether the communist solution, or labour checks, or equal salaries, or any other method*” while considering a given solution best in their opinion. [Kropotkin’s *Revolutionary Pamphlets*, p. 166] Free experiment is a key aspect of anarchism.

While certain anarchists have certain preferences on the social system they want to live in and so argue for that, they are aware that objective circumstances and social desires will determine what is introduced during a revolution (for example, while Kropotkin was a communist-anarchist and considered it essential that a revolution proceed towards communism as quickly as possible, he was aware that it was unlikely it would be introduced immediately — see section I.2.2 for details).

However, we will outline some possible means of economic decision making criteria as this question is an important one (it is the crux of the “*libertarian socialism is impossible*” argument, for example). Therefore, we will indicate what possible solutions exist in different forms of anarchism.

In a mutualist or collectivist system, the answer is easy. Prices will exist and be used as a means of making decisions. Mutualism will be more market orientated than collectivism, with collectivism being based on confederations of collectives to respond to changes in demand (i.e. to determine investment decisions and ensure that supply is kept in line with demand). Mutualism, with its system of market based distribution around a network of co-operatives and mutual banks, does not really need a further discussion as its basic operations are the same as in any non-capitalist market system. Collectivism and communism will have to be discussed in more detail. However, all systems are based on workers’ self-management and so the individuals directly affected make the decisions concerning what to produce, when to do it, and how to do it. In this way workers retain control of the product of their labour. It is the social context of these decisions and what criteria workers use to make their decisions that differ between anarchist schools of thought.

Although collectivism promotes the greatest autonomy for worker associations, it should not be confused with a market economy as advocated by supporters of mutualism (particularly in its Individualist form). The goods produced by the collectivised factories and workshops are exchanged not according to highest price that can be wrung from consumers, but according to their actual production costs. The determination of these honest prices is to be by a “*Bank of Exchange*” in each community (obviously an idea borrowed from Proudhon). These “*Banks*” would represent the various producer confederations and consumer/citizen groups in the community and would seek to negotiate these “*honest*” prices (which would, in all likelihood, include “*hidden*” costs like pollution). These agreements would be subject to ratification by the assemblies of those involved.

As Guillaume puts it “*the value of the commodities having been established in advance by a contractual agreement between the regional co-operative federations [i.e. confederations of syndicates]*”

*and the various communes, who will also furnish statistics to the Banks of Exchange. The Bank of Exchange will remit to the producers negotiable vouchers representing the value of their products; these vouchers will be accepted throughout the territory included in the federation of communes.*” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 366] These vouchers would be related to hours worked, for example, and when used as a guide for investment decisions could be supplemented with cost-benefit analysis of the kind possibly used in a communist-anarchist society (see below).

Although this scheme bears a strong resemblance to Proudhonian “People’s Banks,” it should be noted that the Banks of Exchange, along with a “Communal Statistical Commission,” are intended to have a “*planning*” function as well to ensure that supply meets demand. This does not imply a “*command*” economy, but simple book keeping for “*each Bank of Exchange makes sure in advance that these products are in demand [in order to risk] nothing by immediately issuing payment vouchers to the producers.*” [Op. Cit., p. 367] The workers syndicates would still determine what orders to produce and each commune would be free to choose its suppliers.

As will be discussed in more depth later (see section I.4.8) information about consumption patterns will be recorded and used by workers to inform their production and investment decisions. In addition, we can imagine that production syndicates would encourage communes as well as consumer groups and co-operatives to participate in making these decisions. This would ensure that produced goods reflect consumer needs. Moreover, as conditions permit, the exchange functions of the communal “*banks*” would (in all likelihood) be gradually replaced by the distribution of goods “*in accordance with the needs of the consumers.*” In other words, most supporters of collectivist anarchism see it as a temporary measure before anarcho-communism could develop.

Communist anarchism would be similar to collectivism, i.e. a system of confederations of collectives, communes and distribution centres (“*Communal stores*”). However, in an anarcho-communist system, prices are not used. How will economic decision making be done? One possible solution is as follows:

*“As to decisions involving choices of a general nature, such as what forms of energy to use, which of two or more materials to employ to produce a particular good, whether to build a new factory, there is a ... technique ... that could be [used] ... ‘cost-benefit analysis’ ... in socialism a points scheme for attributing relative importance to the various relevant considerations could be used ... The points attributed to these considerations would be subjective, in the sense that this would depend on a deliberate social decision rather than some objective standard, but this is the case even under capitalism when a monetary value has to be attributed to some such ‘cost’ or ‘benefit’ ... In the sense that one of the aims of socialism is precisely to rescue humankind from the capitalist fixation with production time/money, cost-benefit analyses, as a means of taking into account other factors, could therefore be said to be more appropriate for use in socialism than under capitalism. Using points systems to attribute relative importance in this way would not be to recreate some universal unit of evaluation and calculation, but simply to employ a technique to facilitate decision-making in particular concrete cases.”* [Adam Buick and John Crump, *State Capitalism: The Wages System Under New Management*, pp. 138–139]

This points system would be the means by which producers and consumers would be able to determine whether the use of a particular good is efficient or not. Unlike prices, this cost-benefit



analysis system would ensure that production and consumption reflects social and ecological costs, awareness and priorities. Moreover, this analysis would be a **guide** to decision making and not a replacement of human decision making and evaluation. As Lewis Mumford argues:

*“it is plan that in the decision as to whether to build a bridge or a tunnel there is a human question that should outweigh the question of cheapness or mechanical feasibility: namely the number of lives that will be lost in the actual building or the advisability of condemning a certain number of men [and women] to spend their entire working days underground supervising tunnel traffic. As soon as our thought ceases to be automatically conditioned by the mine, such questions become important. Similarly the social choice between silk and rayon is not one that can be made simply on the different costs of production, or the difference in quality between the fibres themselves: there also remains, to be integrated in the decision, the question as to difference in working-pleasure between tending silkworms and assisting in rayon production. What the product contributes to the labourer is just as important as what the worker contributes to the product. A well-managed society might alter the process of motor car assemblage, at some loss of speed and cheapness, in order to produce a more interesting routine for the worker: similarly, it would either go to the expense of equipping dry-process cement making plants with dust removers — or replace the product itself with a less noxious substitute. When none of these alternatives was available, it would drastically reduce the demand itself to the lowest possible level.”* [The Future of Technics and Civilisation, pp. 160–1]

Obviously, today, we would include ecological issues as well as human ones. However Mumford’s argument is correct. Any decision making process which disregards the quality of work or the effect on the human and natural environment is a deranged process. However, this is how capitalism operates, with the market rewarding capitalists and managers who introduce de-humanising and ecologically harmful practices. Indeed, so biased against labour and the environment is capitalism that economists and pro-capitalists argue that reducing “*efficiency*” by such social concerns is actually **harmful** to an economy, which is a total reversal of common sense and human feelings (after all, surely the economy should satisfy human needs and not sacrifice those needs to the economy?). The argument is that consumption would suffer as resources (human and material) would be diverted from more “*efficient*” productive activities and so reduce, over all, our economic well-being. What this argument ignores is that consumption does not exist in isolation from the rest of the economy. What we want to consume is conditioned, in part, by the sort of person we are and that is influenced by the kind of work we do, the kinds of social relationships we have, whether we are happy with our work and life, and so on. If our work is alienating and of low quality, then so will our consumption decisions. If our work is subject to hierarchical control and servile in nature then we cannot expect our consumption decisions of totally rational — indeed they may become an attempt to find happiness via shopping, a self-defeating activity as consumption cannot solve a problem created in production. Thus rampant consumerism may be the result of capitalist “*efficiency*” and so the objection against socially aware production is question begging.

Of course, as well as absolute scarcity, prices under capitalism also reflect relative scarcity (while in the long term, market prices tend towards their production price plus a mark-up based on the degree of monopoly in a market, in the short term prices can change as a result of changes

in supply and demand). How a communist society could take into account such short term changes and communicate them through out the economy is discussed in section I.4.5 (“What about ‘*supply and demand*?’”). Needless to say, production and investment decisions based upon such cost-benefit analysis would take into account the current production situation and so the relative scarcity of specific goods.

Therefore, a communist-anarchist society would be based around a network of syndicates who communicate information between each other. Instead of the “*price*” being communicated between workplaces as in capitalism, actual physical data will be sent. This data is a summary of the use values of the good (for example labour time and energy used to produce it, pollution details, relative scarcity and so forth). With this information a cost-benefit analysis will be conducted to determine which good will be best to use in a given situation based upon mutually agreed common values. The data for a given workplace could be compared to the industry as a whole (as confederations of syndicates would gather and produce such information – see section I.3.5) in order to determine whether a specific workplace will efficiently produce the required goods (this system has the additional advantage of indicating which workplaces require investment to bring them in line, or improve upon, the industrial average in terms of working conditions, hours worked and so on). In addition, common rules of thumb would possibly be agreed, such as agreements not to use scarce materials unless there is no alternative (either ones that use a lot of labour, energy and time to produce or those whose demand is currently exceeding supply capacity).

Similarly, when ordering goods, the syndicate, commune or individual involved will have to inform the syndicate why it is required in order to allow the syndicate to determine if they desire to produce the good and to enable them to prioritise the orders they receive. In this way, resource use can be guided by social considerations and “*unreasonable*” requests ignored (for example, if an individual “*needs*” a ship-builders syndicate to build a ship for his personal use, the ship-builders may not “*need*” to build it and instead builds ships for the transportation of freight). However, in almost all cases of individual consumption, no such information will be needed as communal stores would order consumer goods in bulk as they do now. Hence the economy would be a vast network of co-operating individuals and workplaces and the dispersed knowledge which exists within any society can be put to good effect (**better** effect than under capitalism because it does not hide social and ecological costs in the way market prices do and co-operation will eliminate the business cycle and its resulting social problems).

Therefore, production units in a social anarchist society, by virtue of their autonomy within association, are aware of what is socially useful for them to produce and, by virtue of their links with communes, also aware of the social (human and ecological) cost of the resources they need to produce it. They can combine this knowledge, reflecting overall social priorities, with their local knowledge of the detailed circumstances of their workplaces and communities to decide how they can best use their productive capacity. In this way the division of knowledge within society can be used by the syndicates effectively as well as overcoming the restrictions within knowledge communication imposed by the price mechanism.

Moreover, production units, by their association within confederations (or Guilds) ensure that there is effective communication between them. This results in a process of negotiated co-ordination between equals (i.e. horizontal links and agreements) for major investment decisions, thus bringing together supply and demand and allowing the plans of the various units to be co-ordinated. By this process of co-operation, production units can reduce duplicating effort and

so reduce the waste associated with over-investment (and so the irrationalities of booms and slumps associated with the price mechanism, which does not provide sufficient information to allow workplaces to efficiently co-ordinate their plans — see section C.7.2).

Needless to say, this issue is related to the “*socialist calculation*” issue we discussed in section I.1.2. To clarify our ideas, we shall present an example.

Consider two production processes. Method A requires 70 tons of steel and 60 tons of concrete while Method B requires 60 tons of steel and 70 tons of concrete. Which method should be preferred? One of the methods will be more economical in terms of leaving more resources available for other uses than the other but in order to establish which we need to compare the relevant quantities.

Supporters of capitalism argue that only prices can supply the necessary information as they are heterogeneous quantities. Both steel and concrete have a price (say \$10 per ton for steel and \$5 per ton for concrete). The method to choose is clearly B as it has a lower price than A (\$950 for B compared to \$1000 for A). However, this does not actually tell us whether B is the more economical method of production in terms of minimising waste and resource use, it just tells us which costs less in terms of money.

Why is this? Simply because, as we argued in section I.1.2, prices do not totally reflect social, economic and ecological costs. They are influenced by market power, for example, and produce externalities, environmental and health costs which are not reflected in the price. Indeed, passing on costs in the form of externalities and inhuman working conditions actually are rewarded in the market as it allows the company so doing to cut their prices. As far as market power goes, this has a massive influence on prices, directly in terms of prices charged and indirectly in terms of wages and conditions of workers. Due to natural barriers to entry (see section C.4), prices are maintained artificially high by the market power of big business. For example, steel could, in fact cost \$5 per ton to produce but market power allows the company to charge \$10 per ton,

Wage costs are, again, determined by the bargaining power of labour and so do not reflect the real costs in terms of health, personality and alienation the workers experience. They may be working in unhealthy conditions simply to get by, with unemployment or job insecurity hindering their attempts to improve their conditions or find a new job. Nor are the social and individual costs of hierarchy and alienation factored into the price, quite the reverse. It seems ironic that an economy which its defenders claim meets human needs (as expressed by money, of course) totally ignores individuals in the workplace, the place they spend most of their waking hours in adult life.

So the relative costs of each production method have to be evaluated but price does not, indeed cannot, provide a real indication of whether a method is economical in the sense of actually minimising resource use. Prices do reflect some of these costs, of course, but filtered through the effects of market power, hierarchy and externalities they become less and less accurate. Unless you take the term “*economical*” to simply mean “*has the least cost in price*” rather than the sensible “*has the least cost in resource use, ecological impact and human pain*” you have to accept that the price mechanism is not a great indicator of economic use.

What is the alternative? Obviously the exact details will be worked out in practice by the members of a free society, but we can suggest a few ideas based on our comments above.

When evaluating production methods we need to take into account as many social and ecological costs as possible and these have to be evaluated. Which costs will be taken into account, of course, be decided by those involved, as will how important they are relative to each other

(i.e. how they are weighted). Moreover, it is likely that they will factor in the desirability of the work performed to indicate the potential waste in human time involved in production (see section I.4.13 for a discussion of how the desirability of productive activity could be indicated in an anarchist society). The logic behind this is simple, a resource which people like to produce will be a better use of the scarce resource of an individual's time than one people hate producing.

So, for example, steel may take 3 person hours to produce one ton, produce 200 cubic metres of waste gas, 2000 kilo-joules of energy, and has excellent working conditions. Concrete, on the other hand, may take 4 person hours to produce one ton, produce 300 cubic metres of waste gas, uses 1000 kilo-joules of energy and has dangerous working conditions due to dust. What would be the best method? Assuming that each factor is weighted the same, then obviously Method A is the better method as it produces the least ecological impact and has the safest working environment – the higher energy cost is offset by the other, more important, factors.

What factors to take into account and how to weigh them in the decision making process will be evaluated constantly and reviewed so to ensure that it reflects real costs and social concerns. Moreover, simply accounting tools can be created (as a spreadsheet or computer programme) that takes the decided factors as inputs and returns a cost benefit analysis of the choices available.

Therefore, the claim that communism cannot evaluate different production methods due to lack of prices is inaccurate. Indeed, a look at the actual capitalist market – marked as it is by differences in bargaining and market power, externalities and wage labour – soon shows that the claims that prices accurately reflect costs is simply not accurate.

One final point on this subject. As social anarchists consider it important to encourage all to participate in the decisions that affect their lives, it would be the role of communal confederations to determine the relative points value of given inputs and outputs. In this way, all individuals in a community determine how their society develops, so ensuring that economic activity is responsible to social needs and takes into account the desires of everyone affected by production. In this way the problems associated with the “*Isolation Paradox*” (see section B.6) can be overcome and so consumption and production can be harmonised with the needs of individuals as members of society and the environment they live in.

### I.4.5 What about “*supply and demand*”?

Anarchists do not ignore the facts of life, namely that at a given moment there is so much of a certain good produced and so much of it is desired to be consumed or used. Neither do we deny that different individuals have different interests and tastes. However, this is not what is usually meant by “*supply and demand*.” Often in general economic debate, this formula is given a certain mythical quality which ignores the underlying realities which it reflects as well as some unwholesome implications of the theory. So, before discussing “*supply and demand*” in an anarchist society, it is worthwhile to make a few points about the “*law of supply and demand*” in general.

Firstly, as E.P. Thompson argues, “*supply and demand*” promotes “*the notion that high prices were a (painful) remedy for dearth, in drawing supplies to the afflicted region of scarcity. But what draws supply are not high prices but sufficient money in their purses to pay high prices. A characteristic phenomenon in times of dearth is that it generates unemployment and empty purses; in purchasing necessities at inflated prices people cease to be able to buy inessentials [causing un-*

employment] ... Hence the number of those able to pay the inflated prices declines in the afflicted regions, and food may be exported to neighbouring, less afflicted, regions where employment is holding up and consumers still have money with which to pay. In this sequence, high prices can actually withdraw supply from the most afflicted area.” [Customs in Common, pp. 283–4]

Therefore “the law of supply and demand” may not be the “most efficient” means of distribution in a society based on inequality. This is clearly reflected in the “rationing” by purse which this system is based on. While in the economics books, price is the means by which scarce resources are “rationed” in reality this creates many errors. Adam Smith argued that high prices discourage consumption, putting “everybody more or less, but particularly the inferior ranks of people, upon thrift and good management.” [cited by Thompson, Op. Cit., p. 284] However, as Thompson notes, “[h]owever persuasive the metaphor, there is an elision of the real relationships assigned by price, which suggests...ideological sleight-of-mind. Rationing by price does not allocate resources equally among those in need; it reserves the supply to those who can pay the price and excludes those who can’t...The raising of prices during dearth could ‘ration’ them [the poor] out of the market altogether.” [Op. Cit., p. 285]

In other words, the market cannot be isolated and abstracted from the network of political, social and legal relations within which it is situated. This means that all that “supply and demand” tells us is that those with money can demand more, and be supplied with more, than those without. Whether this is the “most efficient” result for society cannot be determined (unless, of course, you assume that rich people are more valuable than working class ones because they are rich). This has an obvious effect on production, with “effective demand” twisting economic activity. As Chomsky notes, “[t]hose who have more money tend to consume more, for obvious reasons. So consumption is skewed towards luxuries for the rich, rather than necessities for the poor.” George Barrett brings home of the evil of such a “skewed” form of production:

*“To-day the scramble is to compete for the greatest profits. If there is more profit to be made in satisfying my lady’s passing whim than there is in feeding hungry children, then competition brings us in feverish haste to supply the former, whilst cold charity or the poor law can supply the latter, or leave it unsupplied, just as it feels disposed. That is how it works out.”* [Objections to Anarchism]

Therefore, as far as “supply and demand” is concerned, anarchists are well aware of the need to create and distribute necessary goods to those who require them. This, however, cannot be achieved under capitalism. In effect, supply and demand under capitalism results in those with most money determining what is an “efficient” allocation of resources for if financial profit is the sole consideration for resource allocation, then the wealthy can outbid the poor and ensure the highest returns. The less wealthy can do without.

However, the question remains of how, in an anarchist society, do you know that valuable labour and materials might be better employed elsewhere? How do workers judge which tools are most appropriate? How do they decide among different materials if they all meet the technical specifications? How important are some goods than others? How important is cellophane compared to vacuum-cleaner bags?

It is answers like this that the supporters of the market claim that their system answers. However, as indicated, it does answer them in irrational and dehumanising ways under capitalism but the question is: can anarchism answer them? Yes, although the manner in which this is

done varies between anarchist threads. In a mutualist economy, based on independent and co-operative labour, differences in wealth would be vastly reduced, so ensuring that irrational aspects of the market that exist within capitalism would be minimised. The workings of supply and demand would provide a more just result than under the current system.

However, collectivist, syndicalist and communist anarchists reject the market. This rejection often implies, to some, central planning. As the market socialist David Schweickart puts it, “[i]f profit considerations do not dictate resource usage and production techniques, then central direction must do so. If profit is not the goal of a productive organisation, then physical output (use values) must be.” [Against Capitalism, p. 86]

However, Schweickart is wrong. Horizontal links need not be market based and co-operation between individuals and groups need not be hierarchical. What is implied in this comment is that there is just two ways to relate to others – namely, by bribery or by authority. In other words, either by prostitution (purely by cash) or by hierarchy (the way of the state, the army or capitalist workplace). But people relate to each other in other ways, such as friendship, love, solidarity, mutual aid and so on. Thus you can help or associate with others without having to be ordered to do so or by being paid cash to do so – we do so all the time. You can work together because by so doing you benefit yourself and the other person. This is the real communist way, that of mutual aid and free agreement.

So Schweickart is ignoring the vast majority of relations in any society. For example, love/attraction is a horizontal link between two autonomous individuals and profit considerations do not enter into the relationship. Thus anarchists argue that Schweickart’s argument is flawed as it fails to recognise that resource usage and production techniques can be organised in terms of human need and free agreement between economic actors, without profits or central command. This system does not mean that we all have to love each other (an impossible wish). Rather, it means that we recognise that by voluntarily co-operating as equals we ensure that we remain free individuals and that we can gain the advantages of sharing resources and work (for example, a reduced working day and week, self-managed work in safe and hygienic working conditions and a free selection of the product of a whole society). In other words, a self-interest which exceeds the narrow and impoverished “egotism” of capitalist society. In the words of John O’Neil:

*“[F]or it is the institutions themselves that define what counts as one’s interests. In particular, the market encourages egoism, not primarily because it encourages an individual to be ‘self-interested’ – it would be unrealistic not to expect individuals to act for the greater part in a ‘self-interested’ manner – but rather because it defines an individual’s interests in a particularly narrow fashion, most notably in terms of possession of certain material goods. In consequence, where market mechanism enter a particular sphere of life, the pursuit of goods outside this narrow range of market goods is institutionally defined as an act of altruism.”* [The Market, p. 158]

Thus free agreement and horizontal links are not limited to market transactions – they develop for numerous reasons and anarchists recognise this. As George Barret argues:

*“Let us imagine now that the great revolt of the workers has taken place, that their direct action has made them masters of the situation. It is not easy to see that some man in a street that grew hungry would soon draw a list of the loaves that were needed, and take*

*it to the bakery where the strikers were in possession? Is there any difficulty in supposing that the necessary amount would then be baked according to this list? By this time the bakers would know what carts and delivery vans were needed to send the bread out to the people, and if they let the carters and vanmen know of this, would these not do their utmost to supply the vehicles... If ... [the bakers needed] more benches [to make bread] ... the carpenters would supply them [and so on] ... So the endless continuity goes on — a well-balanced interdependence of parts guaranteed, because **need** is the motive force behind it all... In the same way that each free individual has associated with his brothers [and sisters] to produce bread, machinery, and all that is necessary for life, driven by no other force than his desire for the full enjoyment of life, so each institution is free and self-contained, and co-operates and enters into agreements with other because by so doing it extends its own possibilities. There is no centralised State exploiting or dictating, but the complete structure is supported because each part is dependent on the whole ... It will be a society responsive to the wants of the people; it will supply their everyday needs as quickly as it will respond to their highest aspirations. Its changing forms will be the passing expressions of humanity.” [The Anarchist Revolution, pp. 17–19]*

To make productive decisions we need to know what others need and information in order to evaluate the alternative options available to us to satisfy that need. Therefore, it is a question of distributing information between producers and consumers, information which the market often hides (or actively blocks) or distorts due to inequalities in resources (i.e. need does not count in the market, “effective demand” does and this skews the market in favour of the wealthy). This information network has partly been discussed in the last section where a method of comparison between different materials, techniques and resources based upon use value was discussed. However, the need to indicate the current fluctuations in production and consumption needs to be indicated which complements that method.

In a non-Mutualist anarchist system it is assumed that confederations of syndicates will wish to adjust their capacity if they are aware of the need to do so. Hence, price changes in response to changes in demand would not be necessary to provide the information that such changes are required. This is because a “change in demand first becomes apparent as a change in the quantity being sold at existing prices [or being consumed in a moneyless system] and is therefore reflected in changes in stocks or orders. Such changes are perfectly good indicators or signals that an imbalance between demand and current output has developed. If a change in demand for its products proved to be permanent, a production unit would find its stocks being run down and its order book lengthening, or its stocks increasing and orders falling ... Price changes in response to changes in demand are therefore not necessary for the purpose of providing information about the need to adjust capacity.” [Pat Devine, **Democracy and Economic Planning**, p. 242]

To indicate the relative changes in scarcity of a given good it will be necessary to calculate a “scarcity index.” This would inform potential users of this good whether its demand is outstripping its supply so that they may effectively adjust their decisions in light of the decisions of others. This index could be, for example, a percentage figure which indicates the relation of orders placed for a commodity to the amount actually produced. For example, a good which has a demand higher than its supply would have an index value of 101% or higher. This value would inform potential users to start looking for substitutes for it or to economise on its use. Such a scarcity figure would

exist for each collective as well as (possibly) a generalised figure for the industry as a whole on a regional, “national,” etc. level.

In this way, a specific good could be seen to be in high demand and so only those producers who **really** required it would place orders for it (so ensuring effective use of resources). Needless to say, stock levels and other basic book-keeping techniques would be utilised in order to ensure a suitable buffer level of a specific good existed. This may result in some excess supply of goods being produced and used as stock to buffer out unexpected changes in the aggregate demand for a good.

Such a buffer system would work on an individual workplace level and at a communal level. Syndicates would obviously have their inventories, stores of raw materials and finished goods “*on the shelf*,” which can be used to meet excesses in demand. Communal stores, hospitals and so on would have their stores of supplies in case of unexpected disruptions in supply. This is a common practice even in capitalism, although it would (perhaps) be extended in a free society to ensure changes in supply and demand do not have disruptive effects.

Communes and confederations of communes may also create buffer stocks of goods to handle unforeseen changes in demand and supply. This sort of inventory has been used by capitalist countries like the USA to prevent changes in market conditions for agricultural products and other strategic raw materials producing wild spot-price movements and inflation. Post-Keynesian economist Paul Davidson argued that the stability of commodity prices this produced “*was an essential aspect of the unprecedented prosperous economic growth of the world’s economy*” between 1945 and 1972. US President Nixon dismantled these buffer zone programmes, resulting in “*violent commodity price fluctuations*” which had serious economic effects. [**Controversies in Post-Keynesian Economics**, p. 114 and p. 115]

Again, an anarchist society is likely to utilise this sort of buffer system to iron out short-term changes in supply and demand. By reducing short-term fluctuations of the supply of commodities, bad investment decisions would be reduced as syndicates would not be misled, as is the case under capitalism, by market prices being too high or too low at the time when the decisions were being made. Indeed, if market prices are not at their equilibrium level then they do not (and cannot) provide adequate knowledge for rational calculation. The misinformation conveyed by dis-equilibrium prices can cause very substantial macroeconomic distortions as profit-maximising capitalists response to unsustainable prices for, say, tin, and over-invest in a given branch of industry. Such mal-invest could spread through the economy, causing chaos and recession.

This, combined with cost-benefit analysis described in section I.4.4, would allow information about changes within the “*economy*” to rapidly spread throughout the whole system and influence all decision makers without the great majority knowing anything about the original causes of these changes (which rest in the decisions of those directly affected). The relevant information is communicated to all involved, without having to be order by an “*all-knowing*” central body as in a Leninist centrally planned economy. As argued in section I.1.2, anarchists have long realised that no centralised body could possibly be able to possess all the information dispersed throughout the economy and if such a body attempted to do so, the resulting bureaucracy would effectively reduce the amount of information available to society and so cause shortages and inefficiencies.



To get an idea how this system could work, let us take the example of a change in the copper industry. Let us assume that a source of copper unexpectedly dries up or, what amounts to the same thing, that the demand for copper increases. What would happen?

First, the initial difference would be a diminishing of stocks of copper which each syndicate maintains to take into account unexpected changes in requests for copper. This would help “*buffer out*” expected, and short lived, changes in supply or requests. Second, naturally, there is an increase in demand for copper for those syndicates which are producing it. This immediately increases the “*scarcity index*” of those firms, and so the “*scarcity index*” for the copper they produce and for the industry as a whole. For example, the index may rise from 95% (indicating a slight over-production in respect to current demand) to 115% (indicating that the demand for copper has risen in respect to the current level of production).

This change in the “*scarcity index*” (combined with difficulties in finding copper producing syndicates which can supply their orders) enters into the decision making algorithms of other syndicates. This, in turn, results in changes in their plans (for example, substitutes for copper may be used as they have become a more efficient resource to use).

This would aid a syndicate when it determined which method of production to use when creating a consumer good. The cost-benefit analysis outlined in the last section would allow a syndicate to determine the costs involved between competing productive techniques (i.e. to ascertain which used up least resources and therefore left the most over for other uses). Producers would already have an idea of the absolute costs involved in any good they are planning to use, so relative changes between them would be a deciding factor.

In this way, requests for copper products fall and soon only reflects those requests that need copper and do not have realistic substitutes available for it. This would result in the demand falling with respect to the current supply (as indicated by requests from other syndicates and to maintain buffer stock levels). Thus a general message has been sent across the “*economy*” that copper has become (relatively) scarce and syndicates plans have changed in light of this information. No central planner made these decisions nor was money required to facilitate them. We have a decentralised, non-market system based on the free exchange of products between self-governing associations.

Looking at the wider picture, the question of how to respond to this change in supply/requests for copper presents itself. The copper syndicate federation and cross-industry syndicate federations have regular meetings and the question of the changes in the copper situation present themselves. The copper syndicates, and their federation, must consider how to respond to these changes. Part of this is to determine whether this change is likely to be short term or long term. A short term change (say caused by a mine accident, for example) would not need new investments to be planned. However, long term changes (say the new requests are due to a new product being created by another syndicate or an existing mine becoming exhausted) may need co-ordinated investment (we can expect syndicates to make their own plans in light of changes, for example, by investing in new machinery to produce copper more efficiently or to increase efficiency). If the expected changes of these plans approximately equal the predicted long term changes, then the federation need not act. However, if they do then investment in new copper mines or large scale new investment across the industry may be required. The federation would propose such plans.

Needless to say, the future can be guessed, it cannot be accurately predicted. Thus there may be over-investment in certain industries as expected changes do not materialise. However, unlike

capitalism, this would not result in an economic crisis as production would continue (with over investment within capitalism, workplaces close due to lack of profits, regardless of social need). All that would happen is that the syndicates would rationalise production, close down relatively inefficient plant and concentrate production in the more efficient ones. The sweeping economic crises of capitalism would be a thing of the past.

Therefore, each syndicate receives its own orders and supplies and sends its own produce out. Similarly, communal distribution centres would order required goods from syndicates it determines. In this way consumers can change to syndicates which respond to their needs and so production units are aware of what it is socially useful for them to produce as well as the social cost of the resources they need to produce it. In this way a network of horizontal relations spread across society, with co-ordination achieved by equality of association and not the hierarchy of the corporate structure. This system ensures a co-operative response to changes in supply and demand and so reduces the communication problems associated with the market which help causes periods of unemployment and economic downturn (see section C.7.2).

While anarchists are aware of the “*isolation paradox*” (see section B.6) this does not mean that they think the commune should make decisions for people on what they were to consume. This would be a prison. No, all anarchists agree that is up to the individual to determine their own needs and for the collectives they join to determine social requirements like parks, infrastructure improvements and so on. However, social anarchists think that it would be beneficial to discuss the framework around which these decisions would be made. This would mean, for example, that communes would agree to produce eco-friendly products, reduce waste and generally make decisions enriched by social interaction. Individuals would still decide which sort goods they desire, based on what the collectives produce but these goods would be based on a socially agreed agenda. In this way waste, pollution and other “*externalities*” of atomised consumption could be reduced. For example, while it is rational for individuals to drive a car to work, collectively this results in massive **irrationality** (for example, traffic jams, pollution, illness, unpleasant social infrastructures). A sane society would discuss the problems associated with car use and would agree to produce a fully integrated public transport network which would reduce pollution, stress, illness, and so on.

Therefore, while anarchists recognise individual tastes and desires, they are also aware of the social impact of them and so try to create a social environment where individuals can enrich their personal decisions with the input of other people’s ideas.

On a related subject, it is obvious that different collectives would produce slightly different goods, so ensuring that people have a choice. It is doubtful that the current waste implied in multiple products from different companies (sometimes the same company) all doing the same job would be continued in an anarchist society. However, production will be “*variations on a theme*” in order to ensure consumer choice and to allow the producers to know what features consumers prefer. It would be impossible to sit down beforehand and make a list of what features a good should have — that assumes perfect knowledge and that technology is fairly constant. Both these assumptions are of limited use in real life. Therefore, co-operatives would produce goods with different features and production would change to meet the demand these differences suggest (for example, factory A produces a new CD player, and consumption patterns indicate that this is popular and so the rest of the factories convert). This is in addition to R&D experiments and test populations. In this way consumer choice would be maintained, and enhanced as con-

sumers would be able to influence the decisions of the syndicates as producers (in some cases) and through syndicate/commune dialogue.

Therefore, anarchists do not ignore “*supply and demand*.” Instead, they recognise the limitations of the capitalist version of this truism and point out that capitalism is based on **effective** demand which has no necessary basis with efficient use of resources. Instead of the market, social anarchists advocate a system based on horizontal links between producers which effectively communicates information across society about the relative changes in supply and demand which reflect actual needs of society and not bank balances. The response to changes in supply and demand will be discussed in section I.4.8 (*What about investment decisions?*) and section I.4.13 (*Who will do the dirty or unpleasant work?*) will discuss the allocation of work tasks.

### **I.4.6 Surely anarchist-communism would just lead to demand exceeding supply?**

Its a common objection that communism would lead to people wasting resources by taking more than they need. Kropotkin stated that “*free communism ... places the product reaped or manufactured at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his own home.*” [The Place of Anarchism in the Evolution of Socialist Thought, p. 7]

But, some argue, what if an individual says they “*need*” a luxury house or a personal yacht? Simply put, workers may not “*need*” to produce for that need. As Tom Brown puts it, “*such things are the product of social labour... Under syndicalism...it is improbable that any greedy, selfish person would be able to kid a shipyard full of workers to build him a ship all for his own hoggish self. There would be steam luxury yachts, but they would be enjoyed in common*” [Syndicalism, p. 51]

Therefore, communist-anarchists are not blind to the fact that free access to products is based upon the actual work of real individuals — “*society*” provides nothing, individuals working together do. This is reflected in the classic statement of communism — “*From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.*” Therefore, the needs of both consumer **and** producer are taken into account. This means that if no syndicate or individual desires to produce a specific order an order then this order can be classed as an “*unreasonable*” demand — “*unreasonable*” in this context meaning that no one freely agrees to produce it. Of course, individuals may agree to barter services in order to get what they want produced if they **really** want something but such acts in no way undermines a communist society.

Communist-anarchists recognise that production, like consumption, must be based on freedom. However, it has been argued that free access would lead to waste as people take more than they would under capitalism. This objection is not as serious as it first appears. There are plenty of examples within current society to indicate that free access will not lead to abuses. Let us take three examples, public libraries, water and pavements. In public libraries people are free to sit and read books all day. However, few if any actually do so. Neither do people always take the maximum number of books out at a time. No, they use the library as they need to and feel no need to maximise their use of the institution. Some people never use the library, although it is free. In the case of water supplies, its clear that people do not leave taps on all day because water is often supplied freely or for a fixed charge. Similarly with pavements, people do not walk everywhere because to do so is free. In such cases individuals use the resource as and when they need to.

We can expect a similar results as other resources become freely available. In effect, this argument makes as much sense as arguing that individuals will travel to stops **beyond** their destination if public transport is based on a fixed charge! And only an idiot would travel further than required in order to get “*value for money.*” However, for many the world seems to be made up of such idiots. Perhaps it would be advisable for such critics to hand out political leaflets in the street. Even though the leaflets are free, crowds rarely form around the person handing them out demanding as many copies of the leaflet as possible. Rather, those interested in what the leaflets have to say take them, the rest ignore them. If free access automatically resulted in people taking more than they need then critics of free communism would be puzzled by the lack of demand for what they were handing out!

Part of the problem is that capitalist economics have invented a fictional type of person, **Homo Economicus**, whose wants are limitless: an individual who always wants more and more of everything and so whose needs could only satisfied if resources were limitless too. Needless to say, such an individual has never existed. In reality, wants are not limitless — people have diverse tastes and rarely want everything available nor want more of a good than that which satisfies their need.

Communist Anarchists also argue that we cannot judge people’s buying habits under capitalism with their actions in a free society. After all, advertising does not exist to meet people’s needs but rather to create needs by making people insecure about themselves. Simply put, advertising does not amplify existing needs or sell the goods and services that people already wanted. Advertising would not need to stoop to the level of manipulative ads that create false personalities for products and provide solutions for problems that the advertisers themselves create if this was the case.

Crude it may be, but advertising is based on the creation of insecurities, preying on fears and obscuring rational thought. In an alienated society in which people are subject to hierarchical controls, feelings of insecurity and lack of control and influence would be natural. It is these fears that advertising multiples — if you cannot have real freedom, then at least you can buy something new. Advertising is the key means of making people unhappy with what they have (and who they are). It is naive to claim that advertising has no effect on the psyche of the receiver or that the market merely responds to the populace and makes no attempt to shape their thoughts. Advertising creates insecurities about such matter-of-course things and so generates irrational urges to buy which would not exist in a libertarian communist society.

However, there is a deeper point to be made here about consumerism. Capitalism is based on hierarchy and not liberty. This leads to a weakening of individuality and a lose of self-identity and sense of community. Both these senses are a deep human need and consumerism is often a means by which people overcome their alienation from their selves and others (religion, ideology and drugs are other means of escape). Therefore the consumption within capitalism reflects its values, not some abstract “*human nature.*” As Bob Black argues:

*“what we want, what we are capable of wanting is relative to the forms of social organisation. People ‘want’ fast food because they have to hurry back to work, because processed supermarket food doesn’t taste much better anyway, because the nuclear family (for the dwindling minority who have even that to go home to) is too small and too stressed to sustain much festivity in cooking and eating — and so forth. It is only people who can’t get what they want who resign themselves to want more of what they*

*can get. Since we cannot be friends and lovers, we wait for more candy.” [Smokestack Lightning]*

Therefore, most anarchists think that consumerism is a product of a hierarchical society within which people are alienated from themselves and the means by which they can make themselves **really** happy (i.e. meaningful relationships, liberty, work, and experiences). Consumerism is a means of filling the spiritual hole capitalism creates within us by denying our freedom.

This means that capitalism produces individuals who define themselves by what they have, not who they are. This leads to consumption for the sake of consumption, as people try to make themselves happy by consuming more commodities. But, as Erich Fromm points out, this cannot work for and only leads to even more insecurity (and so even more consumption):

*“If I am what I have and if what I have is lost, who then am I? Nobody but a defeated, deflated, pathetic testimony to a wrong way of living. Because I **can** lose what I have, I am necessarily constantly worried that I **shall** lose what I have.” [To Have Or To Be, p. 111]*

Such insecurity easily makes consumerism seem a “*natural*” way of life and so make communism seem impossible. However, rampant consumerism is far more a product of lack of meaningful freedom within an alienated society than a “*natural law*” of human existence. In a society that encouraged and protected individuality by non-hierarchical social relationships and organisations, individuals would have a strong sense of self and so be less inclined to mindlessly consume. As Fromm puts it: “*If I am what I am and not what I have, nobody can deprive me of or threaten my security and my sense of identity. My centre is within myself.*” [Op. Cit., p. 112] Such self-centred individuals do not have to consume endlessly to build a sense of security or happiness within themselves (a sense which can never actually be created by those means).

In other words, the well-developed individuality that an anarchist society would develop would have less need to consume than the average person in a capitalist one. This is not to suggest that life will be bare and without luxuries in an anarchist society, far from it. A society based on the free expression of individuality could be nothing but rich in wealth and diverse in goods and experiences. What we are arguing here is that an anarchist-communist society would not have to fear rampant consumerism making demand outstrip supply constantly and always precisely because freedom will result in a non-alienated society of well developed individuals.

Of course, this may sound totally utopian. Possibly it is. However, as Oscar Wilde said, a map of the world without Utopia on it is not worth having. One thing is sure, if the developments we have outlined above fail to appear and attempts at communism fail due to waste and demand exceeding supply then a free society would make the necessary decisions and introduce some means of limiting supply (such as, for example, labour notes, equal wages, and so on). Whether or not full communism **can** be introduced instantly is a moot point amongst anarchists, although most would like to see society develop towards a communist goal eventually.

### **I.4.7 What will stop producers ignoring consumers?**

It is often claimed that with a market producers would ignore the needs of consumers. Without the threat (and fear) of unemployment and destitution and the promise of higher profits, produc-

ers would turn out shoddy goods. The holders of this argument point to the example of the Soviet Union which was notorious for terrible goods and a lack of consumer goods.

Capitalism, in comparison to the old Soviet block, does, to some degree make the producers accountable to the consumers. If the producer ignores the desires of the producer then they will loose business to those who do not and be forced, perhaps, out of business (large companies, of course, due to their resources can hold out far longer than smaller ones). Thus we have the carrot (profits) and the stick (fear of poverty) — although, of course, the carrot can be used as a stick against the consumer (no profit, no sale, no matter how much the consumer may need it). Ignoring the obvious objection to this analogy (namely we are human beings, **not** donkeys!) it does have contain an important point. What will ensure that consumer needs are meet in an anarchist society?

In an Individualist-Mutualist anarchist system, as it is based on a market, producers would be subject to market forces and so have to meet consumers needs. Of course, there are three problems with this system. Firstly, those without money have no access to the goods produced and so the ill, the handicapped, the old and the young may go without. Secondly, inequalities may become more pronounced as successful producers drive others out of business. Such inequality would skew consumption as it does in capitalism, so ensuring that a minority get all the good things in life (Individualist anarchists would claim that this is unlikely, as non-labour income would be impossible). Lastly, there is the danger that the system would revert back to capitalism. This is because unsuccessful co-operatives may fail and cast their members into unemployment. This creates a pool of unemployed workers, which (in turn) creates a danger of wage-labour being re-created as successful firms hire the unemployed but do not allow them to join the co-operative. This would effectively end self-management and anarchy. Moreover, the successful could hire “*protection agencies*” (i.e. thugs) to enforce capitalist ideas of property rights.

This problem was recognised by Proudhon, who argued for an agro-industrial federation to protect self-management from the effects of market forces, as well as the collectivist-anarchists. In both these schemes, self-management would be protected by agreements between co-operative workplaces to share their resources with others in the confederation, so ensuring that new workers would gain access to the means of life on the same terms as those who already use it. In this way wage-labour would be abolished. In addition, the confederation of workplaces would practice mutual aid and provide resources and credit at cost to their members, so protecting firms from failure while they adjust their production to meet consumer needs.

In both these systems producers would be accountable to consumers by the process of buying and selling between co-operatives. As James Guillaume put it, the workers’ associations would “*deposit their unconsumed commodities in the facilities provided by the [communal] Bank of Exchange ... The Bank of Exchange would remit to the producers negotiable **vouchers** representing the value of their products*” (this value “*having been established in advance by a contractual agreement between the regional co-operative federations and the various communes*”). [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 366] If the goods are not in demand then the producer associations would not be able to sell the product of their labour to the Bank of Exchange and so they would adjust their output accordingly. Overtime Guillaume hopes that this system would evolve into free communism as production develops and continually meets demand [**Op. Cit.**, p. 368].

While mutualist and collectivist anarchists can argue that producers would respond to consumer needs otherwise they would not get an income, communist-anarchists (as they seek a moneyless society) cannot argue their system would reward producers in this way. So what mech-

anism exists to ensure that “*the wants of all*” are, in fact, met? How does anarcho-communism ensure that production becomes “*the mere servant of consumption*” and “*mould itself on the wants of the consumer, not dictate to him conditions*”? [Peter Kropotkin, *Act for Yourselves*, p. 57]

Libertarian communists argue that in a **free** communist society consumers’ needs would be met. This is because of the decentralised and federal nature of a communist-anarchist society.

So what is the mechanism which makes producers accountable to consumers in a libertarian communist society? Firstly, communes would practice their power of “*exit*” in the distributive network. If a syndicate was producing sub-standard goods or refusing to change their output in the face of changing consumer needs, then the communal stores would turn to those syndicates which were producing the goods desired. The original syndicates would then be producing for their own stocks, a pointless task and one few, if any, would do. After all, people generally desire their work to have meaning, to be useful. To just work, producing something no-one wanted would be such a demoralising task that few, if any, sane people would do it (under capitalism people put up with spirit destroying work as some income is better than none, such an “*incentive*” would not exist in a free society).

As can be seen, “*exit*” would still exist in libertarian communism. However, it could be argued that unresponsive or inefficient syndicates would still exist, exploiting the rest of society by producing rubbish (or goods which are of less than average quality) and consuming the products of other people’s labour, confident that without the fear of poverty and unemployment they can continue to do this indefinitely. Without the market, it is argued, some form of bureaucracy would be required (or develop) which would have the power to punish such syndicates. Thus the state would continue in “*libertarian*” communism, with the “*higher*” bodies using coercion against the lower ones to ensure they meet consumer needs or produced enough.

While, at first glance, this appears to be a possible problem on closer inspection it is flawed. This is because anarchism is based not only on “*exit*” but also “*voice*.” Unlike capitalism, libertarian communism is based on association and communication. Each syndicate and commune is in free agreement and confederation with all the others. Thus, if a specific syndicate was producing bad goods or not pulling its weight, then those in contact with them would soon realise this. First, those unhappy with a syndicate’s work would appeal to them directly to get their act together. If this did not work, then they would notify their disapproval by refusing to “*contract*” with them in the future (i.e. they would use their power of “*exit*” as well as refusing to provide the syndicate with any goods it requires). They would also let society as a whole know (via the media) as well as contacting consumer groups and co-operatives and the relevant producer and communal confederations which they and the other syndicate are members of, who would, in turn, inform their members of the problems (the relevant confederations could include local and regional communal confederations, the general cross-industry confederation, its own industrial/communal confederation and the confederation of the syndicate not pulling its weight). In today’s society, a similar process of “*word of mouth*” warnings and recommendations goes on, along with consumer groups and programmes. Our suggestions here are an extension of this common practice (that this process exists suggests that the price mechanism does not, in fact, provide consumers with all the relevant information they need to make decisions, but this is an aside).

If the syndicate in question, after a certain number of complaints had been lodged against it, still did not change its ways, then it would suffer non-violent direct action. This would involve the boycotting of the syndicate and (perhaps) its local commune with products and investment, so resulting in the syndicate being excluded from the benefits of association. The syndicate would

face the fact that no one else wanted to associate with it and suffer a drop in the goods coming its way, including consumption products for its members. In effect, a similar process would occur to that of a firm under capitalism that loses its customers and so its income. However, we doubt that a free society would subject any person to the evils of destitution or starvation (as capitalism does). Rather, it would provide a bare minimum of goods required for survival would still be available.

In the unlikely event this general boycott did not result in a change of heart, then two options are left available. These are either the break-up of the syndicate and the finding of its members new work places or the giving/selling of the syndicate to its current users (i.e. to exclude them from the society they obviously do not want to be part of). The decision of which option to go for would depend on the importance of the workplace in question and the desires of the syndicates' members. If the syndicate refused to disband, then option two would be the most logical choice (unless the syndicate controlled a scarce resource). The second option would, perhaps, be best as this would drive home the benefits of association as the expelled syndicate would have to survive on its own, subject to survival by selling the product of its labour and would soon return to the fold.

Kropotkin argued in these terms over 100 years ago. It is worthwhile to quote him at length:

*“First of all, is it not evident that if a society, founded on the principle of free work, were really menaced by loafers, it could protect itself without the authoritarian organisation we have nowadays, and without having recourse to wagedom [or payment by results]?”*

*“Let us take a group of volunteers, combining for some particular enterprise. Having its success at heart, they all work with a will, save one of the associates, who is frequently absent from his post... some day the comrade who imperils their enterprise will be told: ‘Friend, we should like to work with you; but as you are often absent from your post, and you do your work negligently, we must part. Go and find other comrades who will put up with your indifference!’”*

*“This is so natural that it is practised everywhere, even nowadays, in all industries ... [I]f [a worker] does his work badly, if he hinders his comrades by his laziness or other defects, if he is quarrelsome, there is an end of it; he is compelled to leave the workshop.*

*“Authoritarian pretend that it is the almighty employer and his overseers who maintain regularity and quality of work in factories. In reality ... it is the factory itself, the workmen [and women] who see to the good quality of the work ...”*

*“Not only in industrial workshops do things go in this way; it happens everywhere, every day, on a scale that only bookworms have as yet no notion of. When a railway company, federated with other companies, fails to fulfil its engagements, when its trains are late and goods lie neglected at the stations, the other companies threaten to cancel the contract, and that threat usually suffices.*

*“It is generally believed ... that commerce only keeps to its engagements from fear of lawsuits. Nothing of the sort; nine times in ten the trader who has not kept his word will not appear before a judge... the sole fact of having driven a creditor to bring a lawsuit suffices for the vast majority of merchants to refuse for good to have any dealings with a man who has compelled one of them to go to law.*



*“This being so, why should means that are used today among workers in the workshop, traders in the trade, and railway companies in the organisation of transport, not be made use of in a society based on voluntary work?”* [The Conquest of Bread, pp. 152–3]

Thus, to ensure producer accountability of production to consumption, no bureaucratic body is required in libertarian communism (or any other form of anarchism). Rather, communication and direct action by those affected by unresponsive producers would be an effective and efficient means of ensuring the accountability of production to consumption.

#### I.4.8 What about investment decisions?

Obviously, a given society needs to take into account changes in consumption and so invest in new means of production. An anarchist society is no different. As G.D.H Cole points out, *“it is essential at all times, and in accordance with considerations which vary from time to time, for a community to preserve a balance between production for ultimate use and production for use in further production. And this balance is a matter which ought to be determined by and on behalf of the whole community.”* [Guild Socialism Restated, p. 144]

How this balance is determined varies according to the school of anarchist thought considered. All agree, however, that such an important task should be under effective community control.

The mutualists see the solution to the problems of investment as creating a system of mutual banks, which reduce interest rates to zero. This would be achieved *“[b]y the organisation of credit, on the principle of reciprocity or mutualism...In such an organisation credit is raised to the dignity of a social function, managed by the community; and, as society never speculates upon its members, it will lend its credit ... at the actual cost of transaction.”* [Charles A. Dana, **Proudhon and his “Bank of the People”**, p. 36] This would allow money to be made available to those who needed it and so break the back of the capitalist business cycle (i.e. credit would be available as required, not when it was profitable for bankers to supply it) as well as capitalist property relations.

So under a mutualist regime, credit for investment would be available from two sources. Firstly, an individual’s or co-operative’s own saved funds and, secondly, as zero interest loans from mutual banks, credit unions and other forms of credit associations. Loans would be allocated to projects which the mutual banks considered likely to succeed and repay the original loan.

Collectivist and communist anarchists recognise that credit is based on human activity, which is represented as money. As the Guild Socialist G.D.H. Cole pointed out, the *“understanding of this point [on investment] depends on a clear appreciation of the fact that all real additions to capital take the form of directing a part of the productive power of labour and using certain materials not for the manufacture of products and the rendering of services incidental to such manufacture for purposes of purposes of further production.”* [Guild Socialism Restated, p. 143] So collectivist and communist anarchists agree with their Mutualist cousins when they state that *“[a]ll credit presupposes labour, and, if labour were to cease, credit would be impossible”* and that the *“legitimate source of credit”* was *“the labouring classes”* who *“ought to control it”* and *“whose benefit [it should] be used”* [Charles A. Dana, **Op. Cit.**, p. 35]

Therefore, in collectivism, investment funds would exist for syndicates, communes and their in community (*“People’s”*) *“banks.”* These would be used to store depreciation funds and as well as other funds agreed to by the collectives for investment projects (for example, collectives may agree to allocate a certain percentage of their labour notes to a common account in order to have

the necessary funds available for major investment projects). Similarly, individual syndicates and communes would also create a store of funds for their own investment projects. In this, collectivist anarchism is like mutualism, with communal credit banks being used to facilitate investment by organising credit and savings on a non-exploitative basis (i.e. issuing credit at zero interest).

However, the confederations of syndicates to which these “*People’s Banks*” would be linked would have a defined planning function as well — i.e. taking a role in investment decisions to ensure that production meets demand (see below). This would be one factor in deciding which investment plans should be given funding (this, we stress, is hardly “*central planning*” as capitalist firms also plan future investments to meet expected demand).

In a communist-anarchist society, things would be slightly different as this would not have the labour notes used in mutualism and collectivism. This means that the collectives would agree that a certain part of their output and activity will be directed to investment projects. In effect, each collective is able to draw upon the sums approved of by the Commune in the form of an agreed claim on the labour power of all the collectives (investment “*is essentially an allocation of material and labour, and fundamentally, an allocation of human productive power.*” [Cole, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 144–5]). In this way, mutual aid ensures a suitable pool of resources for the future from which all benefit.

How would this work? Obviously investment decisions have implications for society as a whole. The implementation of these decisions require the use of **existing** capacity and so must be the responsibility of the appropriate level of the confederation in question. Investment decisions taken at levels above the production unit become effective in the form of demand for the current output of the syndicates which have the capacity to produce the goods required. This would require each syndicate to “*prepare a budget, showing its estimate of requirements both of goods or services for immediate use, and of extensions and improvements.*” [Cole, *Op. Cit.*, p. 145] These budgets and investment projects would be discussed at the appropriate level of the confederation (in this, communist-anarchism would be similar to collectivist anarchism).

The confederation of syndicates/communes would be the ideal forum to discuss (communicate) the various investment plans required — and to allocate scarce resources between competing ends. This would involve, possibly, dividing investment into two groups — necessary and optional — and using statistical techniques to consider the impact of an investment decision (for example, the use of input-output tables could be used to see if a given investment decision in, say, the steel industry would require investment in energy production). In this way social needs **and** social costs would be taken into account and ensure that investment decisions are not taken in isolation from one another, so causing bottle-necks and insufficient production due to lack of inputs from other industries.

Necessary investments are those which have been agreed upon by the appropriate confederation. It means that resources and productive capacity are prioritised towards them, as indicated in the agreed investment project. It will not be required to determine precisely **who** will provide the necessary goods for a given investment project, just that it has priority over other requests. When a bank gives a company credit, it rarely asks exactly where that money will be built. Rather, it gives the company the power to command the labour of other workers by supplying them with credit. Similarly in an anarcho-communist society, except that the other workers have agreed to supply their labour for the project in question by designating it a “*necessary investment.*” This means when a request arrives at a syndicate for a “*necessary investment*” a syndicate must try

and meet it (i.e. it must place the request into its production schedule before “*optional*” requests, assuming that it has the capacity to meet it). A list of necessary investment projects, including what they require and if they have been ordered, will be available to all syndicates to ensure such a request is a real one.

Optional investment is simply investment projects which have not been agreed to by a confederation. This means that when a syndicate or commune places orders with a syndicate they may not be met or take longer to arrive. The project may go ahead, but it depends on whether the syndicate or commune can find workers willing to do that work. This would be applicable for small scale investment decisions or those which other communes/syndicates do not think of as essential.

This we have two inter-related investment strategies. A communist-anarchist society would prioritise certain forms of investment by the use of “*necessary*” and “*optional*” investment projects. This socialisation of investment will allow a free society to ensure that social needs are met while maintaining a decentralised and dynamic “*economy*.” Major projects to meet social needs will be organised effectively, but with diversity for minor projects. In addition, it will also allow such a society to keep track of what actual percentage of resources are being used for investment, so ensuring that current needs are not sacrificed for future ones and vice-versa.

As for when investment is needed, it is clear that this will be based on the changes in demand for goods in both collectivist and communist anarchism. As Guilliame puts it, “[*b*]y means of statistics gathered from all the communes in a region, it will be possible to scientifically balance production and consumption. In line with these statistics, it will also be possible to add more help in industries where production is insufficient and reduce the number of men where there is a surplus of production.” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 370] Obviously, investment in branches of production with a high demand would be essential and this would be easily seen from the statistics generated by the collectives and communes. Tom Brown states this obvious point:

*“Goods, as now, will be produced in greater variety, for workers like producing different kinds, and new models, of goods. Now if some goods are unpopular, they will be left on the shelves... Of other goods more popular, the shops will be emptied. Surely it is obvious that the assistant will decrease his order of the unpopular line and increase his order of the popular.”* [Syndicalism, p. 55]

As a rule of thumb, syndicates that produce investment goods would be inclined to supply other syndicates who are experiencing excess demand before others, all other things being equal. Because of such guidelines and communication between producers, investment would go to those industries that actually required them. In other words, customer choice (as indicated by individuals choosing between the output of different syndicates) would generate information that is relevant to investment decisions.

As production would be decentralised as far as it is sensible and rationale to do so, each locality/region would be able to understand its own requirements and apply them as it sees fit. This means that large-scale planning would not be conducted (assuming that it could work in practice, of course) simply because it would not be needed.

This, combined with an extensive communications network, would ensure that investment not only did not duplicate unused plant within the economy but that investments take into account the specific problems and opportunities each locality has. Of course, collectives would experiment

with new lines and technology as well as existing lines and so invest in new technologies and products. As occurs under capitalism, extensive consumer testing would occur before dedicating major investment decisions to new products.

In addition, investment decisions would also require information which showed the different outcomes of different options. By this we simply mean an analysis of how different investment projects relate to each other in terms of inputs and outputs, compared to the existing techniques. This would be in the form of cost-benefit analysis (as outlined in section I.4.4) and would show when it would make economic, social and ecological sense to switch industrial techniques to more efficient and/or more empowering and/or more ecologically sound methods. Such an evaluation would indicate levels of inputs and compare them to the likely outputs. For example, if a new production technique reduced the number of hours worked in total (comparing the hours worked to produce the machinery with that reduced in using it) as well as reducing waste products for a similar output, then such a technique would be implemented.

Similarly with communities. A commune will obviously have to decide upon and plan civic investment (e.g. new parks, housing and so forth). They will also have the deciding say in industrial developments in their area as it would be unfair for syndicate to just decide to build a cement factory next to a housing co-operative if they did not want it. There is a case for arguing that the local commune will decide on investment decisions for syndicates in its area (for example, a syndicate may produce X plans which will be discussed in the local commune and 1 plan finalised from the debate). For regional decisions (for example, a new hospital) would be decided at the appropriate level, with information fed from the health syndicate and consumer co-operatives. The actual location for investment decisions will be worked out by those involved. However, local syndicates must be the focal point for developing new products and investment plans in order to encourage innovation.

Therefore, under social anarchism no capital market is required to determine whether investment is required and what form it would take. The work that apologists for capitalism claim currently is done by the stock market can be replaced by co-operation and communication between workplaces in a decentralised, confederated network. The relative needs of different consumers of a product can be evaluated by the producers and an informed decision reached on where it would best be used.

Without a capital market, housing, workplaces and so on will no longer be cramped into the smallest space possible. Instead, housing, schools, hospitals, workplaces and so on will be built within a “green” environment. This means that human constructions will be placed within a natural setting and no longer stand apart from nature. In this way human life can be enriched and the evils of cramping as many humans and things into a small a space as is “economical” can be overcome.

In addition, the stock market is hardly the means by which capital is actually raised within capitalism. As Engler points out, “[s]upporters of the system ... claim that stock exchanges mobilise funds for business. Do they? When people buy and sell shares, ‘no investment goes into company treasuries ... Shares simply change hands for cash in endless repetition.’ Company treasuries get funds only from new equity issues. These accounted for an average of a mere 0.5 per cent of shares trading in the US during the 1980s.” [Apostles of Greed, pp. 157–158] Indeed, Doug Henwood argues that “the signals emitted by the stock market are either irrelevant or harmful to real economic activity, and that the stock market itself counts little or nothing as a source of finance. Shareholders ... have no useful role.” [Wall Street, p. 292]

Moreover, the existence of a stock market has serious (negative) effects on investment. As Henwood notes, there “*are serious communication problems between managers and shareholders.*” This is because “[*e*]ven if participants are aware of an upward bias to earnings estimates [of companies], and even if they correct for it, managers would still have an incentive to try to fool the market. If you tell the truth, your accurate estimate will be marked down by a sceptical market. So, it’s entirely rational for managers to boost profits in the short term, either through accounting gimmickry or by making only investments with quick paybacks.” So, managers “*facing a market [the stock market] that is famous for its preference for quick profits today rather than patient long-term growth have little choice but to do its bidding. Otherwise, their stock will be marked down, and the firm ripe for takeover.*” While “[*f*]irms and economies can’t get richer by starving themselves” stock market investors “*can get richer when the companies they own go hungry — at least in the short term. As for the long term, well, that’s someone else’s problem the week after next.*” [Op. Cit., p. 171]

Ironically, this situation has a parallel with Stalinist central planning. Under that system manager of State workplaces had an incentive to lie about their capacity to the planning bureaucracy. The planner would, in turn, assume higher capacity, so harming honest managers and encouraging them to lie. This, of course, had a seriously bad impact on the economy. Unsurprisingly, the similar effects caused by capital markets on economies subject to them as just as bad, downplaying long term issues and investment.

And it hardly needs to be repeated that capitalism results in production being skewed away from the working class and that the “*efficiency*” of market allocation is highly suspect.

Only by taking investment decisions away from “*experts*” and placing it in the hands of ordinary people will current generations be able to invest according to their, and future generations’, self-interest. It is hardly in our interest to have a institution whose aim is to make the wealthy even wealthier and on whose whims are dependent the lives of millions of people.

#### I.4.9 Should technological advance be seen as anti-anarchistic?

Not necessarily. This is because technology can allow us to “*do more with less,*” technological progress can improve standards of living for all people, and technologies can be used to increase personal freedom: medical technology, for instance, can free people from the scourges of pain, illness, and a “*naturally*” short life span; technology can be used to free labour from mundane chores associated with production; advanced communications technology can enhance our ability to freely associate. The list goes on and on. Therefore, most anarchists agree with Kropotkin when he pointed out that the “*development of [the industrial] technique at last gives man [sic!] the opportunity to free himself from slavish toil.*” [Ethics, p. 2]

For example, increased productivity under capitalism usually leads to further exploitation and domination, displaced workers, economic crisis, etc. But it does not have to in an anarchist world. By way of example, consider a commune in which all resources are distributed equally amongst the members. Let us say that this commune has 5 people who desire to be bakers (or 5 people are needed to work the communal bakery) and, for the sake of argument, 20 hours of production per person, per week is spent on baking bread for the local commune. Now, what happens if the introduction of automation, **as desired, planned and organised by the workers themselves**, reduces the amount of labour required for bread production to 15 person-hours per week, including the labour cost spent in creating and maintaining the new machinery? Clearly, no one stands to lose

— even if someone’s work is “displaced”, that person will continue to receive the same resource income as before — and they might even gain. This last is due to the fact that 5 person-hours have been freed up from the task of bread production, and those person-hours may now be used elsewhere or converted to leisure, either way increasing each person’s standard of living.

Obviously, this happy outcome derives not only from the technology used, but also (and critically) from its use in an equitable economic and social system. Certainly, a wide variety of outcomes would be possible under alternative social systems. Yet, we have managed to prove our point: in the end, there is no reason why the use of technology cannot be used to empower people and increase their freedom!

Of course technology can be used for oppressive ends. Human knowledge, like all things, can be used to increase freedom or to decrease it, to promote inequality or reduce it, to aid the worker or to subjugate them, and so on. Technology, as we argued in section D.10, cannot be considered in isolation from the society it is created and used in. In a hierarchical society, technology will be introduced that serves the interests of the powerful and helps marginalise and disempower the majority (“*technology is political*,” to use David Noble’s expression), it does not evolve in isolation from human beings and the social relationships and power structures between them. “*Capitalism has created*,” Cornelius Castoriadis correctly argued, “*a capitalist technology, for its own ends, which are by no means neutral. The real essence of capitalist technology is not to develop production for production’s sake: it is to subordinate and dominate the producers.*” This means that in an anarchist society, technology would have to be transformed and/or developed which empowered those who used it, so reducing any oppressive aspects of it. In the words of Cornelius Castoriadis, the “*conscious transformation of technology will ... be a central task of a society of free workers.*” [**Workers’ Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society**, p. 13]

However, as Kropotkin argued, we are (potentially) in a good position, because “[f]or the first time in the history of civilisation, mankind has reached a point where the means of satisfying its needs are in excess of the needs themselves. To impose, therefore, as hitherto been done, the curse of misery and degradation upon vast divisions of mankind, in order to secure well-being and further development for the few, is needed no more: well-being can be secured for all, without placing on anyone the burden of oppressive, degrading toil and humanity can at last build its entire social life on the basis of justice.” [**Ethics**, p. 2] The question is, for most anarchists, how can we humanise and modify this technology and make it socially and individually liberatory, rather than destroying it (where applicable, of course, certain forms of technology will probably be eliminated due to their inherently destructive nature).

For Kropotkin, like most anarchists, the way to humanise technology and industry was for “*the workers [to] lay hands on factories, houses and banks*” and so “*present production would be completely revolutionised by this simple fact.*” This would be the start of a process which would **integrate** industry and agriculture, as it was “*essential that work-shops, foundries and factories develop within the reach of the fields.*” [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 190] Such a process would obviously involve the transformation of both the structure and technology of capitalism rather than its simple and unthinking application.

There is another reason for anarchists seeking to transform rather than eliminate current technology. As Bakunin pointed out, “*to destroy... all the instruments of labour [i.e. technology and industry] ... would be to condemn all humanity — which is infinity too numerous today to exist... on the simple gifts of nature ... — to ... death by starvation.*” His solution to the question of technology was, like Kropotkin’s, to place it at the service of those who use it, to create “*the intimate and*

*complete union of capital and labour*” so that it would “*not ... remain concentrated in the hands of a separate, exploiting class.*” Only this could “*smash the tyranny of capital.*” [The Basic Bakunin, pp. 90–1]

Thus, most anarchists seek to transform technology and industry rather than get rid of it totally.

Most anarchists are aware that “*Capital invested in machines that would re-enforce the system of domination [within the capitalist workplace], and this decision to invest, which might in the long run render the chosen technology economical, was not itself an economical decision but a political one, with cultural sanction.*” [David Noble, **Progress Without People**, p. 6] But this does not change the fact that we need to be in possession of the means of production before we can decide what to keep, what to change and what to throw away as inhuman. In other words, it is not enough to get rid of the boss, although this is a necessary first step!

It is for these reasons that anarchists have held a wide range of opinions concerning the relationship between human knowledge and anarchism. Some, such as Peter Kropotkin, were themselves scientists and saw great potential for the use of advanced technology to expand human freedom. Others have held technology at arm’s length, concerned about its oppressive uses, and a few have rejected science and technology completely. All of these are, of course, possible anarchist positions. But most anarchists support Kropotkin’s viewpoint, but with a healthy dose of practical Luddism when viewing how technology is (ab)used in capitalism (“*The worker will only respect machinery **in the day** when it becomes his friend, shortening his work, rather than as **today**, his enemy, taking away jobs, killing workers.*” [Emile Pouget quoted by David Noble, **Op. Cit.**, p. 15]).

Anarchists of all types recognise the importance of critically evaluating technology, industry and so on. The first step of any revolution will be the seizing of the means of production. The second **immediate** step will be the start of their radical transformation by those who use them and are affected by them (i.e. communities, those who use the products they produce and so on). Few, if any, anarchists seek to maintain the current industrial set-up or apply, unchanged, capitalist technology. We doubt that many of the workers who use that technology and work in industry will leave either unchanged. Rather, they will seek to liberate the technology they use from the influences of capitalism, just as they liberated themselves. In Kropotkin’s words “*if most of the workshops we know are foul and unhealthy, it is because the workers are of no account in the organisation of factories*” and “[s]laves can submit to them, but free men will create new conditions, and their will be pleasant and infinitely more productive.” [The Conquest of Bread, p. 121 and p. 123]

This will, of course, involve the shutting down (perhaps instantly or over a period of time) of many branches of industry and the abandonment of such technology which cannot be transformed into something more suitable for use by free individuals. And, of course, many workplaces will be transformed to produce new goods required to meet the needs of the revolutionary people or close due to necessity as a social revolution will disrupt the market for their goods — such as producers of luxury export goods or suppliers of repressive equipment for state security forces. Altogether, a social revolution implies the transformation of technology and industry, just as it implies the transformation of society.

This process of transforming work can be seen from the Spanish Revolution. Immediately after taking over the means of production, the Spanish workers started to transform it. They eliminated unsafe and unhygienic working conditions and workplaces and created new workplaces based

on safe and hygienic working conditions. Working practices were transformed as those who did the work (and so understood it) managed it. Many workplaces were transformed to create products required by the war effort (such as weapons, ammunition, tanks and so on) and to produce consumer goods to meet the needs of the local population as the normal sources of such goods, as Kropotkin predicted, were unavailable due to economic disruption and isolation. Needless to say, these were only the beginnings of the process but they clearly point the way any libertarian social revolution would progress, namely the total transformation of work, industry and technology. Technological change would develop along new lines, ones which will take into account human and ecological needs rather the power and profits of a minority.

Explicit in anarchism is the believe that capitalist and statist methods cannot be used for socialist and libertarian ends. In our struggle for workers' and community self-management is the awareness that workplaces are not merely sites of production – they are also sites of reproduction, the reproduction of certain social relationships based on specific relations of authority between those who give orders and those who take them. The battle to democratise the workplace, to place the collective initiative of the direct producers at the centre of any productive activity, is clearly a battle to transform the workplace, the nature of work and, by necessity, technology as well.

As Kropotkin argued, a *“revolution is more than a mere change of the prevailing political system. It implies the awakening of human intelligence, the increasing of the inventive spirit tenfold, a hundredfold; it is the dawn of a new science ... It is a revolution in the minds of men, as deep, and deeper still, than in their institutions ... the sole fact of having laid hands on middle-class property will imply the necessity of completely re-organising the whole of economic life in the workplaces, the dockyards, the factories.”* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 192] And some think that industry and technology will remain unchanged by such a process and that workers will continue doing the same sort of work, in the same way, using the same methods!

For Kropotkin *“all production has taken a wrong direction, as it is not carried on with a view to securing well-being for all”* under capitalism. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101] Well-being for all obviously includes those who do the producing and so covers the structure of industry and the technological processes used. Similarly, well-being also includes a person's environment and surroundings and so technology and industry must be evaluated on an ecological basis. Thus Kropotkin supported the integration of agriculture and industry, with *“the factory and workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens.”* These factories would be *“airy and hygienic, and consequently economical, factories in which human life is of more account than machinery and the making of extra profits.”* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 197]

Technological progress in an anarchist society, needless to say, will have to take into account these factors as well as others people think are relevant, otherwise the ideal of *“well-being for all”* is rejected.

Capitalism has developed many technologies, some of them harmful or dangerous, but those technologies do not develop by themselves. The technology of cheap solar power, for example, has scarcely moved at all because the capitalists have not chosen to invest in it. Chainsaws do not cut down rain forests, people do; and they do so because they have irresistible economic incentives to do so (whether they be capitalists who stand to make profits or workers who have no other way to survive). Until the economic system is abolished, these incentives will continue to drive technological progress and change.



So, technology always partakes of and expresses the basic values of the social system in which it is embedded. If you have a system (capitalism) that alienates everything, it will naturally produce alienated forms of technology and it will orient those technologies so as to reinforce itself. As we argued in section D.10, capitalists will select technology which re-enforces their power and profits and skew technological change in that direction rather than in those which empower individuals and make the workplace more egalitarian.

This does not mean that we have to reject all technology and industry because it has been shaped by, or developed within, class society. Certain technologies are, of course, so insanely dangerous that they will no doubt be brought to a prompt halt in any sane society. Similarly, certain forms of technology and industrial process will be impossible to transform as they are inherently designed for oppressive ends. Many other industries which produce absurd, obsolete or superfluous commodities will, of course, cease automatically with the disappearance of their commercial or social rationales. But many technologies, however they may presently be misused, have few if any inherent drawbacks. They could be easily adapted to other uses. When people free themselves from domination, they will have no trouble rejecting those technologies that are harmful while adapting others to beneficial uses.

So if it is true that technology reflects the society which creates it, then technology cannot be inherently bad. A liberated, non-exploitative society will naturally create liberating, non-exploitative technologies, just as the present alienated social system naturally produces alienated forms (or uses) of technology.

Does this argument mean that most anarchists are against the “*abolition of work*”? No, unless you confuse all kinds of productive activity with work. It always takes some “*work*” to create a product (even only if it is food) but that work does not necessarily have to be wage labour or otherwise alienated or subject to domination and hierarchy. A life without dead time does not mean a life where you never have to move a muscle or use your head.

And, of course, different communities and different regions would choose different priorities and different lifestyles. As the CNT’s Zaragoza resolution on libertarian communism made clear, “*those communes which reject industrialisation ... may agree upon a different model of co-existence.*” Using the example of “*naturists and nudists,*” it argues that they “*will be entitled to an autonomous administration released from the general commitments*” agreed by the communes and their federations and “*their delegates to congresses of the ... Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes will be empowered to enter into economic contacts with other agricultural and industrial Communes.*” [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 106]

(See Ken Knabb’s **The Poverty of Primitivism** for more details — we have extracted some of the above arguments from this excellent text).

All this means, of course, that technological progress is not neutral but dependent on who makes the decisions. As David Noble argues, “[*t*]echnological determinism, the view that machines make history rather than people, is not correct ... If social changes now upon us seem necessary, it is because they follow not from any disembodied technological logic, but from a social logic.” Technology conforms to “*the interests of power*” but as “*technological process is a social process*” then “*it is, like all social processes, marked by conflict and struggle, and the outcome, therefore, is always ultimately indeterminate.*” Viewing technological development “*as a social process rather than as an autonomous, transcendent, and deterministic force can be liberating ... because it opens up a realm of freedom too long denied. It restores people once again to their proper role as subjects of the story, rather than mere pawns of technology ... And technological development itself, now*

*seen as a social construct, becomes a new variable rather than a first cause, consisting of a range of possibilities and promising a multiplicity of futures.” [Forces of Production, pp. 324–5]*

Change society and the technology introduced and utilised will likewise change. By viewing technological progress as a new variable, dependent on those who make the decisions and the type of society they live in, allows us to see that technological development is not inherently anti-anarchist. A non-oppressive, non-exploitative, ecological society will develop non-oppressive, non-exploitative, ecological technology just as capitalism has developed technology which facilitates exploitation, oppression and environmental destruction. Thus an anarchist questions technology: The best technology? Best for whom? Best for what? Best according to what criteria, what visions, according to whose criteria and whose visions?

For most anarchists, technological advancement is important in a free society in order to maximise the free time available for everyone and replace mindless toil with meaningful work. The means of doing so is the use of **appropriate** technology (and **not** the worship of technology as such). Only by critically evaluating technology and introducing such forms which empower, are understandable and are controllable by individuals and communities as well as minimising ecological distribution (in other words, what is termed appropriate technology) can this be achieved. Only this critical approach to technology can do justice to the power of the human mind and reflect the creative powers which developed the technology in the first place. Unquestioning acceptance of technological progress is just as bad as being unquestioningly anti-technology.

Whether technological advance is a good thing or sustainable depends on the choices we make, and on the social, political, and economic systems we use. We live in a universe that contains effectively infinite resources of matter and energy, yet at the moment we are stuck on a planet whose resources can only be stretched so far. Anarchists (and others) differ as to their assessments of how much development the earth can take, and of the best course for future development, but there’s no reason to believe that advanced technological societies per se cannot be sustained into the foreseeable future if they are structured and used properly.

#### **I.4.10 What would be the advantage of a wide basis of surplus distribution?**

We noted earlier that competition between syndicates can lead to “*petty-bourgeois cooperativism*,” and that to eliminate this problem, the basis of collectivisation needs to be widened so that surpluses are distributed industry-wide or even society-wide. We also pointed out another advantage of a wide surplus distribution: that it allows for the consolidation of enterprises that would otherwise compete, leading to a more efficient allocation of resources and technical improvements. Here we will back up this claim with illustrations from the Spanish Revolution.

Collectivisation in Catalonia embraced not only major industries like municipal transportation and utilities, but smaller establishments as well: small factories, artisan workshops, service and repair shops, etc. Augustin Souchy describes the process as follows:

*“The artisans and small workshop owners, together with their employees and apprentices, often joined the union of their trade. By consolidating their efforts and pooling their resources on a fraternal basis, the shops were able to undertake very big projects and provide services on a much wider scale ... The collectivisation of the hairdressing*

*shops provides an excellent example of how the transition of a small-scale manufacturing and service industry from capitalism to socialism was achieved.”*

*“Before July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1936 [the date of the Revolution], there were 1,100 hairdressing parlours in Barcelona, most of them owned by poor wretches living from hand to mouth. The shops were often dirty and ill-maintained. The 5,000 hairdressing assistants were among the most poorly paid workers... Both owners and assistants therefore voluntarily decided to socialise all their shops.*

*“How was this done? All the shops simply joined the union. At a general meeting they decided to shut down all the unprofitable shops. The 1,100 shops were reduced to 235 establishments, a saving of 135,000 pesetas per month in rent, lighting, and taxes. The remaining 235 shops were modernised and elegantly outfitted. From the money saved, wages were increased by 40%. Everyone having the right to work and everyone received the same wages. The former owners were not adversely affected by socialisation. They were employed at a steady income. All worked together under equal conditions and equal pay. The distinction between employers and employees was obliterated and they were transformed into a working community of equals — socialism from the bottom up.” [“Collectivisations in Catalonia,” in Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives**, pp. 93–94]*

Therefore, co-operation ensures that resources are efficiently allocated and waste is minimised by cutting down needless competition. As consumers have choices in which syndicate to consume from as well as having direct communication between consumer co-operatives and productive units, there is little danger that rationalisation in production will hurt the interests of the consumer.

Another way in which wide distribution of surplus can be advantageous is in investment and research and development. By creating a fund for research and development which is independent of the fortunes of individual syndicates, society as a whole can be improved by access to useful new technologies and processes.

Therefore, in a libertarian-socialist society, people (both within the workplace and in communities) are likely to decide to allocate significant amounts of resources for basic research from the available social output. This is because the results of this research would be freely available to all enterprises and so would aid everyone in the long term. In addition, because workers directly control their workplace and the local community effectively “owns” it, all affected would have an interest in exploring research which would reduce labour, pollution, raw materials and so on or increase output with little or no social impact.

This means that research and innovation would be in the direct interests of everyone involved. Under capitalism, this is not the case. Most research is conducted in order to get an edge in the market by increasing productivity or expanding production into new (previously unwanted) areas. Any increased productivity often leads to unemployment, deskilling and other negative effects for those involved. Libertarian socialism will not face this problem.

It should also be mentioned here that research would be pursued more and more as people take an increased interest in both their own work and education. As people become liberated from the grind of everyday life, they will explore possibilities as their interests take them and so research will take place on many levels within society — in the workplace, in the community, in education and so on.

In addition, it should be noted that basic research is not something which capitalism does well. The rise of the Pentagon system in the USA indicates that basic research often needs state support in order to be successful. As Kenneth Arrow noted over thirty years ago that market forces are insufficient to promote basic research:

*“Thus basic research, the output of which is only used as an informational input into other inventive activities, is especially unlikely to be rewarded. In fact, it is likely to be of commercial value to the firm undertaking it only if other firms are prevented from using the information. But such restriction reduces the efficiency of inventive activity in general, and will therefore reduce its quantity also.”* [“Economic Welfare and the Allocation of Resources for Inventiveness,” in National Bureau of Economic Research, **The Rate and Direction of Inventive Activity**, p. 618]

Would modern society have produced so many innovations if it had not been for the Pentagon system, the space race and so on? Take the Internet, for example – it is unlikely that this would have got off the ground if it had not been for the state. Needless to say, of course, much of this technology has been developed for evil reasons and purposes and would be in need of drastic change (and, in many cases, abolition) before it could be used in a libertarian society. However, the fact remains that it is unlikely that a pure market based system could have generated most of the technology we take for granted. As Noam Chomsky argues:

*“[Alan] Greenspan [head of the US Federal Reserve] gave a talk to newspaper editors in the US. He spoke passionately about the miracles of the market, the wonders brought by consumer choice, and so on. He also gave examples: the Internet, computers, information processing, lasers, satellites, transistors. It’s an interesting list: these are textbook examples of creativity and production in the public sector. In the case of the Internet, for 30 years it was designed, developed and funded primarily in the public sector, mostly the Pentagon, then the National Science Foundation – that’s most of the hardware, the software, new ideas, technology, and so on. In just the last couple of years it has been handed over to people like Bill Gates ... In the case of the Internet, consumer choice was close to zero, and during the crucial development stages that same was true of computers, information processing, and all the rest ...*

*“In fact, of all the examples that Greenspan gives, the only one that maybe rises above the level of a joke is transistors, and they are an interesting case. Transistors, in fact, were developed in a private laboratory – Bell Telephone Laboratories of AT&T – which also made major contributions to solar cells, radio astronomy, information theory, and lots of other important things. But what is the role of markets and consumer choice in that? Well, again, it turns out, zero. AT&T was a government supported monopoly, so there was no consumer choice, and as a monopoly they could charge high prices: in effect a tax on the public which they could use for institutions like Bell Laboratories ... So again, it’s publicly subsidised. As if to demonstrate the point, as soon as the industry was deregulated, Bell Labs went out of existence, because the public wasn’t paying for it any more ... But that’s only the beginning of the story. True, Bell invented transistors, but they used wartime technology, which, again, was publicly subsidised and state-initiated. Furthermore, there was nobody to but transistors at that time, because*

*they were very expensive to produce. So, for ten years the government was the major procurer ... Government procurement provided entrepreneurial initiatives and guided the development of the technology, which could then be disseminated to industry.” [Rogue States, pp. 192–3]*

As well as technological developments, a wide basis of surplus generation would help improve the skills and knowledge of the members of a community. As Keynesian economist Michael Stewart points out, “[t]here are both theoretical and empirical reasons to suppose that market forces under-provide research and development expenditures, as well as both education and training.” [Keynes in the 1990s, p. 77]

If we look at vocational training and education, a wide basis of surplus distribution would aid this no end. Under free market capitalism, vocational training suffers due to the nature of the market. The argument is simple. Under free market capitalism, if companies stood to gain, in terms of higher profits, from training more workers, they would train them. If they did not, that just proves that training was not required. Unfortunately, this piece of reasoning overlooks the fact that profit maximising firms will not incur costs that will be enjoyed by others. This means that firms will be reluctant to spend money on training if they fear that the trained workers will soon be poached by other firms which can offer more money because they had not incurred the cost of providing training. This means that few firms will provide the required training as they could not be sure that the trained workers will not leave for their competitors (and, of course, a trained work force also, due to their skill, have more workplace power and are less replaceable).

By socialising training via confederations of workplaces, syndicates could increase productivity via increasing the skill levels of their members. Higher skill levels will also tend to increase innovation and enjoyment at “work” when combined with workers’ self-management. This is because an educated workforce in control of their own time will be unlikely to tolerate mundane, boring, machine-like work and seek ways to eliminate it, improve the working environment and increase productivity to give them more free time.

The free market can also have a negative impact on innovation. This is because, in order to please shareholders with higher share prices, companies may reduce funds available for real investment and R&D, which would also depress growth and employment in the long term. What shareholders might condemn as “*uneconomic*” (investment projects and R&D) can, and does, make society as a whole better off. However, these gains are over the long term and, within capitalism, it is short-term gains which count. Higher share prices in the here and now are essential in order to survive and so see the long-run.

In a more socialised economy, wide-scale collectivisation could aid in allocating resources for Research and Development, long term investment, innovation and so on. Via the use of mutual banks or confederations of syndicates and communes, resources could be allocated which take into account the importance of long-term priorities, as well as social costs, which are not taken into account (indeed, are beneficial to ignore) under capitalism. Rather than penalise long term investment and research and development, a socialised economy would ensure that adequate funds are available, something which would benefit everyone in society in some way.

In addition to work conducted by syndicates, education establishments, communes and so on, it would be essential to provide resources for individuals and small groups to pursue “*pet projects*.” Of course, syndicates and confederations will have their own research institutions but the innovatory role of the interested “*amateur*” cannot be over-rated. As Kropotkin argued:

*“What is needed to promote the spirit of innovation is ... the awakening of thought, the boldness of conception, which our entire education causes to languish; it is the spreading of a scientific education, which would increase the numbers of inquirers a hundred-fold; it is faith that humanity is going to take a step forward, because it is enthusiasm, the hope of doing good, that has inspired all the great inventors. The Social Revolution alone can give this impulse to thought, this boldness, this knowledge, this conviction of working for all.*

*“Then we shall have vast institutes ... immense industrial laboratories open to all inquirers, where men will be able to work out their dreams, after having acquitted themselves of their duty towards society; ... where they will make their experiments; where they will find other comrades, experts in other branches of industry, likewise coming to study some difficult problem, and therefore able to help and enlighten each other — the encounter of their ideas and experiences causing the longed-for solution to be found.”* [The Conquest of Bread, p. 117]

In addition, unlike under capitalism, where inventors often *“carefully hide their inventions from each other, as they are hampered by patents and Capitalism — that bane of present society, that stumbling-block in the path of intellectual and moral progress,”* inventors within a free society will be able to build upon the knowledge of everyone and past generations. Rather than hide knowledge from others, in case they get a competitive advantage, knowledge would be shared, enriching all involved as well as the rest of society [Ibid.]. As John O’Neil argues:

*“There is, in a competitive market economy, a disincentive to communicate information. The market encourages secrecy, which is inimical to openness in science. It presupposes a view of property in which the owner has rights to exclude others. In the sphere of science, such rights of exclusion place limits on the communication of information and theories which are incompatible with the growth of knowledge ... science tends to grow when communication is open... [In addition a] necessary condition for the acceptability of a theory or experimental result is that it pass the public, critical scrutiny of competent scientific judges. A private theory or result is one that is shielded from the criteria of scientific acceptability.”* [The Market, p. 153]

Thus socialisation would aid innovation and scientific development. This is two fold, by providing the necessary resources for such work and by providing the community spirit required to push the boundaries of science forward.

Lastly, there is the issue of those who cannot work and general provision of public goods. With a wide distribution to surplus, communal hospitals, schools, universities and so on can be created. This simple fact is that any society has members who cannot (indeed, should not) work. For example, the young, the old and the sick. In a mutualist society, particularly an Individualist Anarchists mutualist society, there is no real provision for these individuals unless someone (a family member or friend) provides them with the money required for hospital fees and so on. However, with a communal basis for distribution every member of the commune can receive an education, health care and so on as a right — and so live a fully human life as a right, rather than a privilege. Moreover, the experience of capitalist countries suggests that socialising, say, health care, leads to a service with lower costs than one which is predominately privatised. For

example, the administrative costs of the British National Health Service are a fraction of the U.S. or Chilean systems (where a sizeable percentage of income ends up as profit rather than as health care).

This tendency for the use of surplus for communal services (such as hospitals and education) can be seen from the Spanish Revolution. Many collectives funded new hospitals and colleges for their members, providing hundreds of thousands with services they could never have afforded by their own labour. This is a classic example of co-operation helping the co-operators achieve far more than they could by their own isolated activities.

#### I.4.11 If libertarian socialism eliminates the profit motive, won't creativity and performance suffer?

Firstly, just to be totally clear, by the profit motive we mean money profit. As anarchists consider co-operation to be in our self-interest — i.e. we will “*profit*” from it in the widest sense possible — we are **not** dismissing the fact people usually act to improve their situation. However, money profit is a **very** narrow form of “*self-interest*,” indeed so narrow as to be positively harmful to the individual in many ways (in terms of personal development, interpersonal relationships, economic and social well-being, and so on). In other words, do not take our discussion in this section of the FAQ on the “*profit motive*” to imply a denial of self-interest, quite the reverse. Anarchists simply reject the “*narrow concept of life which consist[s] in thinking that **profits** are the only leading motive of human society.*” [Peter Kropotkin, **Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, p. 25]

Secondly, we cannot hope to deal fully with the harmful effects of competition and the profit motive. For more information, we recommend Alfie Kohn's **No Contest: The Case Against Competition and Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes**. He documents the extensive evidence accumulated that disproves the “*common sense*” of capitalism that competition and profits are the best way to organise a society.

According to Alfie Kohn, a growing body of psychological research suggests that rewards can lower performance levels, especially when the performance involves creativity. [“*Studies Find Reward Often No Motivator*,” **Boston Globe**, Monday 19 January 1987] Kohn notes that “*a related series of studies shows that intrinsic interest in a task — the sense that something is worth doing for its own sake — typically declines when someone is rewarded for doing it.*”

Much of the research on creativity and motivation has been performed by Theresa Amabile, associate professor of psychology at Brandeis University. One of her recent experiments involved asking elementary school and college students to make “*silly*” collages. The young children were also asked to invent stories. Teachers who rated the projects found that those students who had contracted for rewards did the least creative work. “*It may be that commissioned work will, in general, be less creative than work that is done out of pure interest*,” Amabile says. In 1985, she asked 72 creative writers at Brandeis and at Boston University to write poetry:

*“Some students then were given a list of extrinsic (external) reasons for writing, such as impressing teachers, making money and getting into graduate school, and were asked to think about their own writing with respect to these reasons. Others were given a list of intrinsic reasons: the enjoyment of playing with words, satisfaction from self-*

*expression, and so forth. A third group was not given any list. All were then asked to do more writing.*

*“The results were clear. Students given the extrinsic reasons not only wrote less creatively than the others, as judged by 12 independent poets, but the quality of their work dropped significantly. Rewards, Amabile says, have this destructive effect primarily with creative tasks, including higher-level problem-solving. ‘The more complex the activity, the more it’s hurt by extrinsic reward, she said.’” [Ibid.]*

In another study, by James Gabarino of Chicago’s Erikson Institute for Advanced Studies in Child Development, it was found that girls in the fifth and sixth grades tutored younger children much less effectively if they were promised free movie tickets for teaching well. *“The study, showed that tutors working for the reward took longer to communicate ideas, got frustrated more easily, and did a poorer job in the end than those who were not rewarded” [Ibid.]*

Such studies cast doubt on the claim that financial reward is the only effective way — or even the best way — to motivate people. As Kohn notes, *“[t]hey also challenge the behaviourist assumption that any activity is more likely to occur if it is rewarded.”* Amabile concludes that her research *“definitely refutes the notion that creativity can be operantly conditioned.”*

These findings re-enforce the findings of other scientific fields. Biology, social psychology, ethnology and anthropology all present evidence that support co-operation as the natural basis for human interaction. For example, ethnological studies indicate that virtually all indigenous cultures operate on the basis of highly co-operative relationships and anthropologists have presented evidence to show that the predominant force driving early human evolution was co-operative social interaction, leading to the capacity of hominids to develop culture. This is even sinking into capitalism, with industrial psychology now promoting *“worker participation”* and team functioning because it is decisively more productive than hierarchical management. More importantly, the evidence shows that co-operative workplaces are more productive than those organised on other principles. All other things equal, producers’ co-operatives will be more efficient than capitalist or state enterprises, on average. Co-operatives can often achieve higher productivity even when their equipment and conditions are worse. Furthermore, the better the organisation approximates the co-operative ideal, the better the productivity.

All this is unsurprising to social anarchists (and it should make individualist anarchists reconsider their position). Peter Kropotkin argued that, *“[i]f we ... ask Nature: ‘Who are the fittest: those who are continually at war with each other, or those who support one another?’ we at once see that those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest. They have more chances to survive, and they attain, in their respective classes, the highest development of intelligence and bodily organisation.”* [Mutual Aid, p. 24] From his observation that mutual aid gives evolutionary advantage to those who practice it, he derived his political philosophy — a philosophy which stressed community and co-operative endeavour.

Modern research has reinforced his argument. For example, as noted, Alfie Kohn is also the author of **No Contest: The Case Against Competition** and he spent seven years reviewing more than 400 research studies dealing with competition and co-operation. Prior to his investigation, he believed that *“competition can be natural and appropriate and healthy.”* After reviewing research findings, he radically revised this opinion, concluding that, the *“ideal amount of competition ... in any environment, the classroom, the workplace, the family, the playing field, is none ... [Competition] is always destructive.”* [Noetic Sciences Review, Spring 1990]



Here we present a very short summary of his findings. According to Kohn, there are three principle consequences of competition:

Firstly, it has a negative effect on productivity and excellence. This is due to increased anxiety, inefficiency (as compared to co-operative sharing of resources and knowledge), and the undermining of inner motivation. Competition shifts the focus to victory over others, and away from intrinsic motivators such as curiosity, interest, excellence, and social interaction. Studies show that co-operative behaviour, by contrast, consistently predicts good performance – a finding which holds true under a wide range of subject variables. Interestingly, the positive benefits of co-operation become more significant as tasks become more complex, or where greater creativity and problem-solving ability is required (as indicated above).

Secondly, competition lowers self-esteem and hampers the development of sound, self-directed individuals. A strong sense of self is difficult to attain when self-evaluation is dependent on seeing how we measure up to others. On the other hand, those whose identity is formed in relation to how they contribute to group efforts generally possess greater self-confidence and higher self-esteem.

Finally, competition undermines human relationships. Humans are social beings; we best express our humanness in interaction with others. By creating winners and losers, competition is destructive to human unity and prevents close social feeling.

Social Anarchists have long argued these points. In the competitive mode, people work at cross purposes, or purely for (material) personal gain. This leads to an impoverishment of society and hierarchy, with a lack of communal relations that result in an impoverishment of all the individuals involved (mentally, spiritually, ethically and, ultimately, materially). This not only leads to a weakening of individuality and social disruption, but also to economic inefficiency as energy is wasted in class conflict and invested in building bigger and better cages to protect the haves from the have-nots. Instead of creating useful things, human activity is spent in useless toil reproducing an injustice and authoritarian system.

All in all, the results of competition (as documented by a host of scientific disciplines) shows its poverty as well as indicating that co-operation is the means by which the fittest survive.

Moreover, as Kohn discusses in **Punished by Rewards**, the notion that material rewards result in better work is simply not true. Basing itself on simple behaviourist psychology, such arguments fail to meet the test of long-term success (and, indeed, can be counter-productive). Indeed, it means treating human beings as little better than pets or other animals (he argues that it is “*not an accident that the theory behind ‘Do this and you’ll get that’ derives from work with other species, or that behaviour management is frequently described in words better suited to animals.*”) In other words, it “*is by its very nature dehumanising.*” [**Punished by Rewards**, p. 24 and p. 25]

Rather than simply being motivated by outside stimuli like mindless robots, people are not passive. We are “*beings who possess natural curiosity about ourselves and our environment, who search for and overcome challenges, who try and master skills and attain competence, and who seek new levels of complexity in what we learn and do ... in general we act on the environment as much as we are acted on by it, and we do not do so simply in order to receive a reward.*” [Op. Cit., p. 25]

Kohn presents extensive evidence to back upon his case that rewards harm activity and individuals. We cannot do justice to it here. We will present a few examples. One study with college students showed that those paid to work on a puzzle “*spent less time on it than those who hadn’t been paid*” when they were given a choice of whether to work on it or not. “*It appeared that working for a reward made people less interested in the task.*” Another study with children showed

that “*extrinsic rewards reduce intrinsic motivation.*” Scores of other studies confirmed this. This is because a reward is effectively saying that a given activity is not worth doing for its own sake — and why would anyone wish to do something they have to be bribed to do? [Op. Cit., p. 70 and p. 71]

In the workplace, a similar process goes on. Kohn presents extensive evidence to show that extrinsic motivation also does not work in the workplace. Indeed, he argues that “*economists have it wrong if they think of work as a ‘disutility’ — something unpleasant we must do in order to be able to buy what we need, merely a means to an end.*” Kohn stresses that “*to assume that money is what drives people is to adopt an impoverished understanding of human motivation.*” Moreover, “*the risk of any incentive or pay-for-performance system is that it will make people less interested in their work and therefore less likely to approach it with enthusiasm and a commitment to excellence. Furthermore, the more closely we tie compensation (or other rewards) to performance, the most damage we do.*” [Op. Cit., p. 131, p. 134 and p. 140]

Kohn argues that the idea that human’s will only work for profit or rewards “*can be fairly described as dehumanising*” if “*the capacity for responsible action, the natural love of learning, and the desire to do good work are already part of who we are.*” Also, it is “*a way of trying to control people*” and so to “*anyone who is troubled by a model of human relationships founded principally on the idea of one person controlling another must ponder whether rewards are as innocuous as they are sometimes made out to be.*” He uses the example of a workplace, where “*there is no getting around the fact that ‘the basic purpose of merit pay is manipulative.’ One observer more bluntly characterises incentives as ‘demeaning’ since the message they really convey is, ‘Please big daddy boss and you will receive the rewards that the boss deems appropriate.’*” [Op. Cit., p. 26]

Given that much work is controlled by others and can be a hateful experience under capitalism does not mean that it has to be that way. Clearly, even under wage slavery most workers can and do find work interesting and seek to do it well — not because of possible rewards or punishment but because we seek meaning in our activities and try and do them well. Given that research shows that reward orientated work structures harm productivity and excellence, social anarchists have more than just hope to base their ideas. Such research confirms Kropotkin’s comments:

*“Wage-work is serf-work; it cannot, it must not, produce all it could produce. And it is high time to disbelieve the legend which presents wagedom as the best incentive to productive work. If industry nowadays brings in a hundred times more than it did in the days of our grandfathers, it is due to the sudden awakening of physical and chemical sciences towards the end of the [18<sup>th</sup>] century; not to the capitalist organisation of wagedom, but in spite of that organisation.”* [The Conquest of Bread, p. 150]

For these reasons, social anarchists are confident that the elimination of the profit motive within the context of self-management will not harm productivity and creativity, but rather **enhance** them (within an authoritarian system in which workers enhance the power and income of bureaucrats, we can expect different results). With the control of their own work and workplaces ensured, all working people can express their abilities to the full. This will see an explosion of creativity and initiative, not a reduction.

### I.4.12 Won't there be a tendency for capitalist enterprise to reappear in any socialist society?

This is a common right-libertarian objection. Robert Nozick, for example, imagines the following scenario:

*"[S]mall factories would spring up in a socialist society, unless forbidden. I melt some of my personal possessions and build a machine out of the material. I offer you and others a philosophy lecture once a week in exchange for yet other things, and so on ... some persons might even want to leave their jobs in socialist industry and work full time in this private sector... [This is] how private property even in means of production would occur in a socialist society."*

Hence Nozick claims that *"the socialist society will have to forbid capitalist acts between consenting adults."* [Anarchy, State and Utopia, pp. 162–3]

As Jeff Stein points out, however, *"the only reason workers want to be employed by capitalists is because they have no other means for making a living, no access to the means of production other than by selling themselves. For a capitalist sector to exist there must be some form of private ownership of productive resources, and a scarcity of alternatives. The workers must be in a condition of economic desperation for them to be willing to give up an equal voice in the management of their daily affairs and accept a boss."* ["Market Anarchism? Caveat Emptor!," a review of **A Structured Anarchism : An Overview of Libertarian Theory and Practice** by John Griffin, **Libertarian Labour Review** #13, Winter 1992–93, pp. 33–39]

In an anarchist society, there is no need for anyone to *"forbid"* capitalist acts. All people have to do is **refrain** from helping would-be capitalists set up monopolies of productive assets. This is because, as we have noted in section B.3.2, capitalism cannot exist without some form of state to protect such monopolies. In a libertarian-socialist society, of course, there would be no state to begin with, and so there would be no question of it *"refraining"* from doing anything, including protecting would-be capitalists' monopolies of the means of production. In other words, would-be capitalists would face stiff competition for workers in an anarchist society. This is because self-managed workplaces would be able to offer workers more benefits (such as self-government, better working conditions, etc.) than the would-be capitalist ones. The would-be capitalists would have to offer not only excellent wages and conditions but also, in all likelihood, workers' control and hire-purchase on capital used. The chances of making a profit once the various monopolies associated with capitalism are abolished are slim.

It should be noted that Nozick makes a serious error in his case. He assumes that the *"use rights"* associated with an anarchist (i.e. socialist) society are identical to the *"property rights"* of a capitalist one. This is **not** the case, and so his argument is weakened and loses its force. Simply put, there is no such thing as an absolute or *"natural"* law of property. As John Stuart Mill pointed out, *"powers of exclusive use and control are very various, and differ greatly in different countries and in different states of society."* ["Chapters on Socialism," **Principles of Political Economy**, p. 432] Therefore, Nozick slips an ideological ringer into his example by erroneously interpreting socialism (or any other society for that matter) as specifying a distribution of private property rights (like those he, and other supporters of capitalism, believes in) along with the wealth. As Mill argued, *"[o]ne of the mistakes oftenest committed, and which are the sources of the greatest*

*practical errors in human affairs, is that of supposing that the same name always stands for the same aggregation of ideas. No word has been subject of more of this kind of misunderstanding than the word property.*” [Ibid.] Unfortunately, this error seems particularly common with right-wing libertarians, who assume any use of the word “*property*” means what they mean by the word (this error reaches ridiculous levels when it comes to their co-option of the Individualist Anarchists based on this error!).

In other words, Nozick assumes that in **all** societies property rights must replace use rights in both consumption **and** production (an assumption that is ahistorical in the extreme). As Cheyney C. Ryan comments, “[d]ifferent conceptions of justice differ not only in how they would apportion society’s holdings but in what rights individuals have over their holdings once they have been apportioned.” [“Property Rights and Individual Liberty”, in **Reading Nozick**, p. 331]

In effect, what possessions someone holds within a libertarian socialist society will not be his or her property (in the capitalist sense) any more than a company car is the property of the employee under capitalism. This means that as long as an individual remained a member of a commune and abided by the rules they helped create in that commune then they would have full use of the resources of that commune and could use their possessions as they saw fit (even “*melt them down*” to create a new machine, or whatever). Such lack of **absolute** “*ownership*” does not reduce liberty any more than the employee and the company car he or she uses (bar destruction and selling it, the employee can use it as they see fit).

This point highlights another flaw in Nozick’s argument. If his argument is true, then it applies equally to capitalist society. For 40 hours plus a week, workers are employed by a boss. In that time they are given resources to use, under instructions of their boss. They are most definitely **not** allowed to melt down these resources to create a machine or use the resources they have been given access to further their own plans. In other words, “*capitalist society will have to forbid capitalist acts between consenting adults.*” This can apply equally to rented accommodation as well, for example when landlords ban working from home or selling off the furniture that is provided. Thus, ironically, capitalism forbids capitalist acts between consenting adults all the time.

Of course, Nozick’s reply to this point would be that the individual’s involved have “*consented*” to these rules when they signed their contract. But the same can be said of an anarchist society — it is freely joined and freely left. To join a communist-anarchist society it would simply be a case of agreeing to “*exchange*” the product of one’s labour freely with the other members of that society. Thus you could smelt down personal possessions and create a machine, exchange your time with others and so on. However, if wage labour becomes involved then the individuals involved have ceased being members of “*the socialist society*” by their actions. They have violated their agreements with their fellows and so it is not a case of “*forbidding*” certain acts. Rather it is a case of individuals meeting their self-created obligations. If this is “*authoritarian*” then so is capitalism — and we must stress that at least anarchist associations are based on self-management and so the individuals involved have an equal say in the obligations they live under.

Notice also that Nozick confuses exchange with capitalism (“*I offer you a lecture once a week in exchange for other things*”). This is a telling mistake by someone who claims to be an expert on capitalism, because the defining feature of capitalism is not exchange (which obviously took place long before capitalism existed) but labour contracts involving capitalist middlemen who appropriate a portion of the value produced by workers — in other words, wage labour. Nozick’s example is merely a direct labour contract between the producer and the consumer. It does not involve any capitalist intermediary taking a percentage of the value created by the producer. Nor

does it involve exploitative wage labour, what makes capitalism capitalism. It is only this latter type of transaction that libertarian socialism prevents — and not by “forbidding” it but simply by refusing to maintain the conditions necessary for it to occur, i.e. protection of capitalist property.

In addition, we must note that Nozick also confuses “*private property in the means of production*” with capitalism. Liberation socialism can be easily compatible with “*private property in the means of production*” when that “*private property*” is based on **possession** rather than capitalistic property. This can be seen from Kropotkin’s arguments that peasant and artisan workers, those who “*exploit nobody*,” would **not** be expropriated in an anarchist revolution. [Act for Yourselves, pp. 104–5] Nozick, in other words, confuses private property with possession and confuses pre-capitalist forms of production with capitalist ones. Thus possession of the means of production by people outside of the free commune is perfectly acceptable to social anarchists (see also section I.6.2).

Lastly, we must also note that Nozick also ignores the fact that acquisition **must** come before transfer, meaning that before “*consenting*” capitalist acts occur, individual ones must precede it. As argued above, for this to happen the would-be capitalist must steal communally owned resources by barring others from using them. This obviously would restrict the liberty of those who currently used them and so be hotly opposed by members of a community. If an individual did desire to use resources to employ wage labour then they would have effectively removed themselves from “*socialist society*” and so that society would bar them from using **its** resources (i.e. they would have to buy access to all the resources they currently took for granted).

Thus an anarchist society would have a flexible approach to Nozick’s (flawed) argument. Individuals, in their free time, could “*exchange*” their time and possessions as they saw fit. These, however, are not “*capitalist acts*” regardless of Nozick’s claims. However, the moment an individual employs wage labour then, by this act, they have broken their agreements with their fellows and, therefore, no longer part of “*socialist society*.” This would involve them no longer having access to the benefits of communal life and to communal possessions. They have, in effect, placed themselves outside of their community and must fair for themselves. After all, if they desire to create “*private property*” (in the capitalist sense) then they have no right of access to communal possessions without paying for that right. For those who become wage slaves, a socialist society would, probably, be less strict. As Bakunin argued:

*“Since the freedom of every individual is inalienable, society shall never allow any individual whatsoever legally to alienate his [or her] freedom or engage upon any contract with another on any footing but the utmost equality and reciprocity. It shall not, however, have the power to disbar a man or woman so devoid of any sense of personal dignity as to contract a relationship of voluntary servitude with another individual, but it will consider them as living off private charity and therefore unfit to enjoy political rights **throughout the duration of that servitude.**”* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 68–9]

It should also be noted here that Nozick’s theory does not provide any support for such appropriation of commonly held resources, meaning that his (right) libertarianism is totally without foundations (see section B.3.4 for details). His argument in favour of such appropriations recognises that certain liberties are very definitely restricted by private property (and it should be kept in mind that the destruction of commonly held resources, such as village commons, were

enforced by the state — see section F.8.3). As Cheyney C. Ryan points out, Nozick “*invoke[s] personal liberty as the decisive ground for rejecting patterned principles of justice [such as socialism] and restrictions on the ownership of capital...[b]ut where the rights of private property admittedly restrict the liberties of the average person, he seems perfectly happy to trade off such liberties against material gain for society as a whole.*” [“Property Rights and Individual Liberty”, in **Reading Nozack**, p. 339]

Again, as pointed out in section F.2 (“What do ‘anarcho’-capitalists mean by ‘freedom?’”) right-libertarians would better be termed “*Propertarians.*” Why is liberty according a primary importance when arguing against socialism but not when private property restricts liberty? Obviously, Nozick considers the liberties associated with private property as more important than liberty **in general**. Likewise, capitalism must forbid corresponding socialist acts by individuals (for example, squatting unused property or trespassing on private property) and often socialist acts between consenting individuals (for example, the formation of unions against the wishes of the property owner who is, of course, sovereign over their property and those who use it, or the use of workplace resources to meet the needs of the producer rather than the owner).

So, to conclude, this question involves some strange logic (and many question begging assumptions) and ultimately fails in its attempt to prove libertarian socialism must “ban” “*capitalistic acts between individuals.*” In addition, the objection undermines capitalism because it cannot support the creation of private property out of communal property in the first place.

#### **I.4.13 Who will do the “*dirty*” or unpleasant work?**

This problem affects every society, including capitalism of course. Under capitalism, this problem is “*solved*” by ensuring that such jobs are done by those at the bottom of the social pile. In other words, it does not really solve the problem at all — it just ensures that some people are subject to this work the bulk of their working lives. However, most anarchists reject this flawed solution in favour of something better, one that shares the good with the bad and so ensure everyone’s life is better.

How this would be done depends on the kind of libertarian community you are a member of. Obviously, few would argue against the idea that individuals will voluntarily work at things they enjoyed doing. However there are some jobs that few, if any, would enjoy (for example, collecting rubbish, processing sewage, dangerous work, etc.). So how would an anarchist society deal with it?

It will be clear what is considered unpleasant work in any society — few people (if any) will volunteer to do it. As in any advanced society, communities and syndicates who required extra help would inform others of their need by the various form of media that existed. In addition, it would be likely that each community would have a “*division of activity*” syndicate whose work would be to distribute information about these posts and to which members of a community would go to discover what placements existed for the line of “work” they were interested in. So we have a means by which syndicates and communes can ask for new hands and the means by which individuals can discover these placements. Obviously, some work will still require qualifications and that will be taken into account when syndicates and communes “advertise” for help.

For “work” placements in which supply exceeded demand, it would be easy to arrange a work share scheme to ensure that most people get a chance to do that kind of work (see below for a

discussion of what could happen if the numbers applying for a certain form of work were too high for this to work). When such placements are marked by an excess of demand by supply, it's obvious that the activity in question is not viewed as pleasant or desirable. Until such time as it can be automated away, a free society will have to encourage people to volunteer for "work" placements they do not particularly want to do.

So, it is obvious that not all "jobs" are equal in interest or enjoyment. It is sometimes argued that people would start to join or form syndicates which are involved in more fun activities. By this process excess workers would be found in the more enjoyable "jobs" while the boring and dangerous ones would suffer from a scarcity of willing workers. Hence, so the argument goes, a socialist society would have to force people to do certain jobs and so that requires a state. Obviously, this argument ignores the fact that under capitalism usually it is the boring, dangerous work which is the least well paid with the worse working conditions. In addition, this argument ignores the fact that under workers self-management boring, dangerous work would be minimised and transformed as much as possible. Only under capitalist hierarchy are people in no position to improve the quality of their work and working environment. As George Barrett argues:

*"Now things are so strangely organised at present that it is just the dirty and disagreeable work that men will do cheaply, and consequently there is no great rush to invent machines to take their place. In a free society, on the other hand, it is clear that the disagreeable work will be one of the first things that machinery will be called upon to eliminate. It is quite fair to argue, therefore, that the disagreeable work will, to a large extent, disappear in a state of anarchism."* [Objections to Anarchism]

Moreover, most anarchists would think that the argument that there would be a flood of workers taking up "easy" work placements is abstract and ignores the dynamics of a real society. While many individuals would try to create new productive syndicates in order to express themselves in innovative work outwith the existing research and development going on within existing syndicates, the idea that the majority of individuals would leave their current work at a drop of a hat is crazy. A workplace is a community and part of a community and people would value the links they have with their fellow workers. As such they would be aware of the impacts of their decisions on both themselves and society as a whole. So, while we would expect a turnover of workers between syndicates, the mass transfers claimed in this argument are unlikely. Most workers who did want to try their hand at new work would apply for work places at syndicates that required new people, not create their own ones. Because of this, work transfers would be moderate and easily handled.

However, the possibility of mass desertions does exist and so must be addressed. So how would a libertarian socialist society deal with a majority of its workers deciding to all do interesting work, leaving the boring and/or dangerous work undone? It, of course, depends on the type of anarchism in question and is directly related to the question of who will do the "dirty work" in an anarchist society. So, how will an anarchist society ensure that individual preferences for certain types of work matches the requirements of social demand for labour?

Under mutualism, those who desired a certain form of work done would reach an agreement with a workers or a co-operative and pay them to do the work in question. Individuals would form co-operatives with each co-operative would have to find its place on the market and so this

would ensure that work was spread across society as required. Individuals desiring to form a new co-operative would either provide their own start up credit or arrange a interest free loan from a mutual bank. However, this could lead to some people doing unpleasant work all the time and so is hardly a solution. As in capitalism, we may see some people doing terrible work because it is better than no work at all. This is a solution few anarchists would support.

In a collectivist or communist anarchist society, such an outcome would be avoided by sharing such tasks as fairly as possible between a community's members. For example, by allocating a few days a month to all fit members of a community to do work which no one volunteers to do, it would soon be done. In this way, every one shares in the unpleasant as well as pleasant tasks (and, of course, minimises the time any one individual has to spend on it). Or, for tasks which are very popular, individuals would also have to do unpleasant tasks as well. In this way, popular and unpopular tasks would balance each other out.

Another possible solution could be to follow the ideas of Josiah Warren and take into account the undesirability of the work when considering the level of labour notes received or communal hours worked. In other words, in a collectivist society the individuals who do unpleasant work may be "rewarded" (along with social esteem) with a slightly higher pay – the number of labour notes, for example, for such work would be a multiple of the standard amount, the actual figure being related to how much supply exceeds demand (in a communist society, a similar solution could be possible, with the number of necessary hours required by an individual being reduced by an amount that corresponds to the undesirability of the work involved). The actual levels of "reward" would be determined by agreements between the syndicates.

To be more precise, in a collectivist society, individuals would either use their own savings and/or arrange loans of community labour banks for credit in order to start up a new syndicate. This will obviously restrict the number of new syndicates being formed. In the case of individuals joining existing syndicates, the labour value of the work done would be related to the number of people interested in doing that work. For example, if a given type of work has 50% more people wanting to do it than actually required, then the labour value for one hours work in this industry would correspondingly be less than one hour. If fewer people applied than required, then the labour value would increase, as would holiday time, etc.

In this way, "supply and demand" for workers would soon approximate each other. In addition, a collectivist society would be better placed than the current system to ensure work-sharing and other methods to spread unpleasant and pleasant tasks equally around society due to its organs of self-management and the rising social awareness via participation and debate within those organs.

A communist-anarchist society's solution would be similar to the collectivist one. There would still be basic agreements between its members for work done and so for work placements with excess supply of workers the amount of hours necessary to meet the confederations agreed minimum would correspondingly increase. For example, an industry with 100% excess supply of volunteers would see its minimum requirement increase from (say) 20 hours a week to 30 hours. An industry with less applicants than required would see the number of required hours of "work" decrease, plus increases in holiday time and so on. As G.D.H. Cole argues in respect of this point:

*"Let us first by the fullest application of machinery and scientific methods eliminate or reduce ... 'dirty work' that admit to such treatment. This has never been tried... under capitalism... It is cheaper to exploit and ruin human beings... Secondly, let us see*



*what forms of 'dirty work' we can do without ... [and] if any form of work is not only unpleasant but degrading, we will do without it, whatever the cost. No human being ought to be allowed or compelled to do work that degrades. Thirdly, for what dull or unpleasant work remains, let us offer whatever special conditions are required to attract the necessary workers, not in higher pay, but in shorter hours, holidays extending over six months in the year, conditions attractive enough to men who have other uses for their time or attention to being the requisite number to undertake it voluntarily."*  
[Guild Socialism Restated, p. 76]

By these methods a balance between industrial sectors would be achieved as individuals would balance their desire for interesting work with their desires for free time. Over time, by using the power of appropriate technology, even such time keeping would be minimised or even got eliminated as society developed freely.

And it is important to remember that the means of production required by new syndicates do not fall from the sky. Other members of society will have to work to produce the required goods. Therefore it is likely that the syndicates and communes would agree that only a certain (maximum) percentage of production would be allocated to start-up syndicates (as opposed to increasing the resources of existing confederations). Such a figure would obviously be revised periodically in order to take into account changing circumstances. Members of the community who decide to form syndicates for new productive tasks or syndicates which do the same work but are independent of existing confederations would have to get the agreement of other workers to supply them with the necessary means of production (just as today they have to get the agreement of a bank to receive the necessary credit to start a new business). By budgeting the amounts available, a free society can ensure that individual desires for specific kinds of work can be matched with the requirements of society for useful production.

And we must point out (just to make sure we are not misunderstood) that there will be no group of "*planners*" deciding which applications for resources get accepted. Instead, individuals and associations would apply to different production units for resources, whose workers in turn decide whether to produce the goods requested. If it is within the syndicate's agreed budget then it is likely that they will produce the required materials. In this way, a communist-anarchist society will ensure the maximum amount of economic freedom to start new syndicates and join existing ones plus ensure that social production does not suffer in the process.

Of course, no system is perfect — we are sure that not everyone will be able to do the work they enjoy the most (this is also the case under capitalism, we may add). In an anarchist society every method of ensuring that individuals pursue the work they are interested in would be investigated. If a possible solution can be found, we are sure that it will. What a free society would make sure of was that neither the capitalist market redeveloped (which ensures that the majority are marginalised into wage slavery) or a state socialist "*labour army*" type allocation process developed (which would ensure that free socialism did not remain free or socialist for long).

In this manner, anarchism will be able to ensure the principle of voluntary labour and free association as well as making sure that unpleasant and unwanted "*work*" is done. Moreover, most anarchists are sure that in a free society such requirements to encourage people to volunteer for unpleasant work will disappear over time as feelings of mutual aid and solidarity become more and more common place. Indeed, it is likely that people will gain respect for doing jobs that others might find unpleasant and so it might become "*glamorous*" to do such activity. Showing

off to friends can be a powerful stimulus in doing any activity. So anarchists would agree with Albert and Hahnel when they say that:

*“In a society that makes every effort to depreciate the esteem that derives from anything other than conspicuous consumption, it is not surprising that great income differentials are seen as necessary to induce effort. But to assume that only conspicuous consumption can motivate people because under capitalism we have strained to make it so is unwarranted. There is plenty of evidence that people can be moved to great sacrifices for reasons other than a desire for personal wealth...there is good reason to believe that for nonpathological people wealth is generally coveted only as a **means** of attaining other ends such as economic security, comfort, social esteem, respect, status, or power.”*  
[**The Political Economy of Participatory Economics**, p. 52]

We should note here that the education syndicates would obviously take into account the trends in “work” placement requirements when deciding upon the structure of their classes. In this way, education would respond to the needs of society as well as the needs of the individual (as would any productive syndicate).

#### **I.4.14 What about the person who will not work?**

Anarchism is based on voluntary labour. If people do not desire to work then they cannot (must not) be forced to. The question arises of what to do with those (a small minority, to be sure) who refuse to work.

On this question there is some disagreement. Some anarchists, particularly communist-anarchists, argue that the lazy should not be deprived of the means of life. Social pressure, they argue, would force those who take, but do not contribute to the community, to listen to their conscience and start producing for the community that supports them. Other anarchists are less optimistic and agree with Camillo Berneri when he argues that anarchism should be based upon “no compulsion to work, but no duty towards those who do not want to work.” [“*The Problem of Work*”, in **Why Work?**, Vernon Richards (ed.), p. 74] This means that an anarchist society will not continue to feed, clothe, house someone who can produce but refuses to. Most anarchists have had enough of the wealthy under capitalism consuming but not producing and do not see why they should support a new group of parasites after the revolution.

Obviously, there is a difference between not wanting to work and being unable to work. The sick, children, the old, pregnant women and so on will be looked after by their friends and family (or by the commune, as desired by those involved). As child rearing would be considered “work” along with other more obviously economic tasks, mothers and fathers will not have to leave their children unattended and work to make ends meet. Instead, consideration will be given to the needs of both parents and children as well as the creation of community nurseries and child care centres.

We have to stress here that an anarchist society will not deny anyone the means of life. This would violate the voluntary labour which is at the heart of all schools of anarchism. Unlike capitalism, the means of life will not be monopolised by any group – including the commune. This means that someone who does not wish to join a commune or who does not pull their weight

within a commune and are expelled will have access to the means of making a living outside the commune.

We stated that we stress this fact as many supporters of capitalism seem to be unable to understand this point (or prefer to ignore it and so misrepresent the anarchist position). In an anarchist society, no one will be forced to join a commune simply because they do not have access to the means of production and/or land required to work alone. Unlike capitalism, where access to these essentials of life is dependent on buying access to them from the capitalist class (and so, effectively, denied to the vast majority), an anarchist society will ensure that all have access and have a real choice between living in a commune and working independently. This access is based on the fundamental difference between possession and property — the commune possesses as much land as it needs, as do non-members. The resources used by them are subject to the usual possession rationale — they possess it only as long as they use it and cannot bar others using it if they do not (i.e., it is not property).

Thus an anarchist commune remains a voluntary association and ensures the end of all forms of wage slavery (see also section I.1.4). The member of the commune has the choice of working as part of a community, giving according to their abilities and taking according to their needs (or some other means of organising production and consumption such as equal income or receiving labour notes, and so on), or working independently and so free of communal benefits as well as any commitments (bar those associated with using communal resources such as roads and so on).

So, in most, if not all, anarchist communities, individuals have two options, either they can join a commune and work together as equals, or they can work as an individual or independent co-operative and exchange the product of their labour with others. If an individual joins a commune and does not carry their weight, even after their fellow workers ask them to, then that person will possibly be expelled and given enough land, tools or means of production to work alone. Of course, if a person is depressed, run down or otherwise finding it hard to join in communal responsibilities then their friends and fellow workers would do everything in their power to help and be flexible in their approach to the problem.

Some anarchist communities may introduce what Lewis Mumford termed “*basic communism*.” This means that everyone would get a basic amount of “*purchasing power*,” regardless of productive activity. If some people were happy with this minimum of resources then they need not work. If they want access to the full benefits of the commune, then they could take part in the communal labour process. This could be a means of eliminating all forces, even communal ones, which drive a person to work and so ensure that all labour is fully voluntary (i.e. not even forced by circumstances). What method a community would use would depend on what people in that community thought was best.

It seems likely, however, that in most anarchist communities people will have to work, but how they do so will be voluntary. If people did not work then some would live off the labour of those who do work and would be a reversion to capitalism. However, most social anarchists think that the problem of people trying not to work would be a very minor one in an anarchist society. This is because work is part of human life and an essential way to express oneself. With work being voluntary and self-managed, it will become like current day hobbies and many people work harder at their hobbies than they do at “*real*” work (this FAQ can be considered as an example of this!). It is the nature of employment under capitalism that makes it “*work*” instead of pleasure. Work need not be a part of the day that we wish would end. As Kropotkin argued (and has

been subsequently supported by empirical evidence), it is **not** work that people hate. Rather it is overwork, in unpleasant circumstances and under the control of others that people hate. Reduce the hours of labour, improve the working conditions and place the work under self-management and work will stop being a hated thing. In his own words:

*“Repugnant tasks will disappear, because it is evident that these unhealthy conditions are harmful to society as a whole. Slaves can submit to them, but free men create new conditions, and their work will be pleasant and infinitely more productive. The exceptions of today will be the rule of tomorrow.”* [The Conquest of Bread, p. 123]

This, combined with the workday being shortened, will help ensure that only an idiot would desire to work alone. As Malatesta argued, the *“individual who wished to supply his own material needs by working alone would be the slave of his labours.”* [The Anarchist Revolution, p. 15]

So, enlightened self-interest would secure the voluntary labour and egalitarian distribution anarchists favour in the vast majority of the population. The parasitism associated with capitalism would be a thing of the past. Thus the problem of the *“lazy”* person fails to understand the nature of humanity nor the revolutionising effects of freedom and a free society on the nature and content of work.

#### I.4.15 What will the workplace of tomorrow look like?

Given the anarchist desire to liberate the artist in all of us, we can easily imagine that a free society would transform totally the working environment. No longer would workers be indifferent to their workplaces, but they would express themselves in transforming them into pleasant places, integrated into both the life of the local community and into the local environment. After all, *“no movement that raises the demand for workers’ councils can be regarded as revolutionary unless it tries to promote sweeping transformations in the environment of the work place.”* [Murray Bookchin, Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 146]

A glimpse of the future workplace can be seen from the actual class struggle. In the 40 day sit-down strike at Fisher Body plant #1 in Flint, Michigan in 1936, *“there was a community of two thousand strikers ... Committees organised recreation, information, classes, a postal service, sanitation ... There were classes in parliamentary procedure, public speaking, history of the labour movement. Graduate students at the University of Michigan gave courses in journalism and creative writing.”* [Howard Zinn, A People’s History of the United States, p. 391] In the same year, during the Spanish Revolution, collectivised workplaces also created libraries and education facilities as well as funding schools, health care and other social necessities (a practice, we must note, that had started before the revolution when C.N.T. unions had funded schools, social centres, libraries and so on).

Therefore the workplace would be expanded to include education and classes in individual development (and so following Proudhon’s comment that we should *“[o]rganise association, and by the same token, every workshop becoming a school, every worker becomes a master, every student an apprentice.”* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, pp. 62–3]). This would allow work to become part of a wider community, drawing in people from different areas to share their knowledge and learn new insights and ideas. In addition, children would have part of their school studies with workplaces, getting them aware of the practicalities of many different forms of work and so

allowing them to make informed decisions in what sort of activity they would be interested in pursuing when they were older.

Obviously, a workplace managed by its workers would also take care to make the working environment as pleasant as possible. No more “*sick building syndrome*” or unhealthy and stressful work areas. Buildings would be designed to maximise space and allow individual expression within them. Outside the workplace, we can imagine it surrounded by gardens and allotments which were tended by workers themselves, giving a pleasant surrounding to the workplace. There would, in effect, be a break down of the city/rural divide – workplaces would be placed next to fields and integrated into the surroundings:

*“Have the factory and the workshop at the gates of your fields and gardens, and work in them. Not those large establishments, of course, in which huge masses of metals have to be dealt with and which are better placed at certain spots indicated by Nature, but the countless variety of workshops and factories which are required to satisfy the infinite diversity of tastes among civilised men [and women] ... factories and workshops which men, women and children will not be driven by hunger, but will be attracted by the desire of finding an activity suited to their tastes, and where, aided by the motor and the machine, they will choose the branch of activity which best suits their inclinations.”*  
[Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*, p. 197]

This vision of rural and urban integration is just part of the future anarchists see for the workplace. As Kropotkin argued, “[w]e proclaim **integration**... a society of integrated, combined labour. A society where each individual is a producer of both manual and intellectual work; where each able-bodied human being is a worker, and where each worker works both in the field and the industrial workshop; where every aggregation of individuals, large enough to dispose of a certain variety of natural resources – it may be a nation, or rather a region – produces and itself consumes most of its own agricultural and manufactured produce.” [Op. Cit., p. 26]

The future workplace would be an expression of the desires of those who worked there. It would be based around a pleasant working environment, within gardens and with extensive library, resources for education classes and other leisure activities. All this, and more, will be possible in a society based upon self-realisation and self-expression and one in which individuality is not crushed by authority and capitalism. To re-quote Kropotkin, “if most of the workshops we know are foul and unhealthy, it is because the workers are of no account in the organisation of factories” and “[s]laves can submit to them, but free men will create new conditions, and their will be pleasant and infinitely more productive.” [The Conquest of Bread, p. 121 and p. 123]

“So in brief,” argued William Morris, “our buildings will be beautiful with their own beauty of simplicity as workshops ... [and] besides the mere workshops, our factory will have other buildings which may carry ornament further than that, for it will need dining-hall, library, school, places for study of different kinds, and other such structures.” Such a vision is possible and is only held back by capitalism which denounces such visions of freedom as “*uneconomic*.” However, as William Morris points out:

*“Impossible I hear an anti-Socialist say. My friend, please to remember that most factories sustain today large and handsome gardens, and not seldom parks ...only the said gardens, etc. are twenty miles away from the factory, out of the smoke, and are kept*

*up for one member of the factory only, the sleeping partner to wit” [A Factory as It Might Be, p. 9 and pp. 7–8]*

Pleasant working conditions based upon the self-management of work can produce a workplace within which economic “*efficiency*” can be achieved without disrupting and destroying individuality and the environment (also see section I.4.9 for a fuller discussion of anarchism and technology).

#### **I.4.16 Won't a libertarian communist society be inefficient?**

It is often argued that anarcho-communism and other forms of non-market libertarian-socialism would promote inefficiency and unproductive work. The basis of this argument is that without market forces to discipline workers and the profit motive to reward them, workers would have no incentive to work in a way which minimises time or resources. The net effect of this would be inefficient use of resources, particularly individual's time.

This is a valid point in some ways; for example, a society can (potentially) benefit from increasing productivity as the less time it takes to produce a certain good, the more time it gains for other activities (although, of course, in a class society the benefits of increased productivity generally accrue to, first and foremost, to those at the top). Indeed, for an individual, a decent society depends on people having time available for them to do what they want, to develop themselves in whatever way they want, to enjoy themselves. In addition, doing more with less can have a positive environment impact as well. And it is for these reasons that an anarchist society would be interested in promoting efficiency and productiveness during production.

While capitalism has turned improvements in productivity as a means of increasing work, enriching the few and generally proletarianising the working class, a free society would take a different approach to the problem. As argued in section I.4.3, a communist-anarchist society would be based upon this principle:

*“for some much per day (in money today, in labour tomorrow) you are entitled to satisfy – luxury excepted – this or the other of your wants.” [Peter Kropotkin, **Small Communal Experiments and why they fail**, p. 8]*

Building upon this, we can imagine a situation where the average output for a given industry in a given amount of time is used to encourage efficiency and productivity. If a given syndicate can produce this average output with at least average quality in less time than the agreed average/minimum (and without causing ecological or social externalities, of course) then the members of that syndicate can and should have that time off.

This would be a powerful incentive to innovate, improve productivity, introduce new machinery and processes as well as work efficiently without reintroducing the profit motive and material inequality. With the possibility of having more time available for themselves and their own projects, people involved in productive activities would have a strong interest in being efficient. Of course, if the work in question is something they enjoy then any increases in efficiency would **enhance** what makes their work enjoyable and not eliminate it.

Rewarding efficiency with free time would also be an important means to ensure efficient use of resources as well as a means of reducing time spent in productive activity which was

considered as boring or otherwise undesirable. The incentive of getting unpleasant tasks over with as quickly as possible would ensure that the tasks were done efficiently and that innovation was directed towards them.

Moreover, when it came to major investment decisions, a syndicate would be more likely to get others to agree to its plans if the syndicate had a reputation of excellence. This, again, would encourage efficiency as people would know that they could gain resources for their communities and workplaces (i.e. themselves) more easily if their work is efficient and reliable. This would be a key means of encouraging efficient and effective use of resources.

Similarly, an inefficient or wasteful syndicate would have negative reactions from their fellow workers. As we argued in section I.4.7 (*“What will stop producers ignoring consumers?”*), a libertarian communist economy would be based on free association. If a syndicate or community got a reputation for being inefficient with resources then others would not associate with them (i.e. they would not supply them with materials, or place them at the end of the queue when deciding which production requests to supply, and so on). As with a syndicate which produced shoddy goods, the inefficient syndicate would also face the judgement of its peers. This will produce an environment which will encourage efficient use of resources and time.

All these factors, the possibility of increased free time, the respect and resources gained for an efficient and excellent work and the possibility of a lack of co-operation with others for inefficient use of resources, would ensure that an anarchist-communist or anarchist-collectivist society would have no need to fear inefficiency. Indeed, by placing the benefits of increased efficiency into the hands of those who do the work, efficiency will no doubt increase.

With self-management, we can soon see human time being used efficiently and productively simply because those doing the work would have a direct and real interest in it. Rather than alienate their liberty, as under capitalism, they would apply their creativity and minds to transforming their productive activity in such a way as to make it enjoyable and not a waste of their time.

Little wonder Kropotkin argued, modern knowledge could be applied to a society in which people, *“with the work of their own hands and intelligence, and by the aid of the machinery already invented and to be invented, should themselves create all imaginable riches. Technics and science will not be lagging behind if production takes such a direction. Guided by observation, analysis and experiment, they will answer all possible demands. They will reduce the time required for producing wealth to any desired amount, so as to leave to everyone as much leisure as he or she may ask for... they guarantee ... the happiness that can be found in the full and varied exercise of the different capacities of the human being, in work that need not be overwork.”* [**Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow**, pp. 198–9]

One last point. A free society will undoubtedly create new criteria for what counts as an efficient use of resources and time. What passes for *“efficient”* use capitalism often means what is efficient in increasing the power and profits of the few, without regard to the wasteful use of individual time, energy and potential as well as environmental and social costs. Such a narrow criteria for decision making or evaluating efficient production will not exist in an anarchist society (see our discussion of the irrational nature of the price mechanism in section I.1.2, for example). While we use the term efficiency we mean the dictionary definition of efficiency (i.e. reducing waste, maximising use of resources) rather than what the capitalist market distorts this into (i.e. what creates most profits for the boss).

## I.5 What could the social structure of anarchy look like?

The social and political structure of anarchy is similar to that of the economic structure, i.e., it is based on a voluntary federation of decentralised, directly democratic policy-making bodies. These are the neighbourhood and community assemblies and their confederations. In these grassroots political units, the concept of “*self-management*” becomes that of “*self-government*”, a form of municipal organisation in which people take back control of their living places from the bureaucratic state and the capitalist class whose interests it serves.

*“A new economic phase demands a new political phase,”* argued Kropotkin, *“A revolution as profound as that dreamed of by the [libertarian] socialists cannot accept the mould of an out-dated political life. A new society based on equality of condition, on the collective possession of the instruments of work, cannot tolerate for a week ... the representative system ... if we want the social revolution, we must seek a form of political organisation that will correspond to the new method of economic organisation... The future belongs to the free groupings of interests and not to governmental centralisation; it belongs to freedom and not to authority.”* [Words of a Rebel, pp. 143–4]

Thus the social structure of an anarchist society will be the opposite of the current system. Instead of being centralised and top-down as in the state, it will be decentralised and organised from the bottom up. As Kropotkin argued, *“socialism must become **more popular**, more communalistic, and less dependent upon indirect government through elected representatives. It must become more **self-governing**.”* [Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 185] While anarchists have various different conceptions of how this communal system would be constituted (as we will see), they are in total agreement on these basic visions and principles.

This empowerment of ordinary citizens through decentralisation and direct democracy will eliminate the alienation and apathy that are now rampant in the modern city and town, and (as always happens when people are free) unleash a flood of innovation in dealing with the social breakdown now afflicting our urban wastelands. The gigantic metropolis with its hierarchical and impersonal administration, its atomised and isolated “*residents*,” will be transformed into a network of humanly scaled participatory communities (usually called “*communes*”), each with its own unique character and forms of self-government, which will be co-operatively linked through federation with other communities at several levels, from the municipal through the bioregional to the global.

Of course, it can (and has) been argued that people are just not interested in “*politics*.” Further, some claim that this disinterest is why governments exist — people delegate their responsibilities and power to others because they have better things to do. Such an argument, however, is flawed on empirical grounds. As we indicated in section B.2.6, centralisation of power in both the French and American revolutions occurred **because** working people were taking **too much** interest in politics and social issues, not the reverse (“*To attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its*



*affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more...*” [Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, p. 143]).

Simply put, the state is centralised to facilitate **minority rule** by excluding the mass of people from taking part in the decision making processes within society. This is to be expected as social structures do not evolve by chance – rather they develop to meet specific needs and requirements. The specific need of the ruling class is to rule and that means marginalising the bulk of the population. Its requirement is for minority power and this is transformed into the structure of the state (and the capitalist company).

Even if we ignore the historical evidence on this issue, anarchists do not draw this conclusion from the current apathy that surrounds us. In fact, we argue that this apathy is not the cause of government but its result. Government is an inherently hierarchical system in which ordinary people are deliberately marginalised. The powerlessness people feel due to the workings of the system ensure that they are apathetic about it, thus guaranteeing that wealthy and powerful elites govern society without hindrance from the oppressed and exploited majority.

Moreover, government usually sticks its nose into areas that most people have no real interest in. Some things, as in the regulation of industry or workers’ safety and rights, a free society could leave to those affected to make their own decisions (we doubt that workers would subject themselves to unsafe working conditions, for example). In others, such as the question of personal morality and acts, a free people would have no interest in (unless it harmed others, of course). This, again, would reduce the number of issues that would be discussed in a free commune.

Also, via decentralisation, a free people would be mainly discussing local issues, so reducing the complexity of many questions and solutions. Wider issues would, of course, be discussed but these would be on specific issues and so more focused in their nature than those raised in the legislative bodies of the state. So, a combination of centralisation and an irrational desire to discuss every and all questions also helps make “*politics*” seem boring and irrelevant.

As noted above, this result is not an accident and the marginalisation of “*ordinary*” people is actually celebrated in bourgeois “*democratic*” theory. As Noam Chomsky notes:

*“Twentieth century democratic theorists advise that ‘The public must be put in its place,’ so that the ‘responsible men’ may ‘live free of the trampling and roar of a bewildered herd,’ ‘ignorant and meddling outsiders’ whose ‘function’ is to be ‘interested spectators of action,’ not participants, lending their weight periodically to one or another of the leadership class (elections), then returning to their private concerns. (Walter Lippman). The great mass of the population, ‘ignorant and mentally deficient,’ must be kept in their place for the common good, fed with ‘necessary illusion’ and ‘emotionally potent oversimplifications’ (Wilson’s Secretary of State Robert Lansing, Reinhold Niebuhr). Their ‘conservative’ counterparts are only more extreme in their adulation of the Wise Men who are the rightful rulers — in the service of the rich and powerful, a minor footnote regularly forgotten.” [Year 501, p. 18]*

As discussed in Section B.2.6 (“*Who benefits from centralisation?*”) this marginalisation of the public from political life ensures that the wealthy can be “*left alone*” to use their power as they see fit. In other words, such marginalisation is a necessary part of a fully functioning capitalist society. Hence, under capitalism, libertarian social structures have to be discouraged. Or as Chomsky puts it, the “*rabble must be instructed in the values of subordination and a narrow quest for personal gain*”

*within the parameters set by the institutions of the masters; meaningful democracy, with popular association and action, is a threat to be overcome.” [Op. Cit., p. 18] This philosophy can be seen in the statement of a US Banker in Venezuela under the murderous Jimenez dictatorship:*

*“You have the freedom here to do whatever you want to do with your money, and to me, that is worth all the political freedom in the world.” [quoted by Chomsky, Op. Cit., p. 99]*

Deterring libertarian alternatives to statism is a common feature of our current system. By marginalising and disempowering people, the ability of individuals to manage their own social activities is undermined and weakened. They develop a “*fear of freedom*” and embrace authoritarian institutions and “*strong leaders*,” which in turn reinforces their marginalisation.

This consequence is hardly surprising. Anarchists maintain that the desire to participate and the ability to participate are in a symbiotic relationship: participation feeds on itself. By creating the social structures that allow participation, participation will increase. As people increasingly take control of their lives, so their ability to do so also increases. The challenge of having to take responsibility for decisions that make a difference is at the same time an opportunity for personal development. To begin to feel power, having previously felt powerless, to win access to the resources required for effective participation and learn how to use them, is a liberating experience. Once people become active subjects, making things happen in one aspect of their lives, they are less likely to remain passive objects, allowing things to happen to them, in other aspects. All in all, “*politics*” is far too important a subject to leave to politicians, the wealthy and bureaucrats. After all, it is what affects, your friends, community, and, ultimately, the planet you live on. Such issues cannot be left to anyone but you.

Hence a meaningful communal life based on self-empowered individuals is a distinct possibility (indeed, it has repeatedly appeared throughout history). It is the hierarchical structures in statism and capitalism, marginalising and disempowering the majority, which is at the root of the current wide scale apathy in the face of increasing social and ecological disruption. Libertarian socialists therefore call for a radically new form of political system to replace the centralised nation-state, a form that would be based around confederations of self-governing communities. In other words, in anarchism “*[s]ociety is a society of societies; a league of leagues of leagues; a commonwealth of commonwealths of commonwealths; a republic of republics of republics. Only there is freedom and order, only there is spirit, a spirit which is self-sufficiency and community, unity and independence.*” [Gustav Landauer, *For Socialism*, pp. 125–126]

To create such a system would require dismantling the nation-state and reconstituting relations between communities on the basis of self-determination and free and equal confederation from below. In the following subsections we will examine in more detail why this new system is needed and what it might look like. As we stressed in the introduction, these are just suggestions of possible anarchist solutions to social organisation. Most anarchists recognise that anarchist communities will co-exist with non-anarchist ones after the destruction of the existing state. As we are anarchists we are discussing anarchist visions. We will leave it up to non-anarchists to paint their own pictures of a possible future.

## I.5.1 What are participatory communities?

As Murray Bookchin argues in *The Rise of Urbanisation and the Decline of Citizenship* (reprinted as *From Urbanisation to Cities*), the modern city is a virtual appendage of the capitalist workplace, being an outgrowth and essential counterpart of the factory (where “factory” means any enterprise in which surplus value is extracted from employees). As such, cities are structured and administered primarily to serve the needs of the capitalist elite — employers — rather than the needs of the many — their employees and their families. From this standpoint, the city must be seen as (1) a transportation hub for importing raw materials and exporting finished products; and (2) a huge dormitory for wage slaves, conveniently locating them near the enterprises where their labour is to be exploited, providing them with entertainment, clothing, medical facilities, etc. as well as coercive mechanisms for controlling their behaviour.

The attitude behind the management of these “civic” functions by the bureaucratic servants of the capitalist ruling class is purely instrumental: worker-citizens are to be treated merely as means to corporate ends, not as ends in themselves. This attitude is reflected in the overwhelmingly alienating features of the modern city: its inhuman scale; the chilling impersonality of its institutions and functionaries; its sacrifice of health, comfort, pleasure, and aesthetic considerations to bottom-line requirements of efficiency and “cost effectiveness”; the lack of any real communal interaction among residents other than collective consumption of commodities and amusements; their consequent social isolation and tendency to escape into television, alcohol, drugs, gangs, etc. Such features make the modern metropolis the very antithesis of the genuine community for which most of its residents hunger. This contradiction at the heart of the system contains the possibility of radical social and political change.

The key to that change, from the anarchist standpoint, is the creation of a network of participatory communities based on self-government through direct, face-to-face democracy in grassroots neighbourhood and community assemblies. As we argued in section I.2.3 such assemblies will be born in social struggle and so reflect the needs of the struggle and those within it so our comments here must be considered as generalisations of the salient features of such communities and **not** blue-prints.

Traditionally, these participatory communities were called **communes** in anarchist theory (“*The basic social and economic cell of the anarchist society is the free, independent commune*” [A. Grachev, quoted by Paul Avrich, *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, p. 64]). Within anarchist thought, there are two main conceptions of the free commune. One vision is based on workplace delegates, the other on neighbourhood assemblies. We will sketch each in turn.

Bakunin argued that the “*future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.*” In other words, “*the federative Alliance of all working men’s associations ... will constitute the commune.*” [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206 and p. 170]

This vision of the commune was created during many later revolutions (such as in Russia in 1905 and 1917 and Hungary in 1956). Being based on workplaces, this form of commune has the advantage of being based on groups of people who are naturally associated during most of the day (Bakunin considered workplace bodies as “*the natural organisation of the masses*” as they were “*based on the various types of work*” which “*define their actual day-to-day life*” [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 139]). This would facilitate the organisation of assemblies, discussion on social, economic and

political issues and the mandating and recalling of delegates. Moreover, it combines political and economic power in one organisation, so ensuring that the working class actually manages society.

This vision was stressed by later anarchist thinkers. For example, Spanish anarchist Issac Puente thought that in towns and cities *“the part of the free municipality is played by local federation... Ultimate sovereignty in the local federation of industrial unions lies with the general assembly of all local producers.”* [**Libertarian Communism**, p. 27] The Russian anarchist G. P. Maximoff saw the *“communal confederation”* as being *“constituted by thousands of freely acting labour organisations.”* [**The Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 43]

Other anarchists counterpoise neighbourhood assemblies to workers’ councils. These assemblies will be general meetings open to all citizens in every neighbourhood, town, and village, and will be the source of and final *“authority”* over public policy for all levels of confederal co-ordination. Such *“town meetings”* will bring ordinary people directly into the political process and give them an equal voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Such anarchists point to the experience of the French Revolution of 1789 and the *“sections”* of the Paris Commune as the key example of *“a people governing itself directly — when possible — without intermediaries, without masters.”* It is argued, based on this experience, that *“the principles of anarchism ... dated from 1789, and that they had their origin, not in theoretical speculations, but in the deeds of the Great French Revolution.”* [Peter Kropotkin, **The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 210 and p. 204]

Critics of workers’ councils point out that not all working class people work in factories or workplaces. Many are parents who look after children, for example. By basing the commune around the workplace, such people are automatically excluded. Moreover, in most modern cities many people do not live near where they work. It would mean that local affairs could not be effectively discussed in a system of workers’ councils as many who take part in the debate are unaffected by the decisions reached (this is something which the supporters of workers’ councils **have** noticed and argue for councils which are delegates from both the inhabitants **and** the enterprises of an area).

In addition, anarchists like Murray Bookchin argue that workplace based systems automatically generate *“special interests”* and so exclude community issues. Only community assemblies can *“transcend the traditional special interests of work, workplace, status, and property relations, and create a **general** interest based on shared community problems.”* [Murray Bookchin, **From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 254]

However, such communities assemblies can only be valid if they can be organised rapidly in order to make decisions and to mandate and recall delegates. In the capitalist city, many people work far from where they live and so such meetings have to be called for after work or at weekends. Thus the key need is to reduce the working day/week and to communalise industry. For this reason, many anarchists continue to support the workers’ council vision of the commune, complemented by community assemblies for those who live in an area but do not work in a traditional workplace (e.g. parents bring up small children, the old, the sick and so on).

These positions are not hard and fast divisions, far from it. Puente, for example, thought that in the countryside the dominant commune would be *“all the residents of a village or hamlet meeting in an assembly (council) with full powers to administer local affairs.”* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25] Kropotkin supported the soviets of the Russian Revolution, arguing that the *“idea of soviets ... of councils of workers and peasants ... controlling the economic and political life of the country is a great idea. All the more so, since it necessarily follows that these councils should be composed of all who take part*

*in the production of natural wealth by their own efforts.*” [Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 254]

Which method, workers’ councils or community assemblies, will be used in a given community will depend on local conditions, needs and aspirations and it is useless to draw hard and fast rules. It is likely that some sort of combination of the two approaches will be used, with workers’ councils being complemented by community assemblies until such time as a reduced working week and decentralisation of urban centres will make purely community assemblies the more realistic option. It is likely that in a fully libertarian society, community assemblies will be the dominant communal organisation but in the period immediately after a revolution this may not be immediately possible. Objective conditions, rather than predictions, will be the deciding factor. Under capitalism, anarchists pursue both forms of organisation, arguing for community and industrial unionism in the class struggle (see sections J.5.1 and J.5.2).

Regardless of the exact make up of the commune, they would share identical features. They would be free associations, based upon the self-assumed obligation of those who join them. In free association, participation is essential simply because it is the **only** means by which individuals can collectively govern themselves (and unless they govern themselves, someone else will). “*As a unique individual,*” Stirner argues, “*you can assert yourself alone in association, because the association does not own you, because you are one who owns it or who turns it to your own advantage.*” The rules governing the association are determined by the associated and can be changed by them (and so a vast improvement over “*love it or leave*”) as are the policies the association follows. Thus, the association “*does not impose itself as a spiritual power superior to my spirit. I have no wish to become a slave to my maxims, but would rather subject them to my ongoing criticism.*” [Max Stirner, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 17]

Thus participatory communities are freely joined and self-managed by their members. No more division between order givers and order takers as exist within the state or capitalist workplaces. Rather the associated govern themselves and while the assembled people collectively decide the rules governing their association, and are bound by them as individuals, they are also superior to them in the sense that these rules can always be modified or repealed (see section A.2.11 — “*Why are most anarchists in favour of direct democracy?*” — for more details). As can be seen, a participatory commune is new form of social life, radically different from the state as it is decentralised, self-governing and based upon individual autonomy and free agreement. Thus Kropotkin:

*“The representative system was organised by the bourgeoisie to ensure their domination, and it will disappear with them. For the new economic phase that is about to begin we must seek a new form of political organisation, based on a principle quite different from that of representation. The logic of events imposes it.”* [Words of a Rebel, p. 125]

This “*new form of political organisation has to be worked out the moment that socialistic principles shall enter our life. And it is self-evident that this new form will have to be **more popular, more decentralised, and nearer to the folk-mote self-government** than representative government can ever be.*” [Kropotkin, **Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 184] He, like all anarchists, considered the idea that socialism could be created by taking over the current state or creating a new one as doomed to failure. Instead, he recognised that socialism would only be built using new organisations that reflect the spirit of socialism (such as freedom, self-government and so

on). Kropotkin, like Proudhon and Bakunin before him, therefore argued that “[t]his was the form that the social revolution must take — the independent commune... [whose] inhabitants have decided that they will communalise the consumption of commodities, their exchange and their production.” [Op. Cit., p. 163]

In a nutshell, a participatory community is a free association, based upon the mass assembly of people who live in a common area, the means by which they make the decisions that affect them, their communities, bio-regions and the planet. Their essential task is to provide a forum for raising public issues and deciding them. Moreover, these assemblies will be a key way of generating a community (and community spirit) and building and enriching social relationships between individuals and, equally important, of developing and enriching individuals by the very process of participation in communal affairs. By discussing, thinking and listening to others, individuals develop their own abilities and powers while at the same time managing their own affairs, so ensuring that no one else does (i.e. they govern themselves and are no longer governed from above by others). As Kropotkin argued, self-management has an educational effect on those who practice it:

*“The ‘permanence’ of the general assemblies of the sections — that is, the possibility of calling the general assembly whenever it was wanted by the members of the section and of discussing everything in the general assembly... will educate every citizen politically... The section in permanence — the forum always open — is the only way ... to assure an honest and intelligent administration.”* [The Great French Revolution, vol. 1, pp. 210–1]

As well as integrating the social life of a community and encouraging the political and social development of its members, these free communes will also be integrated into the local ecology. Humanity would live in harmony with nature as well as with itself:

*“We can envision that their squares will be interlaced by streams, their places of assembly surrounded by groves, their physical contours respected and tastefully landscaped, their soils nurtured carefully to foster plant variety for ourselves, our domestic animals, and wherever possible the wildlife they may support on their fringes.”* [Murray Bookchin, The Ecology of Freedom, p. 344]

The commune itself would aim for a balanced mix of agriculture and industry, as described by Peter Kropotkin in his classic work **Fields, Factories and Workshops**. Thus a free commune would aim to integrate the individual into social and communal life, rural and urban life into a balanced whole and human life into the wider ecology. In this way the free commune would make human habitation fully ecological, ending the sharp and needless (and dehumanising and de-individualising) division of human life from the rest of the planet. The commune will be a key means of the expressing diversity within humanity and the planet as well as improving the quality of life in society:

*“The Commune ... will be entirely devoted to improving the communal life of the locality. Making their requests to the appropriate Syndicates, Builders’, Public Health, Transport or Power, the inhabitants of each Commune will be able to gain all reasonable living amenities, town planning, parks, play-grounds, trees in the street, clinics, museums and*

*art galleries. Giving, like the medieval city assembly, an opportunity for any interested person to take part in, and influence, his town's affairs and appearance, the Commune will be a very different body from the borough council...*

*"In ancient and medieval times cities and villages expressed the different characters of different localities and their inhabitants. In redstone, Portland or granite, in plaster or brick, in pitch of roof, arrangements of related buildings or patterns of slate and thatch each locality added to the interests of travellers ... each expressed itself in castle, home or cathedral.*

*"How different is the dull, drab, or flashy ostentatious monotony of modern England. Each town is the same. The same Woolworth's, Odeon Cinemas, and multiple shops, the same 'council houses' or 'semi-detached villas' ... North, South, East or West, what's the difference, where is the change?*

*"With the Commune the ugliness and monotony of present town and country life will be swept away, and each locality and region, each person will be able to express the joy of living, by living together." [Tom Brown, **Syndicalism**, p. 59]*

The size of the neighbourhood assemblies will vary, but it will probably fluctuate around some ideal size, discoverable in practice, that will provide a viable scale of face-to-face interaction and allow for both a variety of personal contacts and the opportunity to know and form a personal estimation of everyone in the neighbourhood. Some anarchists have suggested that the ideal size for a neighbourhood assembly might be under one thousand adults. This, of course, suggests that any town or city would itself be a confederation of assemblies — as was, of course, practised very effectively in Paris during the Great French Revolution.

Such assemblies would meet regularly, at the very least monthly (probably more often, particularly during periods which require fast and often decision making, like a revolution), and deal with a variety of issues. In the words of the CNT's resolution on libertarian communism:

*"the foundation of this administration will be the commune. These communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels to achieve their general goals. The right to autonomy does not preclude the duty to implement agreements regarding collective benefits.*

*"[The] commune ... without any voluntary restrictions will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms may be agreed by majority vote after free debate. In return, those communities which industrialisation ... may agree upon a different model of co-existence and will be entitled to an autonomous administration released from the general commitments ...*

*"... the commune is to be autonomous and confederated with the other communes ... the commune will have the duty to concern itself with whatever may be of interest to the individual.*

*"It will have to oversee organising, running and beautification of the settlement. It will see that its inhabitants; are housed and that items and products be made available to them by the producers' unions or associations.*

*“Similarly, it is concern itself with hygiene, the keeping of communal statistics and with collective requirements such as education, health services and with the maintenance and improvement of local means of communication.*

*“It will orchestrate relations with other communes and will take care to stimulate all artistic and cultural pursuits.*

*“So that this mission may be properly fulfilled, a communal council is to be appointed ... None of these posts will carry any executive or bureaucratic powers ... [its members] will perform their role as producers coming together in session at the close of the day’s work to discuss the detailed items which may not require the endorsement of communal assemblies.*

*“Assemblies are to be summoned as often as required by communal interests, upon the request of the communal council or according to the wishes of the inhabitants of each commune ...*

*“The inhabitants of a commune are to debate among themselves their internal problems ... Federations are to deliberate over major problems affecting a country or province and all communes are to be represented at their reunions and assemblies, thereby enabling their delegates to convey the democratic viewpoint of their respective communes ... every commune which is implicated will have its right to have its say ... On matters of a regional nature, it is the duty of the regional federation to implement agreements ... So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the commune, to the federation and right on up finally to the confederation.” [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 106–7]*

Thus the communal assembly discusses that which affects the community and those within it. As these local community associations, will be members of larger communal bodies, the communal assembly will also discuss issues which affect wider areas, as indicated, and mandate their delegates to discuss them at confederation assemblies (see next section). This system, we must note, was applied with great success during the Spanish revolution (see section I.8) and so cannot be dismissed as wishful thinking.

However, of course, the actual framework of a free society will be worked out in practice. As Bakunin correctly argued, society *“can, and must, organise itself in a different fashion [than what came before], but not from top to bottom and according to an ideal plan”* [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 205] What does seem likely is that confederations of communes will be required. We turn to this in the next section.

## **I.5.2 Why are confederations of participatory communities needed?**

Since not all issues are local, the neighbourhood and community assemblies will also elect mandated and recallable delegates to the larger-scale units of self-government in order to address issues affecting larger areas, such as urban districts, the city or town as a whole, the county, the bio-region, and ultimately the entire planet. Thus the assemblies will confederate at several levels in order to develop and co-ordinate common policies to deal with common problems.

In the words of the CNT’s resolution on libertarian communism:



*“The inhabitants of a commune are to debate among themselves their internal problems ... Federations are to deliberate over major problems affecting a country or province and all communes are to be represented at their reunions and assemblies, thereby enabling their delegates to convey the democratic viewpoint of their respective communes.*

*“If, say, roads have to be built to link villages of a county or any matter arises to do with transportation and exchange of produce between agricultural and industrial counties, then naturally every commune which is implicated will have its right to have its say.*

*“On matters of a regional nature, it is the duty of the regional federation to implement agreements which will represent the sovereign will of all the region’s inhabitants. So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the commune, to the federation and right on up finally to the confederation.*

*“Similarly, discussion of all problems of a national nature shall flow a like pattern ... “*  
[quoted by Jose Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, p. 107]

In other words, the commune *“cannot any longer acknowledge any superior: that, above it, there cannot be anything, save the interests of the Federation, freely embraced by itself in concert with other Communes.”* [Kropotkin, *No Gods, No Masters*, vol. 1, p. 259]

Federalism is applicable at all levels of society. As Kropotkin pointed out, anarchists *“understand that if no central government was needed to rule the independent communes, if national government is thrown overboard and national unity is obtained by free federation, then a central **municipal** government becomes equally useless and noxious. The same federative principle would do within the commune.”* [Kropotkin’s *Revolutionary Pamphlets*, pp. 163–164] Thus the whole of society would be a free federation, from the local community right up to the global level. And this free federation would be based squarely on the autonomy and self-government of local groups. With federalism, co-operation replaces coercion.

This need for co-operation does not imply a centralised body. To exercise your autonomy by joining self-managing organisations and, therefore, agreeing to abide by the decisions you help make is not a denial of that autonomy (unlike joining a hierarchical structure, where you forsake autonomy **within** the organisation). In a **centralised** system, we must stress, **power** rests at the top and the role of those below is simply to obey (it matters not if those with the power are elected or not, the principle is the same). In a **federal** system, power is **not** delegated into the hands of a few (obviously a *“federal”* government or state is a centralised system). Decisions in a federal system are made at the base of the organisation and flow upwards so ensuring that power remains decentralised in the hands of all. Working together to solve common problems and organise common efforts to reach common goals is not centralisation and those who confuse the two make a serious error — they fail to understand the different relations of authority each generates and confuse obedience with co-operation.

As in the economic federation of collectives, the lower levels will control the higher, thus eliminating the current pre-emptive powers of centralised government hierarchies. Delegates to higher-level co-ordinating councils or conferences will be instructed, at every level of confederation, by the assemblies they represent, on how to deal with any issue. These instructions will be binding, committing delegates to a framework of policies within which they must act and providing for their recall and the nullification of their decisions if they fail to carry out their mandates.

Delegates may be selected by election and/or sortition (i.e. random selection by lot, as for jury duty currently).

Most anarchists recognise that there will be a need for “*public officials*” with specific tasks within the social confederation. We stress the word “*tasks*” as “*powers*” would not be the best word to describe their activities simply because their work is essentially administrative in nature. For example, an individual or a group of individuals may be elected to look into alternative power supplies for a community and report back on what they discover. They cannot impose their decision **onto** the community as they do not have the power to do so. They simply present their findings to the body which had mandated them. These findings are **not** a law which the electors are required to follow, but a series of suggestions and information from which the electors chose what they think is best. Or, to use another example, someone may be elected to overlook the installation of a selected power supply but the decision on what power supply to use and which specific project to implement has been decided upon by the whole community. Similarly with any delegate elected to a confederal council. Such a delegate will have their decisions mandated by their electors and are subject to recall by those electors. If such a delegate starts to abuse their position or even vote in ways opposed to by the communal assembly then they would quickly be recalled and replaced.

As such a person is an elected delegate of the community, they are a “*public official*” in the broadest sense of the word but that does not mean that they have power or authority. Essentially they are an agent of the local community who is controlled by, and accountable to, that community. Clearly, such “*officials*” are unlike politicians. They do not, and cannot, make policy decisions on behalf of those who elected them, and so they do not have governmental power over those who elected them. By this method the “*officials*” remain the servants of the public and are not given power to make decisions for people. In addition, these “*officials*” will be rotated frequently to prevent a professionalisation of politics and the problem of politicians being largely on their own once elected. And, of course, they will continue to work and live with those who elected them and receive no special privileges due to their election (in terms of more income, better housing, and so on).

Therefore, such “*public officials*” would be under the strict control of the organisations that elected them to administration posts. But, as Kropotkin argued, the general assembly of the community “*in permanence — the forum always open — is the only way ...to assure an honest and intelligent administration ... [and is based upon] distrust of all executive powers.*” [The Great French Revolution Vol. 1, p. 211]

As Murray Bookchin argues, a “*confederalist view involves a clear distinction between policy making and the co-ordination and execution of adopted policies. Policy making is exclusively the right of popular community assemblies based on the practices of participatory democracy. Administration and co-ordination are the responsibility of confederal councils, which become the means for interlinking villages, towns, neighbourhoods, and cities into confederal networks. Power 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.*” [From Urbanisation to Cities, p. 253]

Thus the people will have the final word on policy, which is the essence of self-government, and each citizen will have his or her turn to participate in the co-ordination of public affairs. In other words, the “*legislative branch*” of self-government will be the people themselves organised in their community assemblies and their confederal co-ordinating councils, with the “*executive*

*branch*” (public officials) limited to implementing policy formulated by the legislative branch, that is, by the people.

Besides rotation of public officials, means to ensure the accountability of such officials to the people will include a wider use of elections and sortitions, open access to proceedings and records of “*executive*” activities by computer or direct inspection, the right of citizen assemblies to mandate delegates to higher-level confederal meetings, recall their officials, and revoke their decisions, and the creation of accountability boards, elected or selected by lot (as for jury duty), for each important administrative branch, from local to national.

Thus confederations of communes are required to co-ordinate joint activity and discuss common issues and interests. Confederation is also required to protect individual, community and social freedom. The current means of co-ordinating wide scale activity – centralism via the state – is a threat to freedom as, to quote Proudhon, “*the citizen divests himself of sovereignty, the town and the Department and province above it, absorbed by central authority, are no longer anything but agencies under direct ministerial control.*” He continues:

*“The Consequences soon make themselves felt: the citizen and the town are deprived of all dignity, the state’s depredations multiply, and the burden on the taxpayer increases in proportion. It is no longer the government that is made for the people; it is the people who are made for the government. Power invades everything, dominates everything, absorbs everything...”* [The Principle of Federation, p. 59]

Moreover, “[t]he principle of political centralism is openly opposed to all laws of social progress and of natural evolution. It lies in the nature of things that every cultural advance is first achieved within a small group and only gradually finds adoption by society as a whole. Therefore, political decentralisation is the best guaranty for the unrestricted possibilities of new experiments. For such an environment each community is given the opportunity to carry through the things which it is capable of accomplishing itself without imposing them on others. Practical experimentation is the parent of ever development in society. So long as each distinct is capable of effecting the changes within its own sphere which its citizens deem necessary, the example of each becomes a fructifying influence on the other parts of the community since they will have the chance to weigh the advantages accruing from them without being forced to adopt them if they are not convinced of their usefulness. The result is that progressive communities serve the others as models, a result justified by the natural evolution of things.” [Rudolf Rocker, *Pioneers of American Freedom*, pp. 16–7]

The contrast with centralisation of the state could not be more clear. As Rocker argues, “[i]n a strongly centralised state, the situation is entirely reversed and the best system of representation can do nothing to change that. The representatives of a certain district may have the overwhelming majority of a certain district on his [or her] side, but in the legislative assembly of the central state, he [or she] will remain in the minority, for it lies in the nature of things that in such a body not the intellectually most active but the most backward districts represent the majority. Since the individual district has indeed the right to give expression of its opinion, but can effect no changes without the consent of the central government, the most progressive districts will be condemned to stagnate while the most backward districts will set the norm.” [Op. Cit., p. 17]

Little wonder anarchists have always stressed what Kropotkin termed “*local action*” and considered the libertarian social revolution as “*proceed[ing] by proclaiming independent Communes which Communes will endeavour to accomplish the economic transformation within ... their respective surroundings.*” [Peter Kropotkin, *Act For Yourselves*, p. 43] Thus the advanced communities

will inspire the rest to follow them by showing them a practical example of what is possible. Only decentralisation and confederation can promote the freedom and resulting social experimentation which will ensure social progress and make society a good place to live.

Moreover, confederation is required to maximise self-management. As Rocker explains, “[i]n a smaller community, it is far easier for individuals to observe the political scene and become acquainted with the issues which have to be resolved. This is quite impossible for a representative in a centralised government. Neither the single citizen nor his [or her] representative is completely or even approximately to supervise the huge clockwork of the central state machine. The deputy is forced daily to make decisions about things of which he [or she] has no personal knowledge and for the appraisal of which he must therefore depend on others [i.e. bureaucrats and lobbyists]. That such a system necessarily leads to serious errors and mistakes is self-evident. And since the citizen for the same reason is not able to inspect and criticise the conduct of his representative, the class of professional politicians is given added opportunity to fish in troubled waters.” [Op. Cit., p. 17–18]

In other words, confederations are required to protect society and the individual against the dangers of centralisation. As Bakunin stressed, there are two ways of organising society, “as it is today, from high to low and from the centre to circumference by means of enforced unity and concentration” and the way of the future, by federalism “starting with the free individual, the free association and the autonomous commune, from low to high and from circumference to centre, by means of free federation.” [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 88] In other words, “the organisation of society from the bottom up.” [The Basic Bakunin, p. 131]

Thus confederations of participatory communities are required to co-ordinate joint activities, allow social experimentation and protect the distinctiveness, dignity, freedom and self-management of communities and so society as a whole. This is why “socialism is federalist” and “true federalism, the political organisation of socialism, will be attained only when these popular grass-roots institutions [namely, “communes, industrial and agricultural associations”] are organised in progressive stages from the bottom up.” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 402]

### I.5.3 What will be the scales and levels of confederation?

This can only be worked out in practice. In general, it would be save to say that confederations would be needed on a wide scale, including in towns and cities. No village, town or city could be self-sufficient nor would desire to be – communication and links with other places are part and parcel of live and anarchists have no desire to retreat back into an isolated form of localism:

*“No community can hope to achieve economic autarchy, 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 ... Divested of the cultural cross-fertilisation 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.”* [Murray Bookchin, **From Urbanisation to Cities**, p. 237]

This means that the scale and level of the confederations created by the communes will be varied and extensive. It would be hard to generalise about them, particularly as different confederations will exist for different tasks and interests. Moreover, any system of communes would start off based on the existing villages, towns and cities of capitalism. That is unavoidable and will, of course, help determine the initial scale and level of confederations.

It seems likely that the scale of the confederation will be dependent on the inhabited area in question. A village, for example, would be based on one assembly and (minimally) be part of a local confederation covering all the villages nearby. In turn, this local confederation would be part of a district confederation, and so on up to (ultimately) a continental and world scale. Needless to say, the higher the confederation the less often it would meet and the less it would have to consider in terms of issues to decide. On such a level, only the most general issues and decisions could be reached (in effect, only guidelines which the member confederations would apply as they saw fit).

In urban areas, the town or city would have to be broken down into confederations and these confederations would constitute the town or city assembly of delegates. Given a huge city like London, New York or Mexico City it would be impossible to organise in any other way. Smaller towns would probably be able to have simpler confederations. We must stress here that few, if any, anarchists consider it desirable to have huge cities in a free society and one of the major tasks of social transformation will be to break the metropolis into smaller units, integrated with the local environment. However, a social revolution will take place in these vast metropolises and so we have to take them into account in our discussion.

Thus the issue of size would determine when a new level of confederation would be needed. A town or village of several thousand people could be organised around the basic level of the commune and it may be that a libertarian socialist society would probably form another level of confederation once this level has been reached. Such units of confederation would, as noted above, include urban districts within today's large cities, small cities, and rural districts composed of several nearby towns. The next level of confederation would, we can imagine, be dependent on the number of delegates required. After a certain number, the confederation assembly may become difficult to manage, so implying that another level of confederation is required. This would, undoubtedly, be the base for determining the scale and level of confederation, ensuring that any confederal assembly can actually manage its activities and remain under the control of lower levels.

Combined with this consideration, we must also raise the issue of economies of scale. A given level of confederation may be required to make certain social and economic services efficient (we are thinking of economies of scale for such social needs as universities, hospitals, and cultural institutions). While every commune may have a doctor, nursery, local communal stores and small-scale workplaces, not all can have a university, hospital, factories and so forth. These would be organised on a wider level, so necessitating the appropriate confederation to exist to manage them.

However, face-to-face meetings of the whole population are impractical at this size. Therefore, the decision making body at this level would be the **confederal council**, which would consist of mandated, recallable, and rotating delegates from the neighbourhood assemblies. These delegates would co-ordinate policies which have been discussed and voted on by the neighbourhood assemblies, with the votes being summed across the district to determine district policy by majority rule. The issues to be discussed by these confederal meetings/assemblies would be proposed

by local communes, the confederal council would collate these proposals and submit them to the other communes in the confederation for discussion. Thus the flow of decision making would be from the bottom up, with the “lowest” bodies having the most power, particularly the power to formulate, suggest, correct and, if need be, reject decisions made at “higher” levels in the confederation.

Ties between bioregions or larger territories based on the distribution of such things as geographically concentrated mineral deposits, climate dependent crops, and production facilities that are most efficient when concentrated in one area will unite communities confederally on the basis of common material needs as well as values. At the bioregional and higher levels of confederation, councils of mandated, recallable, and rotating delegates will co-ordinate policies at those levels, but such policies will still be subject to approval by the neighbourhood and community assemblies through their right to recall their delegates and revoke their decisions.

In the final analysis, libertarian socialism cannot function optimally – and indeed may be fatally undermined – unless the present system of competing nation-states is replaced by a co-operative system of decentralised bioregions of self-governing communities confederated on a global scale. For, if a libertarian socialist nation is forced to compete in the global market for scarce raw materials and hard cash with which to buy them, the problems of “*petty-bourgeois co-operativism*,” previously noted, will have merely been displaced to a higher level of organisation. That is, instead of individual co-operatives acting as collective capitalists and competing against each other in the national market for profits, raw materials, etc., the nation or community as a whole will become the “*collective capitalist*” and compete against other nations in the global capitalist market – a situation that is bound to reintroduce many problems, e.g. militarism, imperialism, and alienating/disempowering measures in the workplace, justified in the name of “*efficiency*” and “*global competitiveness*.”

To some extent such problems can be reduced in the revolutionary period by achieving self-sufficiency within bioregions as Kropotkin argued (see section I.3.8). This should be easier to achieve in a libertarian socialist economy as artificial needs are not manufactured by massive advertising campaigns of giant profit-seeking corporations. As a social revolution would, as Kropotkin predicted, suffer (initially) from isolation and disrupted trade patterns such a policy would have to be applied anyway and so interbioregional trade would be naturally be limited to other members of the libertarian socialist federation to a large degree. However, to eliminate the problem completely, anarchists envision a global council of bioregional delegates to co-ordinate global co-operation based on policies formulated and approved at the grassroots by the confederal principles outlined above. As noted above, most anarchists think that the “higher” the confederation, the more its decisions will be guidelines rather than anything else.

In summary, the size and scale of confederations will depend on practical considerations, based on what people found were optimal sizes for their neighbourhood assemblies and the needs of co-operation between them, towns, cities, regions and so on. We cannot, and have no wish, to predict the development of a free society. Therefore the scale and levels of confederation will be decided by those actually creating an anarchist world. All we can do is make a few suggestions of what seems likely.

## I.5.4 How will anything ever be decided by all these meetings?

Anarchists have little doubt that the confederal structure will be an efficient means of decision making and will not be bogged down in endless meetings. We have various reasons for thinking this.

Firstly, we doubt that a free society will spend all its time in assemblies or organising confederal conferences. Certain questions are more important than others and few anarchists desire to spend all their time in meetings. The aim of a free society is to allow individuals to express their desires and wants freely – they cannot do that if they are continually at meetings (or preparing for them). So while communal and confederal assemblies will play an important role in a free society, do not think that they will be occurring all the time or that anarchists desire to make meetings the focal point of individual life. Far from it!

Thus communal assemblies may occur, say, once a week, or fortnightly or monthly in order to discuss truly important issues. There would be no real desire to meet continuously to discuss every issue under the sun and few people would tolerate this occurring. This would mean that such meetings would current regularly and when important issues needed to be discussed, **not** continuously (although, if required, continuous assembly or daily meetings may have to be organised in emergency situations but this would be rare).

Secondly, it is extremely doubtful that a free people would desire waste vast amounts of time at such meetings. While important and essential, communal and confederal meetings would be functional in the extreme and not forums for hot air. It would be the case that those involved in such meetings would quickly make their feelings known to time wasters and those who like the sound of their own voices. Thus Cornelius Castoriadis:

*“It might be claimed that the problem of numbers remains and that people never would be able to express themselves in a reasonable amount of time. This is not a valid argument. There would rarely be an assembly over twenty people where everyone would want to speak, for the very good reason that when there is something to be decided upon there are not an infinite number of options or an infinite number of arguments. In unhampered rank-and-file workers’ gatherings (convened, for instance, to decide on a strike) there have never been ‘too many’ speeches. The two or three fundamental opinions having been voiced, and various arguments exchanged, a decision is soon reached.*

*“The length of speeches, moreover, often varies inversely with the weight of their content. Russian leaders sometimes talk on for four hours at Party Congresses without saying anything ... For an account of the laconicism of revolutionary assemblies, see Trotsky’s account of the Petrograd soviet of 1905 – or accounts of the meetings of factory representatives in Budapest in 1956.” [Political and Social Writings, vol. 2, pp. 144–5]*

As we shall see below, this was definitely the case during the Spanish Revolution as well.

Thirdly, as these assemblies and congresses are concerned purely with joint activity and co-ordination, it is likely that they will not be called very often. Different associations, syndicates and co-operatives have a functional need for co-operation and so would meet more regularly and take action on practical activity which affects a specific section of a community or group of communities. Not every issue that a member of a community is interested in is necessarily best discussed at a meeting of all members of a community or at a confederal conference.

In other words, communal assemblies and conferences will have specific, well defined agendas, and so there is little danger of “politics” taking up everyone’s time. Hence, far from discussing abstract laws and pointless motions which no one actually knows much about, the issues discussed in these conferences will be on specific issues which are important to those involved. In addition, the standard procedure may be to elect a sub-group to investigate an issue and report back at a later stage with recommendations. The conference can change, accept, or reject any proposals.

As Kropotkin argued, anarchy would be based on “free agreement, by exchange of letters and proposals, and by congresses at which delegates met to discuss well specified points, and to come to an agreement about them, but not to make laws. After the congress was over, the delegates [would return] ... not with a law, but with the draft of a contract to be accepted or rejected.” [Conquest of Bread, p. 131]

By reducing conferences to functional bodies based on concrete issues, the problems of endless discussions can be reduced, if not totally eliminated. In addition, as functional groups would exist outside of these communal confederations (for example, industrial collectives would organise conferences about their industry with invited participants from consumer groups), there would be a limited agenda in most communal get-togethers.

The most important issues would be to agree on the guidelines for industrial activity, communal investment (e.g. houses, hospitals, etc.) and overall co-ordination of large scale communal activities. In this way everyone would be part of the commonwealth, deciding on how resources would be used to maximise human well-being and ecological survival. The problems associated with “the tyranny of small decisions” would be overcome without undermining individual freedom. (In fact, a healthy community would enrich and develop individuality by encouraging independent and critical thought, social interaction, and empowering social institutions based on self-management).

Is such a system fantasy? Given that such a system has existed and worked at various times, we can safely argue that it is not. Obviously we cannot cover every example, so we point to just two – revolutionary Paris and Spain.

As Murray Bookchin points out, Paris “in the late eighteenth century was, by the standards of that time, one of the largest and economically most complex cities in Europe: its population approximated a million people ... Yet in 1793, at the height of the French Revolution, the city was managed **institutionally** almost entirely by [48] citizen assemblies... and its affairs were co-ordinated by the **Commune** ... and often, in fact, by the assemblies themselves, or sections as they were called, which established their own interconnections without recourse to the **Commune**.” [Society and Nature, no. 5, p. 96]

Here is his account of how communal self-government worked in practice:

*“What, then, were these little-known forty-eight sections of Paris ... How were they organised? And how did they function?”*

*“Ideologically, the **sectionnaires** (as their members were called) believed primarily in sovereignty of the people. This concept of popular sovereignty, as Albert Soboul observes, was for them ‘not an abstraction, but the concrete reality of the people united in sectional assemblies and exercising all their rights.’ It was in their eyes an inalienable right, or, as the section de la Cite declared in November 1792, ‘every man who assumes to have sovereignty [over others] will be regarded as a tyrant, usurper of public liberty and worthy of death.’*



*“Sovereignty, in effect, was to be enjoyed by **all** citizens, not pre-empted by ‘representatives’ ... The radical democrats of 1793 thus assumed that every adult was, to one degree or another, competent to participate in management public affairs. Thus, each section ... was structured around a **face-to-face democracy**: basically a general assembly of the people that formed the most important deliberative body of a section, and served as the incarnation of popular power in a given part of the city ... each elected six deputies to the Commune, presumably for the pursue merely of co-ordinating all the sections in the city of Paris.*

*“Each section also had its own various administrative committees, whose members were also recruited from the general assembly.” [The Third Revolution, vol. 1, p. 319]*

Little wonder Kropotkin argued that these “sections” showed “*the principles of anarchism, expressed some years later in England by W. Godwin, ... had their origin, not in theoretical speculations, but in the **deeds** of the Great French Revolution*” [The Great French Revolution, vol. 1, p. 204]

Communal self-government was also practised, and on a far wider scale, in revolutionary Spain. All across Republican Spain, workers and peasants formed communes and federations of communes (see section I.8 for fuller details). As Gaston Leval summarises the experience:

*“There was, in the organisation set in motion by the Spanish Revolution and by the libertarian movement, which was its mainspring, a structuring from the bottom to the top, which corresponds to a real federation and true democracy ... the controlling and co-ordinating Comites, clearly indispensable, do not go outside the organisation that has chosen them, they remain in their midst, always controllable by and accessible to the members. If any individuals contradict by their actions their mandates, it is possible to call them to order, to reprimand them, to replace them. It is only by and in such a system that the ‘majority lays down the law.’*

*“The syndical assemblies were the expression and the practice of libertarian democracy, a democracy having nothing in common with the democracy of Athens where the citizens discussed and disputed for days on end on the Agora; where factions, clan rivalries, ambitions, personalities conflicted, where, in view of the social inequalities precious time was lost in interminable wrangles. Here a modern Aristophenes would have had no reason to write the equivalent of **The Clouds**.*

*“Normally those periodic meetings would not last more than a few hours. They dealt with concrete, precise subjects concretely and precisely. And all who had something to say could express themselves. The Comite presented the new problems that had arisen since the previous assembly, the results obtained by the application of such and such a resolution . . . relations with other syndicates, production returns from the various workshops or factories. All this was the subject of reports and discussion. Then the assembly would nominate the commissions, the members of these commissions discussed between themselves what solutions to adopt, if there was disagreement, a majority report and a minority report would be prepared.*

*“This took place in **all** the syndicates **throughout Spain**, in **all** trades and **all** industries, in assemblies which, in Barcelona, from the very beginnings of our movement*

*brought together hundreds or thousands of workers depending on the strength of the organisations. So much so that the awareness of the duties, responsibilities of each spread all the time to a determining and decisive degree...*

*“The practice of this democracy also extended to the agricultural regions ... the decision to nominate a local management Comite for the villages was taken by general meetings of the inhabitants of villages, how the delegates in the different essential tasks which demanded an indispensable co-ordination of activities were proposed and elected by the whole assembled population. But it is worth adding and underlining that in all the collectivised villages and all the partially collectivised villages, in the 400 Collectives in Aragon, in the 900 in the Levante region, in the 300 in the Castilian region, to mention only the large groupings ... the population was called together weekly, fortnightly or monthly and kept fully informed of everything concerning the commonweal.*

*“This writer was present at a number of these assemblies in Aragon, where the reports on the various questions making up the agenda allowed the inhabitants to know, to so understand, and to feel so mentally integrated in society, to so participate in the management of public affairs, in the responsibilities, that the recriminations, the tensions which always occur when the power of decision is entrusted to a few individuals, be they democratically elected without the possibility of objecting, did not happen there. The assemblies were public, the objections, the proposals publicly discussed, everybody being free, as in the syndical assemblies, to participate in the discussions, to criticise, propose, etc. Democracy extended to the whole of social life.” [Collectives in the Spanish Revolution, pp. 205–7]*

These collectives organised federations embracing thousands of communes and workplaces, whole branches of industry, hundreds of thousands of people and whole regions of Spain.

In other words, it is possible. It **has** worked. With the massive improvements in communication technology it is even more viable than before. Whether or not we reach such a self-managed society depends on whether we desire to be free or not.

### **I.5.5 Aren't participatory communities and confederations just new states?**

No. As we have seen in section B.2, a state can be defined both by its structure and its function. As far as structure is concerned, a state involves the politico-military and economic domination of a certain geographical territory by a ruling elite, based on the delegation of power into the hands of the few, resulting in hierarchy (centralised authority). As Kropotkin argued, *“the word ‘State’ ... should be reserved for those societies with the hierarchical system and centralisation.”* [Ethics, p. 317f]

In a system of federated participatory communities, however, there is no ruling elite, and thus no hierarchy, because power is retained by the lowest-level units of confederation through their use of direct democracy and mandated, rotating, and recallable delegates to meetings of higher-level confederal bodies. This eliminates the problem in “representative” democratic systems of the delegation of power leading to the elected officials becoming isolated from and beyond the control of the mass of people who elected them. As Kropotkin pointed out, an anarchist society would

make decisions by “means of congresses, composed of delegates, who discuss among themselves, and submit **proposals**, not **laws**, to their constituents”, and so is based on self-government, not representative government (i.e. statism). [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 135]

In addition, in representative democracy, elected officials who must make decisions on a wide range of issues inevitably gather an unelected bureaucracy around them to aid in their decision making, and because of its control of information and its permanency, this bureaucracy soon has more power than the elected officials (who themselves have more power than the people). In the system we have sketched, policy proposals formulated by higher-level confederal bodies would often be presented to the grassroots political units for discussion and voting (though the grassroots units could also formulate policy proposals directly), and these higher-level bodies would often need to consult experts in formulating such proposals. But these experts would not be retained as a permanent bureaucracy, and all information provided by them would be available to the lower-level units to aid in their decision making, thus eliminating the control of information on which bureaucratic power is based.

Perhaps it will be objected that communal decision making is just a form of “statism” based on direct, as opposed to representative, democracy — “statist” because the individual is still be subject to the rules of the majority and so is not free. This objection, however, confuses statism with free agreement (i.e. co-operation). Since participatory communities, like productive syndicates, are voluntary associations, the decisions they make are based on self-assumed obligations (see section A.2.11 — “*Why are most anarchists in favour of direct democracy?*”), and dissenters can leave the association if they so desire. Thus communes are no more “statist” than the act of promising and keeping ones word.

In addition, in a free society, dissent and direct action can be used by minorities to press their case (or defend their freedom) as well as debate. As Carole Pateman argues, “[p]olitical disobedience is merely one possible expression of the active citizenship on which a self-managing democracy is based.” [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 162] In this way, individual liberty can be protected in a communal system and society enriched by opposition, confrontation and dissent.

Without self-management and minority dissent, society would become an ideological cemetery which would stifle ideas and individuals as these thrives on discussion (“those who will be able to create in their mutual relations a movement and a life based on the principles of free understanding ... will understand that **variety, conflict even, is life and that uniformity is death**” [Kropotkin, **Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 143]). Therefore it is likely that a society based on voluntary agreements and self-management would, out of interpersonal empathy and self-interest, create a society that encouraged individuality and respect for minorities.

Therefore, a commune’s participatory nature is the opposite of statism. April Carter, in **Authority and Democracy** agrees. She states that “commitment to direct democracy or anarchy in the socio-political sphere is incompatible with political authority” and that the “only authority that can exist in a direct democracy is the collective ‘authority’ vested in the body politic ... it is doubtful if authority can be created by a group of equals who reach decisions by a process of mutual persuasion.” [p. 69 and p. 380] Which echoes, we must note, Proudhon’s comment that “the true meaning of the word ‘democracy’” was the “dismissal of government.” [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 42] Bakunin argued that when the “whole people govern” then “there will be no one to be governed. It means that there will be no government, no State.” [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 287] Malatesta, decades later, made the same point — “government by everybody is no longer government in the authoritarian, historical and practical sense of the word.” [**No Gods, No Mas-**

ters, vol. 2, p. 38] And, of course, Kropotkin argued that by means of the directly democratic sections of the French Revolution the masses “*practic[ed] what was to be described later as Direct Self-Government*” and expressed “*the principles of anarchism.*” [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 200 and p. 204]

Anarchists assert that individuals and the institutions they create cannot be considered in isolation. Authoritarian institutions will create individuals who have a servile nature, who cannot govern themselves. Anarchists, therefore, consider it common sense that individuals, in order to be free, **must** have take part in determining the general agreements they make with their neighbours which give form to their communities. Otherwise, a free society could not exist and individuals would be subject to rules others make **for** them (following orders is hardly libertarian). Therefore, anarchists recognise the social nature of humanity and the fact any society based on contracts (like capitalism) will be marked by authority, injustice and inequality, **not** freedom. As Bookchin points out, “[t]o speak of ‘The Individual’ apart from its social roots is as meaningless as to speak of a society that contains no people or institutions.” [“Communalism: The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism”, **Society and Nature** no. 8, p. 15]

Society cannot be avoided and “[u]nless everyone is to be 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.” [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 15–16] Those who reject democracy in the name of liberty (such as many supporters of capitalism claim to do) usually also see the need for laws and hierarchical authority (particularly in the workplace). This is unsurprising, as such authority is the only means left by which collective activity can be co-ordinated if “*democracy*” (i.e. self-management) is rejected (usually as “*statist*”, which is ironic as the resulting institutions, such as a capitalist company, are far more statist than self-managed ones).

However, it should be noted that communities can expel individuals or groups of individuals who constantly hinder community decisions. As Malatesta argued, “*for if it is unjust that the majority should oppress the minority, the contrary would be quite as unjust; and if the minority has a right to rebel, the majority has a right to defend itself... it is true that this solution is not completely satisfactory. The individuals put out of the association would be deprived of many social advantages, which an isolated person or group must do without, because they can only be procured by the co-operation of a great number of human beings. But what would you have? These malcontents cannot fairly demand that the wishes of many others should be sacrificed for their sakes.*” [**A Talk about Anarchist-Communism**, p. 29]

Nevertheless, such occurrences would be rare (for reasons discussed in section I.5.6), and their possibility merely indicates that free association also means the freedom **not** to associate. This a very important freedom for both the majority and the minority, and must be defended. However, as an isolated life is impossible, the need for communal associations is essential. It is only by living together in a supportive community can individuality be encouraged and developed along with individual freedom. However, anarchists are aware that not everyone is a social animal and that there are times that people like to withdraw into their own personal space. Thus our support for free association and federalism along with solidarity, community and self-management.

Lastly, that these communities and confederations are not just states with new names in indicated by two more considerations. Firstly, in regard to the activities of the confederal conferences, it is clear that they would **not** be passing laws on personal behaviour or ethics, i.e. not legislating to restrict the liberty of those who live in these communities they represent. For example,

a community is unlikely to pass laws outlawing homosexuality or censoring the press, for reasons discussed in the next section. Hence they would not be “*law-making bodies*” in the modern sense of the term, and thus not statist. Secondly, these confederations have no means to enforce their decisions. In other words, if a confederal congress makes a decision, it has no means to force people to act or not act in a certain way. We can imagine that there will be ethical reasons why participants will not act in ways to oppose joint activity — as they took part in the decision making process they would be considered childish if they reject the final decision because it did not go in their favour. Moreover, they would also have to face the reaction of those who also took part in the decision making process. It would be likely that those who ignored such decisions (or actively hindered them) would soon face non-violent direct action in the form of non-co-operation, shunning, boycotting and so on.

So, far from being new states by which one section of a community imposes its ethical standards on another, the anarchist commune is just a public forum. In this forum, issues of community interest (for example, management of the commons, control of communalised economic activity, and so forth) are discussed and policy agreed upon. In addition, interests beyond a local area are also discussed and delegates for confederal conferences are mandated with the wishes of the community. Hence, administration of things replaces government of people, with the community of communities existing to ensure that the interests of all are managed by all and that liberty, justice and equality are more than just ideals.

For these reasons, a libertarian-socialist society would not create a new state as far as structure goes. But what about in the area of function?

As noted in section B.2.1, the function of the state is to enable the ruling elite to exploit subordinate social strata, i.e. to derive an economic surplus from them, which it does by protecting certain economic monopolies from which the elite derives its wealth, and so its power. But this function is completely eliminated by the economic structure of anarchist society, which, by abolishing private property, makes it impossible for a privileged elite to form, let alone exploit “*subordinate strata*” (which will not exist, as no one is subordinate in power to anyone else). In other words, by placing the control of productive resources in the hands of the workers councils and community assemblies, every worker is given free access to the means of production that he or she needs to earn a living. Hence no one will be forced to pay usury (i.e. a use-fee) in the form of appropriated surplus value (profits) to an elite class that monopolises the means of production. In short, without private property, the state loses its reason for existence.

### **I.5.6 Won't there be a danger of a “*tyranny of the majority*” under libertarian socialism?**

While the “*tyranny of the majority*” objection does contain an important point, it is often raised for self-serving reasons. This is because those who raised the issue (for example, creators of the 1789 US constitution like Hamilton and Madison) saw the “*minority*” to be protected as the rich. In other words, the objection is not opposed to majority tyranny as such (they have no objections when the majority support their right to their riches) but rather attempts of the majority to change their society to a fairer one. However, as noted, the objection to majority rule **does** contain a valid point and one which anarchists have addressed — namely, what about minority freedom within a self-managed society.

There is, of course, this danger in **any** society, be its decision making structure direct (anarchy) or indirect (by some form of government). Anarchists are at the forefront in expressing concern about it (see, for example, Emma Goldman's classic essay "*Minorities versus Majorities*" in **Anarchism and Other Essays**). We are well aware that the mass, as long as the individuals within it do not free themselves, can be a dead-weight on others, resisting change and enforcing conformity. As Goldman argued, "*even more than constituted authority, it is social uniformity and sameness that harass the individual the most.*" [**Red Emma Speaks**, p. 93] Hence Malatesta's comment that anarchists "*have the special mission of being vigilant custodians of freedom, against all aspirants to power and against the possible tyranny of the majority.*" [**Life and Ideas**, p. 161]

However, rather than draw elitist conclusions from this fact of life under capitalism and urge forms of government and organisation which restrict popular participation (and promote rule, and tyranny, by the few) — as classical liberals do — libertarians argue that only a process of self-liberation through struggle and participation can break up the mass into free, self-managing individuals. Moreover, we also argue that participation and self-management is the only way that majorities can come to see the point of minority ideas and for seeing the importance of protecting minority freedoms. This means that any attempt to restrict participation in the name of minority rights actually enforces the herd mentality, undermining minority and individual freedom rather than protecting it. As Carole Pateman argues:

*"the evidence supports the arguments ... that we do learn to participate by participating and that feelings of political efficacy are more likely to be developed in a participatory environment. Furthermore, the evidence indicates that experience of a participatory authority structure might also be effective in diminishing tendencies towards non-democratic attitudes in the individual."* [**Participation and Democratic Theory**, p. 105]

However, while there is cause for concern (and anarchists are at the forefront in expressing it), the "*tyranny of the majority*" objection fails to take note of the vast difference between direct and "*representative*" forms of democracy.

In the current system, as we pointed out in section B.5, voters are mere passive spectators of occasional, staged, and highly rehearsed debates among candidates pre-selected by the corporate elite, who pay for campaign expenses. More often the public is expected to choose simply on the basis of political ads and news sound bites. Once the choice is made, cumbersome and ineffective recall procedures insure that elected representatives can act more or less as they (or rather, their wealthy sponsors) please. The function, then, of the electorate in bourgeois "*representative government*" is ratification of "*choices*" that have been **already made for them!**

By contrast, in a direct, libertarian democracy, decisions are made following public discussion in community assemblies open to all. After decisions have been reached, outvoted minorities — even minorities of one — still have ample opportunity to present reasoned and persuasive counter-arguments to try to change the decision. This process of debate, disagreement, challenge, and counter-challenge, which goes on even after the defeated minority has temporarily acquiesced in the decision of the majority, is virtually absent in the representative system, where "*tyranny of the majority*" is truly a problem. In addition, minorities can secede from an association if the decision reached by it are truly offensive to them.

And let us not forget that in all likelihood, issues of personal conduct or activity will not be discussed in the neighbourhood assemblies. Why? Because we are talking about a society in

which most people consider themselves to be unique, free individuals, who would thus recognise and act to protect the uniqueness and freedom of others. Unless people are indoctrinated by religion or some other form of ideology, they can be tolerant of others and their individuality. If this is not the case now, then it has more to do with the existence of authoritarian social relationships — relationships that will be dismantled under libertarian socialism — and the type of person they create rather than some innate human flaw.

Thus there will be vast areas of life in a libertarian socialist community which are none of other people's business. Anarchists have always stressed the importance of personal space and "private" areas. Indeed, for Kropotkin, the failure of many "utopian" communities directly flowed from a lack personal space. One of the mistakes made by such "utopian" communities within capitalism was *"the desire to manage the community after the model of a family, to make it 'the great family.' They lived all in the same house and were thus forced to continuously meet the same 'brethren and sisters.' It is already difficult often for two real brothers to live together in the same house, and family life is not always harmonious; so it was a fundamental error to impose on all the 'great family' instead of trying, on the contrary, to guarantee as much freedom and home life to each individual."* [Small Communal Experiments and Why they Fail, pp. 8–9]

Thus in an anarchist society, continual agreement on all issues is not desired. The members of a free society *"need only agree as to some advantageous method of common work, and are free otherwise to live in their own way."* [Op. Cit., p. 22]

Which brings us to another key point. When anarchists talk of democratising or communalising the household or any other association, we do not mean that it should be stripped of its private status and become open to the "tyranny of the majority" or regulation by general voting in a single, universal public sphere. Rather, we mean that households and other relationships should take in libertarian characteristics and be consistent with the liberty of all its members. Thus a society based on self-management does not imply the destruction of private spheres of activity — it implies the extension of anarchist principles into all spheres of life, both private and public. It does not mean the subordination of the private by the public, or vice versa.

So, in other words, it is highly unlikely that the "tyranny of the majority" will exert itself where most rightly fear it — in their homes, how they act with friends, their personal space, how they act, and do on. As long as individual freedom and rights are protected, it is of little concern what people get up to (included the rights of children, who are also individuals and **not** the property of their parents). Direct democracy in anarchist theory is purely concerned with common resources and their use and management. It is highly unlikely that a free society would debate issues of personal behaviour or morality and instead would leave them to those directly affected by them — as it should be, as we all need personal space and experimentation to find the way of life that best suits us.

Today an authoritarian worldview, characterised by an inability to think beyond the categories of domination and submission, is imparted by conditioning in the family, schools, religious institutions, clubs, fraternities, the army, etc., and produces a type of personality that is intolerant of any individual or group perceived as threatening to the perpetuation of that worldview and its corresponding institutions and values. Thus, as Bakunin argues, *"public opinion" is potentially intolerant "simply because hitherto this power has not been humanised itself; it has not been humanised because the social life of which it is ever the faithful expression is based ... in the worship of divinity, not on respect for humanity; in authority, not on liberty; on privilege, not on equality; in the exploitation, not on the brotherhood, of men; on iniquity and falsehood, not on justice and truth.*

*Consequently its real action, always in contradiction of the humanitarian theories which it professes, has constantly exercised a disastrous and depraving influence.*” [God and the State, p. 43f] In other words, *“if society is ever to become free, it will be so through liberated individuals, whose free efforts make society.”* [Emma Goldman, **Anarchism and Other Essays**, p. 44]

In an anarchist society, however, a conscious effort will be made to dissolve the institutional and traditional sources of the authoritarian/submissive type of personality, and thus to free “*public opinion*” of its current potential for intolerance. In addition, it should be noted that as anarchists recognise that the practice of self-assumed political obligation implied in free association also implies the right to practice dissent and disobedience as well. As Carole Pateman notes, *“[e]ven if it is impossible to be unjust to myself, I do not vote for myself alone, but alone with everyone else. Questions about injustice are always appropriate in political life, for there is no guarantee that participatory voting will actually result in decisions in accord with the principles of political morality.”* [The Problem of Political Obligation, p. 160]

If an individual or group of individuals feel that a specific decision threatens their freedom (which is the basic principle of political morality in an anarchist society) they can (and must) act to defend that freedom. *“The political practice of participatory voting rests in a collective self-consciousness about the meaning and implication of citizenship. The members of the political association understand that to vote is simultaneously to commit oneself, to commit one’s fellow citizens, and also to commit oneself to them in a mutual undertaking ... a refusal to vote on a particular occasion indicates that the refusers believe ... [that] the proposal ... infringes the principle of political morality on which the political association is based . . . A refusal to vote [or the use of direct action] could be seen as an appeal to the ‘sense of justice’ of their fellow citizens.”* [Carole Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 161]

As they no longer “*consent*” to the decisions made by their community they can appeal to the “*sense of justice*” of their fellow citizens by direct action and indicate that a given decision may have impacts which the majority were not aware. Hence direct action and dissent is a key aspect of an anarchist society and help ensure against the tyranny of the majority. Anarchism rejects the “*love it or leave it*” attitude that marks classical liberalism as well as Rousseau (this aspect of his work being inconsistent with its foundations in participation).

This vision of self-assumed obligation, with its basis in individual liberty, indicates the basic flaw of Joseph Schumpeter’s argument against democracy as anything bar a political **method** of arriving at decisions (in his case who will be the leaders of a society). Schumpeter proposed the “*mental experiment*” of imagining a country which, democratically, persecuted Jews, witches and Christians (see his famous work **Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy**). He argues that we should not approve of these practices just because they have been decided upon by the democratic method and, therefore, democracy cannot be an end in itself.

However, such systematic persecution would conflict with the rules of procedure required if a country’s or community’s political method is to be called “*democratic*.” This is because, in order to be democratic, the minority must be in a position for its ideas to become the majority’s via argument and convincing the majority (and that requires freedom of discussion and association). A country or community in which the majority persecutes or represses a minority automatically ensures that the minority can never be in a position to become the majority (as the minority is barred by force from becoming so) or convince the majority of the errors of its way (even if it cannot become the majority physically, it can become so morally by convincing the majority to change its position). Schumpeter’s example utterly violates democratic principles and so cannot



be squared with the rules of democratic procedure. Thus majority tyranny is an outrage against both democratic theory **and** individual liberty (unsurprisingly, as the former has its roots in the latter).

This argument applies with even more force to a self-managed community too and so any system in which the majority tyrannises over a minority is, by definition, **not** self-managed as one part of the community is excluded from convincing the other (*“the enslavement of part of a nation denies the federal principal itself.”* [P-J Proudhon, **The Principle of Federation**, p. 42f]). Thus individual freedom and minority rights are essential to direct democracy/self-management.

It should be stressed, however, that most anarchists do not think that the way to guard against possible tyranny by the majority is to resort to decision-making by consensus (where no action can be taken until every person in the group agrees) or a property system (based in contracts). Both consensus (see section A.2.12 – *“Is consensus an alternative to direct democracy?”*) and contracts (see section A.2.14 – *“Why is voluntarism not enough?”*) soon result in authoritarian social relationships developing in the name of “liberty.”

For example, decision making by consensus tends to eliminate the creative role of dissent and mutate into a system that pressures people into psychic and intellectual conformity – hardly a libertarian ideal. In the case of property and contract based systems, those with property have more power than those without, and so they soon determine what can and cannot be done – in other words, the *“tyranny of the minority”* and hierarchical authority. Both alternatives are deeply flawed.

Hence most anarchists have recognised that majority decision making, though not perfect, is the best way to reach decisions in a political system based on maximising individual (and so social) freedom. Direct democracy in grassroots confederal assemblies and workers’ councils ensures that decision making is *“horizontal”* in nature (i.e. between **equals**) and not hierarchical (i.e. governmental, between order giver and order taker). In other words, it ensures liberty.

### I.5.7 What if I don’t want to join a commune?

As would be expected, no one would be **forced** to join a commune nor take part in its assemblies. To suggest otherwise would be contrary to anarchist principles. We have already indicated (in the last two sections) why the communes would not be likely to restrict individuals with new *“laws.”* Thus a commune would be a free society, in which individual liberty would be respected and encouraged.

However, what about individuals who live within the boundaries of a commune but decide not to join? For example, a local neighbourhood may include households that desire to associate and a few that do not (this is actually happened during the Spanish Revolution). What happens to the minority of dissenters?

Obviously individuals can leave to find communities more in line with their own concepts of right and wrong if they cannot convince their neighbours of the validity of their ideas. And, equally obviously, not everyone will want to leave an area they like. So we must discuss those who decide to not to find a more suitable community. Are the communal decisions binding on non-members? Obviously not. If an individual or family desire **not** to join a commune (for whatever reason), their freedoms must be respected. However, this also means that they cannot benefit from communal activity and resources (such a free housing, hospitals, and so forth) and, possibly,

have to pay for their use. As long as they do not exploit or oppress others, an anarchist community would respect their decision. After all, as Malatesta argued, *“free and voluntary communism is ironical if one has not the right and the possibility to live in a different regime, collectivist, mutualist, individualist — as one wishes, always on condition that there is no oppression or exploitation of others.”* [Life and Ideas, p. 103]

Many who oppose anarchist self-management in the name of freedom often do so because they desire to oppress and exploit others. In other words, they oppose participatory communities because they (rightly) fear that this would restrict their ability to oppress, exploit and grow rich off the labour of others. This type of opposition can be seen from history, when rich elites, in the name of liberty, have replaced democratic forms of social decision making with representative or authoritarian ones (see section B.2.6). Regardless of what defenders of capitalism claim, *“voluntary bilateral exchanges”* affect third parties and can harm others indirectly. This can easily be seen from examples like concentrations of wealth which have effects across society, or crime in the local community, or the ecological impacts of consumption and production. This means that an anarchist society would be aware that inequality and so statism could develop again and take precautions against it. As Malatesta put it, some *“seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of respect for the freedom of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas.”* [Anarchy, p. 41]

So, it goes without saying that the minority, as in any society, will exist within the ethical norms of the surrounding society and they will be *“forced to adhere”* to them in the same sense that they are *“forced to adhere”* to not murdering people. Few people would say that forcing people not to commit murder is a restriction of their liberty. Therefore, while allowing the maximum of individual freedom of dissent, an anarchist community would still have to apply its ethical standards to those beyond that community. Individuals would not be allowed to murder, harm or enslave others and claim that they are allowed to do so because they are not part of the local community (see section I.5.8 on crime in an anarchist society).

Similarly, individuals would not be allowed to develop private property (as opposed to possession) simply because they wanted to. Such a *“ban”* on private property would not be a restriction on liberty simply because stopping the development of authority hardly counts as an authoritarian act (for an analogy, supporters of capitalism do not think that banning theft is a restriction of liberty and because this view is — currently — accepted by the majority, it is enforced on the minority). Even the word *“ban”* is wrong, as it is the would-be capitalist who is trying to ban freedom for others on their *“property.”* Members of a free society would simply refuse to recognise the claims of private property — they would simply ignore the would-be capitalist’s pretensions and *“keep out”* signs. Without a state, or hired thugs, to back up their claims, they would just end up looking silly. *“Occupancy and use”* (to use Tucker’s term) would be the limits of possession — and so property would become *“that control of a thing by a person which will receive either social sanction, or else unanimous individual sanction, when the laws of social expediency shall have been fully discovered.”* [B. Tucker, *Instead of a Book*, p. 131]

Tucker explains this system further:

*“Suppose that all the municipalities have adopted the voluntary principle, and that compulsory taxation has been abolished. Now after this let us suppose that the Anarchistic view that occupancy and use should condition and limit landholding becomes the pre-*

*vailing view. Evidently then these municipalities will proceed to formulate and enforce this view. What the formula will be no one can foresee. But continuing with our suppositions, we will say that they decide to protect no one in the possession of more than ten acres. In execution of this decision, they ... notify all holders of more than ten acres within their limits that ... they will cease to protect them in the possession of more than ten acres ...*” [The Individualist Anarchists, pp. 159–60]

A similar process would occur for housing, with tenants “*would not be forced to pay [the landlord] rent, nor would [the landlord] be allowed to seize their property. The Anarchistic associations would look upon ... tenants very much as they would look upon ... guests.*” [Op. Cit., p. 162]

Therefore anarchists support the maximum of experiments while ensuring that the social conditions that allow this experimentation are protected against concentrations of wealth and power. As Malatesta put it, “*Anarchism involves all and only those forms of life that respect liberty and recognise that every person has an equal right to enjoy the good things of nature and the products of their own activity.*” [The Anarchist Revolution, p. 14]

This means that Anarchists do not support the liberty of being a boss (anarchists will happily work **with** someone but not **for** someone). Of course, those who desire to create private property against the wishes of others expect those others to respect their wishes. So, when the would-be proprietarians happily fence off their “property” and exclude others from it, could not these others remember these words from Woody Guthrie’s **This Land is Your Land**, and act accordingly?

*“As I went rumbling that dusty highway  
I saw a sign that said private property  
But on the other side it didn’t say nothing  
This land was made for you and me”*

While happy to exclude others from “their” property, such owners seem more than happy to use the resources held in common by others. They are the ultimate “free riders,” desiring the benefits of society but rejecting the responsibilities that go with it. In the end, such “individualists” usually end up supporting the state (an institution they claim to hate) precisely because it is the only means by which private property and their “freedom” to exercise authority can be defended.

So, as a way to eliminate the problem of minorities seeking power and property for themselves, an anarchist revolution places social wealth (starting with the land) in the hands of all and promises to protect only those uses of it which are considered just by society as a whole. In other words, by recognising that “property” is a product of society, an anarchist society will ensure that an individual’s “property” is protected by his or her fellows when it is based purely upon actual occupancy and use. Thus attempts to transform minority dissent into, say, property rights would be fought by simply ignoring the “keep out” signs of property owned, but not used, by an individual or group.

Therefore, individuals are free not to associate, but their claims of “ownership” will be based around **use** rights, not property rights. Individuals will be protected by their fellows only in so far as what they claim to “own” is related to their ability to personally use said “property.” As Kropotkin argued, “*when we see a peasant who is in possession of just the amount of land he can cultivate, we do not think it reasonable to turn him off his little farm. He exploits nobody, and nobody would have the right to interfere with his work. But if he possesses under the capitalist law*

*more than he can cultivate himself, we consider that we must not give him the right of keeping that soil for himself, leaving it uncultivated when it might be cultivated by others, or of making other cultivate it for his benefit.*" [Act for Yourselves, p. 104] Without a state to back up and protect property "rights," we see that all rights are, in the end, what society considers to be fair (the difference between law and social custom is discussed in section I.7.3). What the state does is to impose "rights" which do not have such a basis (i.e. those that protect the property of the elite) or "rights" which have been corrupted by wealth and would have been changed because of this corruption had society been free to manage its own affairs.

In summary, individuals will be free not to join a participatory community, and hence free to place themselves outside its decisions and activities on most issues that do not apply to the fundamental ethical standards of a society. Hence individuals who desire to live outside of anarchist communities would be free to live as they see fit but would not be able to commit murder, rape, create private property or other activities that harmed individuals. It should be noted, moreover, that this does not mean that their possessions will be taken from them by "society" or that "society" will tell them what to do with their possessions. Freedom, in a complex world, means that such individuals will not be in a position to turn their possessions into **property** and thus recreate capitalism (for the distinction between "property" and "possessions," see section B.3.1). This will not be done by "anarchist police" or by "banning" voluntary agreements, but purely by recognising that "property" is a social creation and by creating a social system that will encourage individuals to stand up for their rights and co-operate with each other.

### I.5.8 What about crime?

For anarchists, "crime" can best be described as anti-social acts, or behaviour which harms someone else or which invades their personal space. Anarchists argue that the root cause for crime is not some perversity of human nature or "original sin," but is due to the type of society by which people are moulded. For example, anarchists point out that by eliminating private property, crime could be reduced by about 90 percent, since about 90 percent of crime is currently motivated by evils stemming from private property such as poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and alienation. Moreover, by adopting anarchist methods of non-authoritarian child rearing and education, most of the remaining crimes could also be eliminated, because they are largely due to the anti-social, perverse, and cruel "secondary drives" that develop because of authoritarian, pleasure-negative child-rearing practices (See section J.6 — "What methods of child rearing do anarchists advocate?")

"Crime", therefore, cannot be divorced from the society within which it occurs. Society, in Emma Goldman's words, gets the criminals it deserves. For example, anarchists do not think it unusual nor unexpected that crime exploded under the pro-free market capitalist regimes of Thatcher and Reagan. Crime, the most obvious symptom of social crisis, took 30 years to double in Britain (from 1 million incidents in 1950 to 2.2 million in 1979). However, between 1979 and 1992 the crime rate more than doubled, exceeding the 5 million mark in 1992. These 13 years were marked by a government firmly committed to the "free market" and "individual responsibility." It was entirely predictable that the social disruption, atomisation of individuals, and increased poverty caused by freeing capitalism from social controls would rip society apart and increase criminal activity. Also unsurprisingly (from an anarchist viewpoint), under these pro-market

governments we also saw a reduction in civil liberties, increased state centralisation, and the destruction of local government. As Malatesta put it, the classical liberalism which these governments represented could have had no other effect, for *“the government’s powers of repression must perforce increase as free competition results in more discord and inequality.”* [Anarchy, p. 46]

Hence the paradox of governments committed to *“individual rights,”* the *“free market”* and *“getting the state off our backs”* increasing state power and reducing rights while holding office during a crime explosion is no paradox at all. *“The conjuncture of the rhetoric of individual freedom and a vast increase in state power,”* argues Carole Pateman, *“is not unexpected at a time when the influence of contract doctrine is extending into the last, most intimate nooks and crannies of social life. Taken to a conclusion, contract undermines the conditions of its own existence. Hobbes showed long ago that contract — all the way down — requires absolutism and the sword to keep war at bay.”* [The Sexual Contract, p. 232]

Capitalism, and the contract theory on which it is built, will inevitably rip apart society. Capitalism is based upon a vision of humanity as isolated individuals with no connection other than that of money and contract. Such a vision cannot help but institutionalise anti-social acts. As Kropotkin argued *“it is not love and not even sympathy upon which Society is based in mankind. It is the conscience — be it only at the stage of an instinct — of human solidarity. It is the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each man [and woman] from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of every one’s happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his [or her] own.”* [Mutual Aid, p. 16]

The social atomisation required and created by capitalism destroys the basic bonds of society — namely human solidarity — and hierarchy crushes the individuality required to understand that we share a common humanity with others and so understand **why** we must be ethical and respect others rights.

We should also point out that prisons have numerous negative affects on society as well as often re-enforcing criminal (i.e. anti-social) behaviour. Kropotkin originated the accurate description of prisons as *“Universities of Crime”* wherein the first-time criminal learns new techniques and have adapt to the prevailing ethical standards within them. Hence, prisons would have the effect of increasing the criminal tendencies of those sent there and so prove to be counter-productive. In addition, prisons do not affect the social conditions which promote many forms of crime.

We are not saying, however, that anarchists reject the concept of individual responsibility. While recognising that rape, for example, is the result of a social system which represses sexuality and is based on patriarchy (i.e. rape has more to do with power than sex), anarchists do not “sit back” and say *“it’s society’s fault.”* Individuals have to take responsibility for their own actions and recognise that consequences of those actions. Part of the current problem with “law codes” is that individuals have been deprived of the responsibility for developing their own ethical code, and so are less likely to develop “civilised” social standards (see section I.7.3).

Therefore, while anarchists reject the ideas of law and a specialised justice system, they are not blind to the fact that anti-social action may not totally disappear in a free society. Therefore, some sort of *“court”* system would still be necessary to deal with the remaining crimes and to adjudicate disputes between citizens.

These courts would function in one of two ways. One possibility is that the parties involved agree to hand their case to a third party. Then the *“court”* in question would be the arrangements

made by those parties. The second possibility is when the parties cannot not agree (or if the victim was dead). Then the issue could be raised at a communal assembly and a “court” appointed to look into the issue. These “courts” would be independent from the commune, their independence strengthened by popular election instead of executive appointment of judges, by protecting the jury system of selection of random citizens by lot, and by informing jurors of their right to judge the law itself, according to their conscience, as well as the facts of a case. As Malatesta pointed out, “when differences were to arise between men [sic!], would not arbitration voluntarily accepted, or pressure of public opinion, be perhaps more likely to establish where the right lies than through an irresponsible magistrate which has the right to adjudicate on everything and everybody and is inevitably incompetent and therefore unjust?” [Anarchy, p. 43]

In the case of a “police force,” this would not exist either as a public or private specialised body or company. If a local community did consider that public safety required a body of people who could be called upon for help, we imagine that a new system would be created. Such a system would “not be entrusted to, as it is today, to a special, official body: all able-bodied inhabitants [of a commune] will be called upon to take turns in the security measures instituted by the commune.” [James Guillaume, *Bakunin on Anarchism*, p. 371] This system would be based around a voluntary militia system, in which all members of the community could serve if they so desired. Those who served would not constitute a professional body; instead the service would be made up of local people who would join for short periods of time and be replaced if they abused their position. Hence the likelihood that a communal militia would become corrupted by power, like the current police force or a private security firm exercising a policing function, would be vastly reduced. Moreover, by accustoming a population to intervene in anti-social as part of the militia, they would be empowered to do so when not an active part of it, so reducing the need for its services even more.

Such a body would not have a monopoly on protecting others, but would simply be on call if others required it. It would no more be a monopoly of defence (i.e. a “police force”) than the current fire service is a monopoly. Individuals are not banned from putting out fires today because the fire service exists, similarly individuals will be free to help stop anti-social crime by themselves, or in association with others, in an anarchist society.

Of course there are anti-social acts which occur without witnesses and so the “guilty” party cannot be readily identified. If such acts did occur we can imagine an anarchist community taking two courses of action. The injured party may look into the facts themselves or appoint an agent to do so or, more likely, an ad hoc group would be elected at a community assembly to investigate specific crimes of this sort. Such a group would be given the necessary “authority” to investigate the crime and be subject to recall by the community if they start trying to abuse whatever authority they had. Once the investigating body thought it had enough evidence it would inform the community as well as the affected parties and then organise a court. Of course, a free society will produce different solutions to such problems, solutions no-one has considered yet and so these suggestions are just that, suggestions.

As is often stated, prevention is better than cure. This is as true of crime as of disease. In other words, crime is best fought by rooting out its causes as opposed to punishing those who act in response to these causes. For example, it is hardly surprising that a culture that promotes individual profit and consumerism would produce individuals who do not respect other people (or themselves) and see them as purely means to an end (usually increased consumption). And, like everything else in a capitalist system, such as honour and pride, conscience is also available

at the right price — hardly an environment which encourages consideration for others, or even for oneself.

In addition, a society based on hierarchical authority will also tend to produce anti-social activity because the free development and expression it suppresses. Thus, irrational authority (which is often claimed to be the only cure for crime) actually helps produce it. As Emma Goldman argued, crime “*is naught but misdirected energy. So long as every institution of today, economic, political, social, moral conspires to misdirect human energy into wrong channels; so long as most people are out of place doing things they hate to do, living a life they loathe to live, crime will be inevitable, and all the laws on the statues can only increase, but never do away with, crime*” [Red Emma Speaks, p. 57]

Eric Fromm, decades latter, makes the same point:

*“It would seem that the amount of destructiveness to be found in individuals is proportionate to the amount to which expansiveness of life is curtailed. By this we do not refer to individual frustrations of this or that instinctive desire but to the thwarting of the whole of life, the blockage of spontaneity of the growth and expression of man’s sensuous, emotional, and intellectual capacities. Life has an inner dynamism of its own; it tends to grow, to be expressed, to be lived ... the drive for life and the drive for destruction are not mutually interdependent factors but are in a reversed interdependence. The more the drive towards life is thwarted, the stronger is the drive towards destruction; the more life is realised, the less is the strength of destructiveness. **Destructiveness is the outcome of un-lived life.** Those individual and social conditions that make for suppression of life produce the passion for destruction that forms, so to speak, the reservoir from which particular hostile tendencies — either against others or against oneself — are nourished”* [The Fear of Freedom, p. 158]

Therefore, by reorganising society so that it empowers everyone and actively encourages the use of all our intellectual, emotional and sensuous abilities, crime would soon cease to be the huge problem that it is now. As for the anti-social behaviour or clashes between individuals that might still exist in such a society, it would be dealt with in a system based on respect for the individual and a recognition of the social roots of the problem. Restraint would be kept to a minimum.

Anarchists think that public opinion and social pressure would be the main means of preventing anti-social acts in an anarchist society, with such actions as boycotting and ostracising used as powerful sanctions to convince those attempting them of the errors of their way. Extensive non-co-operation by neighbours, friends and work mates would be the best means of stopping acts which harmed others.

An anarchist system of justice, we should note, would have a lot to learn from aboriginal societies simply because they are examples of social order without the state. Indeed many of the ideas we consider as essential to justice today can be found in such societies. As Kropotkin argued, “*when we imagine that we have made great advances in introducing, for instance, the jury, all we have done is to return to the institutions of the so-called ‘barbarians’ after having changed it to the advantage of the ruling classes.*” [The State: Its Historic Role, p. 18]

Like aboriginal justice (as documented by Rupert Ross in **Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice**) anarchists contend that offenders should not be punished but justice achieved by the teaching and healing of all involved. Public condemnation of the wrongdoing

would be a key aspect of this process, but the wrong doer would remain part of the community and so see the effects of their actions on others in terms of grief and pain caused. It would be likely that wrong doers would be expected to try to make amends for their act by community service or helping victims and their families.

So, from a practical viewpoint, almost all anarchists oppose prisons on both practical grounds (they do not work) and ethical grounds (“*We know what prisons mean — they mean broken down body and spirit, degradation, consumption, insanity*” Voltairine de Cleyre, quoted by Paul Avrich in *An American Anarchist*, p. 146]). The Makhnovists took the usual anarchist position on prisons:

*“Prisons are the symbol of the servitude of the people, they are always built only to subjugate the people, the workers and peasants... Free people have no use for prisons. Wherever prisons exist, the people are not free... In keeping with this attitude, they [the Makhnovists] demolished prisons wherever they went.”* [Peter Arshinov, *The History of the Makhnovist Movement*, p. 153]

With the exception of Benjamin Tucker, no major anarchist writer supported the institution. Few anarchists think that private prisons (like private policemen) are compatible with their notions of freedom. However, all anarchists are against the current “*justice*” system which seems to them to be organised around **revenge** and punishing effects and not fixing causes.

However, there are psychopaths and other people in any society who are too dangerous to be allowed to walk freely. Restraint in this case would be the only option and such people may have to be isolated from others for their own, and others, safety. Perhaps mental hospitals would be used, or an area quarantined for their use created (perhaps an island, for example). However, such cases (we hope) would be rare.

So instead of prisons and a legal code based on the concept of punishment and revenge, anarchists support the use of public opinion and pressure to stop anti-social acts and the need to therapeutically rehabilitate those who commit anti-social acts. As Kropotkin argued, “*liberty, equality, and practical human sympathy are the most effective barriers we can oppose to the anti-social instinct of certain among us*” and **not** a parasitic legal system. [*The Anarchist Reader*, p. 117]

### I.5.9 What about Freedom of Speech under Anarchism?

Many express the idea that **all** forms of socialism would endanger freedom of speech, press, and so forth. The usual formulation of this argument is in relation to state socialism and goes as follows: if the state (or “*society*”) owned all the means of communication, then only the views which the government supported would get access to the media.

This is an important point and it needs to be addressed. However, before doing so, we should point out that under capitalism the major media are effectively controlled by the wealthy. As we argued in section D.3, the media are **not** the independent defenders of freedom that they like to portray themselves as. This is hardly surprising, since newspapers, television companies, and so forth are capitalist enterprises owned by the wealthy and with managing directors and editors who are also wealthy individuals with a vested interest in the status quo. Hence there are institutional factors which ensure that the “*free press*” reflects the interests of capitalist elites.



However, in democratic capitalist states there is little overt censorship. Radical and independent publishers can still print their papers and books without state intervention (although market forces ensure that this activity can be difficult and financially unrewarding). Under socialism, it is argued, because “*society*” owns the means of communication and production, this liberty will not exist. Instead, as can be seen from all examples of “*actually existing socialism*,” such liberty is crushed in favour of the government’s point of view.

As anarchism rejects the state, we can say that this danger does not exist under libertarian socialism. However, since social anarchists argue for the communalisation of production, could not restrictions on free speech still exist? We argue no, for three reasons.

Firstly, publishing houses, radio stations, and so on will be run by their workers directly. They will be supplied by other syndicates, with whom they will make agreements, and **not** by “*central planning*” officials, who would not exist. In other words, there is no bureaucracy of officials allocating (and so controlling) resources (and so the means of communication). Hence, anarchist self-management will ensure that there is a wide range of opinions in different magazines and papers. There would be community papers, radio stations, etc., and obviously they would play an increased role in a free society. But they would not be the only media. Associations, political parties, industrial syndicates, and so on would have their own media and/or would have access to the resources of communication workers’ syndicates, so ensuring that a wide range of opinions can be expressed.

Secondly, the “*ultimate*” power in a free society will be the individuals of which it is composed. This power will be expressed in communal and workplace assemblies that can recall delegates and revoke their decisions. It is doubtful that these assemblies would tolerate a set of would-be bureaucrats determining what they can or cannot read, see, or hear.

Thirdly, individuals in a free society would be interested in hearing different viewpoints and discussing them. This is the natural side-effect of critical thought (which self-management would encourage), and so they would have a vested interest in defending the widest possible access to different forms of media for different views. Having no vested interests to defend, a free society would hardly encourage or tolerate the censorship associated with the capitalist media (“*I listen to criticism because I am greedy. I listen to criticism because I am selfish. I would not deny myself another’s insights*” [For Ourselves, **The Right to be Greedy**, Thesis 113]).

Therefore, anarchism will **increase** freedom of speech in many important ways, particularly in the workplace (where it is currently denied under capitalism). This will be a natural result of a society based on maximising freedom and the desire to enjoy life.

We would also like to point out that during both the Spanish and Russian revolutions, freedom of speech was protected within anarchist areas.

For example, the Makhnovists in the Ukraine “*fully applied the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, of thought, of the Press, and of political association. In all the cities and towns occupied ... Complete freedom of speech, Press, assembly, and association of any kind and for everyone was immediately proclaimed.*” [Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 153] This is confirmed by Michael Malet who notes that “[o]ne of the most remarkable achievements of the Makhnovists was to preserve a freedom of speech more extensive than any of their opponents.” [Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War, p. 175]

In revolutionary Spain republicans, liberals, communists, Trotskyites and many different anarchist groups all had freedom to express their views. Emma Goldman writes that “[o]n my first visit to Spain in September 1936, nothing surprised me so much as the amount of political freedom

*I found everywhere. True, it did not extend to Fascists ... [but] everyone of the anti-Fascist front enjoyed political freedom which hardly existed in any of the so-called European democracies.” [Vision on Fire, p.147]* This is confirmed in a host of other eye-witnesses, including George Orwell in **Homage to Catalonia** (in fact, it was the rise of the pro-capitalist republicans and communists that introduced censorship).

Both movements were fighting a life-and-death struggle against communist, fascist and pro-capitalist armies and so this defence of freedom of expression, given the circumstances, is particularly noteworthy.

Therefore, based upon both theory and practice, we can say that anarchism will not endanger freedom of expression. Indeed, by breaking up the capitalist oligopoly which currently exists and introducing workers’ self-management of the press, a far wider range of opinions will become available in a free society. Rather than reflect the interests of a wealthy elite, the media would reflect the interests of society as a whole and the individuals and groups within it.

### **I.5.10 What about political parties?**

Political parties and other interest groups will exist in an anarchist society as long as people feel the need to join them. They will not be “banned” in any way, and their members will have the same rights as everyone else. Individuals who are members of political parties or associations can take part in communal and other assemblies and try to convince others of the soundness of their ideas.

However, there is a key difference between such activity and politics under a capitalist democracy. This is because the elections to positions of responsibility in an anarchist society will not be based on party tickets nor will it involve the delegation of power. Emile Pouget’s description of the difference between the syndicalist trade union and elections drives this difference home:

*“The constituent part of the trade union is the individual. Except that the union member is spared the depressing phenomenon manifest in democratic circles where, thanks to the veneration of universal suffrage, the trend is towards the crushing and diminution of the human personality. In a democratic setting, the elector can avail of his [or her] will only in order to perform an act of abdication: his role is to ‘award’ his ‘vote’ to the candidate whom he [or she] wishes to have as his [or her] ‘representative.’*

*“Affiliation to the trade union has no such implication ... In joining the union, the worker merely enters into a contract — which he may at any time abjure — with comrades who are his equals in will and potential ... In the union, say, should it come to the appointment of a trade union council to take charge of administrative matters, such ‘selection’ is not to be compared with ‘election’: the form of voting customarily employed in such circumstances is merely a means whereby the labour can be divided and is not accompanied by any delegation of authority. The strictly prescribed duties of the trade union council are merely administrative. The council performs the task entrusted to it, without ever overruling its principals, without supplanting them or acting in their place.*

*“The same might be said of all decisions reached in the union: all are restricted to a definite and specific act, whereas in democracy, election implies that the elected candidate has been issued by his [or her] elector with a carte blanche empowering him [or her] to*

*decide and do as he [or she] pleases, in and on everything, without even the hindrance of the quite possibly contrary views of his [or her] principals, whose opposition, in any case, no matter how pronounced, is of no consequence until such time as the elected candidate's mandate has run its course.*

*“So there cannot be any possible parallels, let alone confusion, between trade unions activity and participation in the disappointing chores of politics.” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, pp. 67–68]*

In other words, when individuals are elected to administrative posts they are elected to carry out their mandate, **not** to carry out their party's programme. Of course, if the individuals in question had convinced their fellow workers and citizens that their programme was correct, then this mandate and the programme would be identical. However this is unlikely in practice. We would imagine that the decisions of collectives and communes would reflect the complex social interactions and diverse political opinions their members and of the various groupings within the association.

Hence anarchism will likely contain many different political groupings and ideas. The relative influence of these within collectives and communes would reflect the strength of their arguments and the relevance of their ideas, as would be expected in a free society. As Bakunin argued, “[t]he abolition of this mutual influence would be death. And when we vindicate the freedom of the masses, we are by no means suggesting the abolition of any of the natural influences that individuals or groups of individuals exert on them. What we want is the abolition of influences which are artificial, privileged, legal, official.” [quoted by Malatesta in *Anarchy*, p. 50]

It is only when representative government replaces self-management that political debate results in “*elected dictatorship*” and centralisation of power into the hands of one party which claims to speak for the whole of society, as if the latter had one mind.

### **I.5.11 What about interest groups and other associations?**

Anarchists do not think that social life can be reduced to political and economic associations alone. Individuals have many different interests and desires which they must express in order to have a truly free and interesting life. Therefore an anarchist society will see the development of numerous voluntary associations and groups to express these interests. For example, there would be consumer groups, musical groups, scientific associations, art associations, clubs, housing co-operatives and associations, craft and hobby guilds, fan clubs, animal rights associations, groups based around sex, sexuality, creed and colour and so forth. Associations will be created for all human interests and activities.

As Kropotkin argued:

*“He who wishes for a grand piano will enter the association of musical instrument makers. And by giving the association part of his half-days' leisure, he will soon possess the piano of his dreams. If he is fond of astronomical studies he will join the association of astronomers... and he will have the telescope he desires by taking his share of the associated work...In short, the five or seven hours a day which each will have at his disposal, after having consecrated several hours to the production of necessities, would amply suf-*

*vice to satisfy all longings for luxury, however varied. Thousands of associations would undertake to supply them.” [The Conquest of Bread, p. 120]*

We can imagine, therefore, an anarchist society being based around associations and interest groups on every subject which fires the imagination of individuals and for which individuals want to meet in order to express and further their interests. Housing associations, for example, would exist to allow inhabitants to manage their local areas, design and maintain their homes and local parks and gardens. Animal rights and other interest groups would produce information on issues they consider important, trying to convince others of the errors of eating meat or whatever. Consumer groups would be in dialogue with syndicates about improving products and services, ensuring that syndicates produce what is required by consumers. Environment groups would exist to watch production and make sure that it is not creating damaging side effects and informing both syndicates and communes of their findings. Feminist, homosexual, bisexual and anti-racist groups would exist to put their ideas across, highlighting areas in which social hierarchies and prejudice still existed. All across society, people would be associating together to express themselves and convince others of their ideas on many different issues.

Hence in an anarchist society, free association would take on a stronger and more positive role than under capitalism. In this way, social life would take on many dimensions, and the individual would have the choice of thousands of societies to join to meet his or her interests or create new ones with other like-minded people. Anarchists would be the last to deny that there is more to life than work!

### **I.5.12 Would an anarchist society provide health care and other public services?**

It depends on the type of anarchist society you are talking about. Different anarchists propose different solutions.

In an individualist-mutualist society, for example, health care and other public services would be provided by individuals or co-operatives on a pay-for-use basis. It would be likely that individuals or co-operatives/associations would subscribe to various insurance providers or enter into direct contracts with health care providers. Thus the system would be similar to privatised health care but without the profit margins as competition, it is hoped, would drive prices down to cost.

Other anarchists reject such a system. They are favour of socialising health care and other public services. They argue that a privatised system would only be able to meet the requirements of those who can afford to pay for it and so would be unjust and unfair. The need for medical attention is not dependent on income and so a civilised society would recognise this fact. Under capitalism, profit-maximising medical insurance sets premiums according to the risks of the insured getting ill or injured, with the riskiest may not being able to find insurance at any price. Private insurers shun entire industries, such as logging, as too dangerous for their profits due to the likelihood of accidents or illness. They review contracts regularly and drop people who get sick. Hardly a vision to inspire a free society or one compatible with equality and mutual respect.

Moreover, competition would lead to inefficiencies as prices would be inflated to pay for advertising, competition related administration costs, paying dividends to share-holders and so on. For example, in 1993, Canada's health plans devoted 0.9% of spending to overhead, compared to

U.S. figures of 3.2% for Medicare and 12% for private insurers. In addition, when Canada adopted its publicly financed system in 1971, it and the U.S. both spent just over 7% of GDP on health care. By 1990, the U.S. was up to 12.3%, versus Canada's 9%.

As can be seen, social anarchists point to what happens under capitalism when discussing the benefits of a socialised system of health care in an anarchist society. Competition, they argue, harms health-care provision. According to Alfie Kohn:

*“More hospitals and clinics are being run by for-profit corporations; many institutions, forced to battle for ‘customers,’ seem to value a skilled director of marketing more highly than a skilled caregiver. As in any other economic sector, the race for profits translates into pressure to reduce costs, and the easiest way to do it here is to cut back on services to unprofitable patients, that is, those who are more sick than rich ...”*

He concludes:

*“The result: hospital costs are actually **higher** in areas where there is more competition for patients.”* [Alfie Kohn, **No Contest**, p. 240]

As Robert Kuttner notes:

*“The American health-care system is a tangle of inequity and inefficiency — and getting worse as private-market forces seek to rationalise it. A shift to a universal system of health coverage would cut this Gordian knot at a stroke. It would not only deliver the explicitly medical aspects of health more efficiently and fairly, but, by socialising costs of poor health, it would also create a powerful financial incentive for society as a whole to stress primary prevention... every nation with a universal system spends less of its GDP on health care than the United States ... And nearly every other nation with a universal system has longer life spans from birth (though roughly equivalent life spans from adulthood) ... most nations with universal systems also have greater patient satisfaction.*

*“The reasons ... should be obvious. By their nature, universal systems spend less money on wasteful overhead, and more on primary prevention. Health-insurance overhead in the United States alone consumes about 1 percent of the GDP, compared to 0.1 percent in Canada. Though medical inflation is a problem everywhere, the universal systems have had far lower rates of cost inflation ... In the years between 1980 and 1987, total health costs in the United States increased by 2.4 times the rate of GDP growth. In nations with universal systems, they increased far more slowly. The figures for Sweden, France, West Germany, and Britain were 1.2, 1.6, 1.8, and 1.7 percent, respectively ...*

[... ]

*“Remarkably enough, the United States spends most money on health care, but has the fewest beds per thousand in population, the lowest admission rate, and the lowest occupancy rate — coupled with the highest daily cost, highest technology-intensiveness, and greatest number of employees per bed.”* [Everything for Sale, pp. 155–6]

In 1993, the US paid 13.4% of its GDP towards health care, compared to 10% for Canada, 8.6% for Sweden and Germany, 6.6% for Britain and 6.8% for Japan. Only 40% of the US population was

covered by public health care and over 35 million people, 14% of the population, went without health insurance for all of 1991, and about twice that many were uninsured for some period during the year. In terms of health indicators, the US people are not getting value for money. Life expectancy is higher in Canada, Sweden, Germany, Japan and Britain. The USA has the highest levels of infant mortality and is last in basic health indicators as well as having fewer doctors per 1,000 people than the OECD average. All in all, the US system is miles behind the universal systems of other countries.

Of course, it will be argued that the USA is not an anarchy and so comparisons are pointless. However, it seems strange that the more competitive system, the more privatised system, is less efficient and less fair than the universal systems. It also seems strange that defenders of competition happily use examples from “*actually existing*” capitalism to illustrate their politics but reject negative examples as being a product of an “*impure*” system. They want to have their cake and eat it to.

Therefore, most anarchists are in favour of a socialised and universal health-care system for both ethical and efficiency reasons. Needless to say, an anarchist system of socialised health care would differ in many ways to the current systems of universal health-care provided by the state.

Such a system of socialised health-care will be built from the bottom-up and based around the local commune. In a social anarchist society, “*medical services ... will be free of charge to all inhabitants of the commune. The doctors will not be like capitalists, trying to extract the greatest profit from their unfortunate patients. They will be employed by the commune and expected to treat all who need their services.*” Moreover, prevention will play an important part, as “*medical treatment is only the **curative** side of the science of health care; it is not enough to treat the sick, it is also necessary to prevent disease. That is the true function of hygiene.*” [James Guillaume, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 371]

How would an anarchist health service work? It would be based on self-management, of course, with close links to the local commune and federations of communes. Each hospital or health centre would be autonomous but linked in a federation with the others, allowing resources to be shared as and when required while allowing the health service to adjust to local needs and requirements as quickly as possible.

The Spanish Revolution indicates how an anarchist health service would operate. In rural areas local doctors would usually join the village collective and provided their services like any other worker. Where local doctors were not available, “*arrangements were made by the collectives for treatment of their members by hospitals in nearby localities. In a few cases, collectives themselves build hospitals; in many they acquired equipment and other things needed by their local physicians.*” For example, the Monzon comarcal (district) federation of collectives in Aragon established maintained a hospital in Binefar, the Casa de Salud Durruti. By April 1937 it had 40 beds, in sections which included general medicine, prophylaxis and gynaecology. It saw about 25 outpatients a day and was open to anyone in the 32 villages of the comarca. [Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 331 and pp. 366–7]

The socialisation of the health care took on a slightly different form in Catalonia but on the same libertarian principles. Gaston Leval provides us with an excellent summary:

*“The socialisation of health services was one of the greatest achievements of the revolution. To appreciate the efforts of our comrades it must be borne in mind that the rehabilitated the health service in all of Catalonia in so short a time after July 19<sup>th</sup>. The*

*revolution could count on the co-operation of a number of dedicated doctors whose ambition was not to accumulate wealth but to serve the afflicted and the underprivileged.*

*“The Health Workers’ Union was founded in September, 1936. In line with the tendency to unite all the different classifications, trades, and services serving a given industry, **all** health workers, from porters to doctors and administrators, were organised into one big union of health workers*

*[...]*

*“Our comrades laid the foundations of a new health service ... The new medical service embraced all of Catalonia. It constituted a great apparatus whose parts were distributed according to different needs, all in accord with an overall plan. Catalonia was divided into nine zones ... In turn, all the surrounding villages and towns were served from these centres.*

*“Distributed throughout Catalonia were twenty-seven towns with a total of thirty-six health centres conducting services so thoroughly that every village, every hamlet, every isolated peasant in the mountains, every woman, every child, anywhere, received adequate, up-to-date medical care. In each of the nine zones there was a central syndicate and a Control Committee located in Barcelona. Every department was autonomous within its own sphere. But this autonomy was not synonymous with isolation. The Central Committee in Barcelona, chosen by all the sections, met once a week with one delegate from each section to deal with common problems and to implement the general plan...*

*“The people immediately benefited from the projects of the health syndicate. The syndicate managed all hospitals and clinics. Six hospitals were opened in Barcelona... Eight new sanitariums were installed in converted luxurious homes ideally situated amidst mountains and pine forests. It was no easy task to convert these homes into efficient hospitals with all new facilities...” [quoted by Sam Dolgoff, **The Anarchist Collectives**, pp. 99–100]*

People were no longer required to pay for medical services. Each collective, if it could afford it, would pay a contribution to its health centre. Building and facilities were improved and modern equipment introduced. Like other self-managed industries, the health service was run at all levels by general assemblies of workers who elected delegates and hospital administration.

In the Levante, the CNT built upon its existing Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos de Levante (a health service institution founded by the union as a kind of mutual benefit society which had numerous doctors and specialists). During the revolution, the Mutua had 50 doctors and was available to all affiliated workers and their families.

Thus, all across Spain, the workers in the health service re-organised their industry in libertarian lines and in association with the local collective or commune and the unions of the CNT. As Gaston Leval summarises:

*“Everywhere that we were able to study the towns and little cities transformed by the revolution, the hospitals, the clinics, the polyclinics and other health establishments have been municipalised, enlarged, modernised, put under the safekeeping of the collectivity.*

*And where they didn't exist, they were improvised. The socialisation of medicine was a work for the benefit of all.*" [quoted by Robert Alexander, *Op. Cit.*, p. 677]

We can expect a similar process to occur in the future anarchist society. Workers in the health industry will organise their workplaces, federate together to share resources and information, to formulate plans and improve the quality of service to the public. The communes and their federations, the syndicates and federations of syndicates will provide resources and effectively own the health system, ensuring access for all.

Similar systems would operate in other public services. For example, in education we expect the members of communes to organise a system of free schools. This can be seen from the Spanish revolution. Indeed, the Spanish anarchists organised Modern Schools before the outbreak of the revolution, with 50 to 100 schools in various parts funded by local anarchist groups and CNT unions. During the revolution everywhere across Spain, syndicates, collectives and federations of collectives formed and founded schools. Indeed, education "*advanced at an unprecedented pace. Most of the partly or wholly socialised collectives and municipalities built at least one school. By 1938, for example, every collective in the Levant Federation had its own school.*" [Gaston Leval, quoted by Sam Dolgoff, *The Anarchist Collectives*, p. 168] These schools aimed, to quote the CNT's resolution on Libertarian Communism, to "*help mould men with minds of their own — and let it be clear that when we use the word 'men' we use it in the generic sense — to which end it will be necessary for the teacher to cultivate every one of the child's faculties so that the child may develop every one of its capacities to the full.*" [quoted by Jose Perriats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, p. 70] The principles of libertarian education, of encouraging freedom instead of authority in the school, was applied on vast scale (see section J.5.13 for more details on Modern Schools and libertarian education).

This educational revolution was not confined to collectives or children. For example, the Federación Regional de Campesinos de Levante formed institutes in each of its five provinces. The first was set up in October 1937 in an old convent with 100 students. The Federación also set up two "*universities*" in Valencia and Madrid which taught a wide variety of agricultural subjects and combined learning with practical experience in an experimental form attached to each university. The Aragon collectives formed a similar specialised school in Binefar. The CNT was heavily involved in transforming education in Catalonia. In addition, the local federation of the CNT in Barcelona established a school to train women workers to replace male ones being taken into the army. The school was run by the anarchist-feminist group the Mujeres Libres. [Robert Alexander, *Op. Cit.*, p. 406, p. 670 and pp. 665–8 and p. 670]

Ultimately, the public services that exist in a social anarchist society will be dependent on what members of that society desire. If, for example, a commune or federation of communes desires a system of communal health-care or schools then they will allocate resources to implement it. They will allocate the task of creating such a system to, say, a special commission based on volunteers from the interested parties such as the relevant syndicates, professional associations, consumer groups and so on. For example, for communal education a commission or working group would include delegates from the teachers union, from parent associations, from student unions and so on. The running of such a system would be based, like any other industry, on those who work in it. Functional self-management would be the rule, with doctors managing their work, nurses theirs and so on, while the general running of, say, a hospital would be based on a general assembly of all workers there who would elect and mandate delegates, the administration staff



and decide the policy the hospital would follow. Needless to say, other interested parties would have a say, including patients in the health system and students in the education system.

Thus, as would be expected, public services would be organised by the public, organised in their syndicates and communes. They would be based on workers' self-management of their daily work and of the system as a whole. Non-workers who took part in the system (patients, students) would not be ignored and would also place a role in providing essential feedback to assure quality control of services and to ensure that the service is responsive to users needs. The resources required to maintain and expand the system would be provided by the communes, syndicates and their federations. For the first time, public services would truly be public and not a statist system imposed upon the public from above.

Needless to say, any system of public services would not be imposed on those who did not desire it. They would be organised for and by members of the communes. Therefore, individuals who were not part of a local commune or syndicate would have to pay to gain access to the communal resources. However, it is unlikely that an anarchist society would be as barbaric as a capitalist one and refuse entry to cases who were ill and could not pay, nor turn away emergencies because they did not have enough money to pay. And just as other workers need not join a syndicate or commune, so doctors, teachers and so on could practice their trade outside the communal system as either individual artisans or as part of a co-operative. However, given the availability of free medical services it is doubtful they would grow rich doing so. Medicine, teaching and so on would revert back to what usually initially motivates people to take these up professions — the desire to help others and make a positive impact in peoples lives.

### **I.5.13 Won't an anarchist society be vulnerable to the power hungry?**

A common objection to anarchism is that an anarchist society will be vulnerable to be taken over by thugs or those who seek power. A similar argument is that a group without a leadership structure becomes open to charismatic leaders so anarchy would just lead to tyranny.

For anarchists, such arguments are strange. Society already is run by thugs and/or the offspring of thugs. Kings were originally just successful thugs who succeeded in imposing their domination over a given territorial area. The modern state has evolved from the structure created to impose this domination. Similarly with property, with most legal titles to land being traced back to its violent seizure by thugs who then passed it on to their children who then sold it or gave it to their offspring. The origins of the current system in violence can be seen by the continued use of violence by the state and capitalists to enforce and protect their domination over society. When push comes to shove, the dominant class will happily re-discover their thug past and employ extreme violence to maintain their privileges. The descent of large parts of Europe into Fascism during the 1930s, or Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973 indicates how far they will go. As Peter Arshinov argued (in a slightly different context):

*“Statists fear free people. They claim that without authority people will lose the anchor of sociability, will dissipate themselves, and will return to savagery. This is obviously rubbish. It is taken seriously by idlers, lovers of authority and of the labour of others, or by blind thinkers of bourgeois society. The liberation of the people in reality leads to the degeneration and return to savagery, not of the people, but of those who, thanks to power and privilege, live from the labour of the people's arms and from the blood of*

*the people's veins ... The liberation of the people leads to the savagery of those who live from its enslavement."* [The History of the Makhnovist Movement, p. 85]

Anarchists are not impressed with the argument that anarchy would be unable to stop thugs seizing power. It ignores the fact that we live in a society where the power-hungry already hold power. As an argument against anarchism it fails and is, in fact, an argument against capitalist and statist societies.

Moreover, it also ignores fact that people in an anarchist society would have gained their freedom by overthrowing every existing and would-be thug who had or desired power over others. They would have defended that freedom against those who desired to re-impose it. They would have organised themselves to manage their own affairs and, therefore, to abolish all hierarchical power. And we are to believe that these people, after struggling to become free, would quietly let a new set of thugs impose themselves? As Kropotkin argued:

*"The only way in which a state of Anarchy can be obtained is for each man [or woman] who is oppressed to act as if he [or she] were at liberty, in defiance of all authority to the contrary ... In practical fact, territorial extension is necessary to ensure permanency to any given individual revolution. In speaking of the Revolution, we signify the aggregate of so many successful individual and group revolts as will enable every person within the revolutionised territory to act in perfect freedom ... without having to constantly dread the prevention or the vengeance of an opposing power upholding the former system ... Under these circumstance it is obvious that any visible reprisal could and would be met by a resumption of the same revolutionary action on the part of the individuals or groups affected, and that the **maintenance** of a state of Anarchy in this manner would be far easier than the gaining of a state of Anarchy by the same methods and in the face of hitherto unshaken opposition ... They have it in their power to apply a prompt check by boycotting such a person and refusing to help him with their labour or to willing supply him with any articles in their possession. They have it in their power to use force against him. They have these powers individually as well as collectively. Being either past rebels who have been inspired with the spirit of liberty, or else habituated to enjoy freedom from their infancy, they are hardly to rest passive in view of what they feel to be wrong."* [Kropotkin, **Act for Yourselves**, pp. 87–8]

Thus a free society would use direct action to resist the would-be ruler just as it had used direct action to free itself from existing rulers. An anarchist society would be organised in a way which would facilitate this direct action as it would be based on networks of solidarity and mutual aid. An injury to one is an injury to all and a would-be ruler would face a whole liberated society acting against him or her. Faced with the direct action of the population (which would express itself in non-co-operation, strikes, demonstrations, occupations, insurrections and so on) a would be power seeker would find it difficult to impose themselves. Unlike those accustomed to rulership in existing society, an anarchist people would be a society of rebels and so difficult to dominate and conquer.

Anarchists point to the example of the rise of Fascism in Italy, Spain and Germany to prove their point. In areas with strong anarchist movements the fascists were resisted most strongly. While in Germany Hitler took power with little or no opposition, in Italy and Spain the fascists

had to fight long and hard to gain power. The anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist organisations fought the fascists tooth and nail, with some success before betrayal by the Republicans and Marxists. From this historical experience anarchists argue that an anarchist society would quickly and easily defeat would-be thugs as people would be used to practising direct action and self-management and would have no desire to stop practising them.

As for self-management resulting in “*charismatic*” leaders, well the logic is astounding. As if hierarchical structures are **not** based on leadership structures and do not require a charismatic leader! Such an argument is inherently self-contradictory – as well as ignoring the nature of modern society and its leadership structures. Rather than mass assemblies being dominated by leaders, it is the case that hierarchical structures are the natural breeding ground for dictators. All the great dictators the world have seen have come to the forefront in **hierarchical** organisations, **not** libertarian structured ones. Hitler, for example, did not come to power via a libertarian organisation. Rather he used a highly centralised and hierarchically organised party to take control of a centralised, hierarchical state. The very disempowerment of the population in capitalist society results in them looking to leaders to act for them and so “*charismatic*” leaders are a natural result. An anarchist society, by empowering all, would make it more difficult, not less, for a would-be leader to gain power – few people, if any, would be willing to sacrifice and negate themselves for the benefit of another.

As would be expected, given our comments above, anarchists think an anarchist society must defend itself against attempts to re-introduce the state or private property. The question of defence of an anarchist society is discussed in the next section and so we will not do so here.

Our discussion on the power hungry obviously relates to the more general the question of whether ethical behaviour be rewarded in an anarchist society. In other words, could an anarchist society be stable or would the unethical take over?

It is one of the most disturbing aspects of living in a world where the rush to acquire wealth is the single most important aspect of living is what happens to people who follow an ethical path in life.

Under capitalism, the ethical generally do not succeed as well as those stab their fellows in the back, those who cut corners, indulge in sharp business practises, drive competitors into the ground and live their lives with an eye on the bottom line but they do survive. Loyalty to a firm or a group, bending over backwards to provide a service, giving a helping hand to somebody in need, placing friendship above money, count for nothing when the bills come in. People who act ethically in a capitalist society are usually punished and penalised for their ethical, moral and principled behaviour. Indeed, the capitalist market rewards unethical behaviour as it generally reduces costs and so gives those who do it a competitive edge.

It is different in a free society. Anarchism is based on two principles of association, equal access to power and wealth. Everybody in an anarchist society irrespective of what they do, or who they are or what type of work they perform is entitled to share in society’s wealth. Whether a community survives or prospers depends on the combined efforts of the people in that community. Ethical behaviour would become the norm in an anarchist community; those people who act ethically would be rewarded by the standing they achieve in the community and by others being more than happy to work with and aid them. People who cut corners, try to exercise power over others, refuse to co-operate as equals or otherwise act in an unethical manner would lose their standing in an anarchist society. Their neighbours and work mates would refuse to co-operate with them (or reduce co-operation to a minimum) and take other forms of non-violent direct

action to point out that certain forms of activity was inappropriate. They would discuss the issue with the unethical person and try to convince them of the errors of their way. In a society where the necessities are guaranteed, people would tend to act ethically because ethical behaviour raises an individual's profile and standing within such a community. Capitalism and ethical behaviour are mutually exclusive concepts; anarchism encourages and rewards ethical behaviour.

Therefore, as can be seen, anarchists argue that a free society would not have to fear would-be thugs, “*charismatic*” leaders or the unethical. An anarchist society would be based on the co-operation of free individuals. It is unlikely that they would tolerate such behaviour and would use their own direct action as well as social and economic organisations to combat it. Moreover, the nature of free co-operation would reward ethical behaviour as those who practice it would have it reciprocated by their fellows.

One last point. Some people seem to think that anarchism is about the powerful being appealed to not to oppress and dominate others. Far from it. Anarchism is about the oppressed and exploited refusing to let others dominate them. It is **not** an appeal to the “*better side*” of the boss or would-be boss; it is about the solidarity and direct action of those subject to a boss **getting rid of the boss** — whether the boss agrees to it or not! Once this is clearly understood the idea that an anarchist society is vulnerable to the power-hungry is clearly nonsense — anarchy is based on resisting power and so is, by its very nature, more resistant to would-be rulers than a hierarchical one.

#### I.5.14 How could an anarchist society defend itself?

Anarchists are well aware that an anarchist society will have to defend itself from both inside and outside attempts to re-impose capitalism and the state. Indeed, every revolutionary anarchist has argued that a revolution will have to defend itself.

Unfortunately, Marxists have consistently misrepresented anarchist ideas on this subject. Lenin, for example, argued that the “*proletariat needs the state only temporarily. We do not at all disagree with the anarchists on the question of the abolition of the state as an aim. We maintain that, to achieve this aim, we must temporarily make use of the instruments, resources and methods of state power against the exploiters, just as the dictatorship of the oppressed class is temporarily necessary for the abolition of classes. Marx chooses the sharpest and clearest way of stating his position against the anarchists: after overthrowing the yoke of the capitalists, should workers ‘lay down their arms’ or use them against the capitalists in order to crush their resistance? But what is the systematic use of arms by one class against the other, if not a ‘transitory form’ of state.*” [“*The State and Revolution*”, **Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 316]

Fortunately, as Murray Bookchin points out, anarchists are “*not so naive as to believe anarchism could be established overnight. In imputing this notion to Bakunin, Marx and Engels wilfully distorted the Russian anarchist’s views. Nor did the anarchists ... believe that the abolition of the state involved ‘laying down arms’ immediately after the revolution...*” [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 213] Even a basic familiarity with the work of anarchist thinkers would make the reader aware that Bookchin is right. As we shall see, anarchists have consistently argued that a revolution and an anarchist society needs to be defended against those who would try and re-introduce hierarchy, domination, oppression and exploitation (even, as with Leninists, they call themselves “*socialists*”). As Malatesta argued in 1891:

*“Many suppose that ... anarchists, in the name of their principles, would wish to see that strange liberty respected which violates and destroys the freedom and life of others. They seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas!” [Anarchy, p. 41]*

Anarchists reject the idea that defending a revolution, or even the act of revolution itself, represents or requires a “state.” As Malatesta argued, the state “means the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few.” [Op. Cit., p. 40] Luigi Fabbri stresses this when he argued that, for anarchists, “the essence of the state ... [is] centralised power **or to put it another way the coercive authority** of which the state enjoys the monopoly, in that organisation of violence known as ‘government’; in the hierarchical despotism, juridical, police and military despotism that imposes laws on everyone.” [“Anarchy and ‘Scientific’ Communism”, in *The Poverty of Statism*, pp. 13–49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), pp. 24–5] Therefore the state is the delegation of power, the centralisation of authority into the hands of a few at the top of society rather than a means of defending a revolution against the expropriated ruling class. To confuse the defence of a revolution and the state is, therefore, a great mistake as it introduces an inequality of power into a so-called socialist society. In the words of Voline:

*“All political power inevitably creates a privileged situation for the men who exercise it. Thus it violates, from the beginning, the equalitarian principle and strikes at the heart of the Social Revolution ... [and] becomes the source of other privileges ... **power is compelled to create a bureaucratic and coercive apparatus** indispensable to all authority ... **Thus it forms a new privileged caste**, at first politically and later economically... It sows everywhere the seed of inequality and soon infects the whole social organism ... It **predisposes the masses to passivity**, and all spirit and initiative is stifled by the very existence of power, in the extent to which it is exercised.” [The Unknown Revolution, p. 249]*

Unsurprisingly, anarchists think a revolution should defend itself in the same way that it organises itself — from the bottom up, in a self-managed way. The means to defend an anarchist society or revolution are based around the organs of self-management that revolution creates. In the words of Bakunin:

*“[T]he federative Alliance of all working men’s associations ... constitute the Commune ... Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Communal Council composed of one or two delegates from each barricade ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates ... all provinces, communes and associations ... **reorganising** on revolutionary lines ... [would] send ... their representatives to an agreed meeting place ... vested with similar mandates to constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [which would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction ... it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution...*

*“Since revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised in a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation... “ [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 170–2]*

Thus we have a dual framework of revolution. On the one hand, the federation of workers’ councils based on self-managed assemblies nominating mandated and accountable delegates. On the other, we have a federation of barricades, again based on self-management and mandated delegates, which actually defends the revolution against reaction. The success of the revolution depends on spreading it and organising joint self-defence. He stressed the importance of co-ordinating defence two years later, in 1870:

*“[L]et us suppose ... it is Paris that starts [the revolution] ... Paris will naturally make haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour, every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers**, the federative commune... All the French and foreign revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise the necessary common services ... and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution, together with propaganda, the weapon of revolution, and practical revolutionary solidarity with friends in all countries against enemies in all countries.” [Op. Cit., p. 178–9]*

As can be seen, the revolution not only abolishes the state by a free federation of workers associations, it also expropriates capital and ends wage labour. Thus the *“political revolution is transformed into social revolution.”* [Op. Cit., p. 171] Which, we must add, destroys another Marxist myth that claims that anarchists think, to quote Engels, that *“the state is the chief evil, [and] it is above all the state which must be done away with and then capitalism will go to blazes,”* in other words, the *“abolition of the state”* comes before the *“social revolution.”* [Marx and Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader* p. 728] As can be clearly seen, anarchists consider the social revolution to be, **at the same time**, the abolition of the state **along with** the abolition of capitalism.

Therefore, Bakunin was well aware of the needs to defend a revolution after destroying the state and abolishing capitalism. It is clear that after a successful rising, the revolutionary population does **not** *“lay down their arms”* but rather organises itself in a federal to co-ordinate defence against reactionary areas which seek to destroy it.

Nor was Bakunin alone in this analysis. For example, we discover Errico Malatesta arguing that during a revolution we should *“[a]rm all the population.”* The revolution would have *“armed the people so that it can resist any armed attempt by reaction to re-establish itself.”* This revolution would involve *“creation of a voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution.”* Like Bakunin, Malatesta stresses the importance of co-ordinating activity via free federations of workers’ associations — *“the development of the revolution would be the task of volunteers, by all kinds of committees, local, intercommunal, regional and national congresses which would attend to the co-ordination of social activity,”* the *“[o]rganisation of social life by means of free association and*

*federations of producers and consumers, created and modified according to the wishes of their members,” and so be “under the direct control of the people.” Again, like Bakunin, the revolution would abolish state and capital, and “the workers ... [should] take possession of the factories ... federate among themselves ... the peasants should take over the land and the produce usurped by the landlords.” Ultimately, the “most powerful means for defending the revolution remains always that of taking away from the bourgeois the economic means on which their power rests, and of arming everybody (until such time as one will have managed to persuade everybody to throw away their arms as useless and dangerous toys), and of interesting the mass of the population in the victory of the revolution.” [Life and Ideas, p. 170, p. 165, p. 166, pp. 165–6, p. 184, p. 175, p. 165 and p. 173]*

Malatesta stresses that a government is not required to defend a revolution:

*“But, by all means, let us admit that the governments of the still unemancipated countries were to want to, and could, attempt to reduce free people to a state of slavery once again. Would this people require a government to defend itself? To wage war men are needed who have all the necessary geographical and mechanical knowledge, and above all large masses of the population willing to go and fight. A government can neither increase the abilities of the former nor the will and courage of the latter. And the experience of history teaches us that a people who really want to defend their own country are invincible: and in Italy everyone knows that before the corps of volunteers (anarchist formations) thrones topple, and regular armies composed of conscripts or mercenaries disappear.” [Anarchy, pp. 40–1]*

The Spanish anarchist D. A. Santillan argued that the “local Council of Economy will assume the mission of defence and raise voluntary corps for guard duty and if need be, for combat” in the “cases of emergency or danger of a counter-revolution.” These Local Councils would be a federation of workplace councils and would be members of the Regional Council of the Economy which, like the Local Council, would be “constitute[d] by delegations or through assemblies.” [After the Revolution, p. 80 and pp. 82–83] Yet again we see the defence of the revolution based on the federation of workers’ councils and so directly controlled by the revolutionary population.

Lastly, we turn to the Spanish CNT’s 1936 resolution on Libertarian Communism. In this document is a section entitled “Defence of the Revolution” which argues:

*“We acknowledge the necessity to defend the advances made through the revolution ... So ... the necessary steps will be taken to defend the new regime, whether against the perils of a foreign capitalist invasion ... or against counter-revolution at home. It must be remembered that a standing army constitutes the greatest danger for the revolution, since its influence could lead to dictatorship, which would necessarily kill off the revolution...*

*“The people armed will be the best assurance against any attempt to restore the system destroyed from either within or without...*

*“Let each Commune have its weapons and means of defence ... the people will mobilise rapidly to stand up to the enemy, returning to their workplaces as soon as they may have accomplished their mission of defence...*

*“1. The disarming of capitalism implies the surrender of weaponry to the communes which be responsible for ensuring defensive means are effectively organised nationwide.*

*“2. In the international context, we shall have to mount an intensive propaganda drive among the proletariat of every country so that it may take an energetic protest, calling for sympathetic action against any attempted invasion by its respective government. At the same time, our Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes will render material and moral assistance to all the world’s exploited so that these may free themselves forever from the monstrous control of capitalism and the State.”* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 110]

Therefore, an anarchist society defends itself in a non-statist fashion. Defence is organised in a libertarian manner, based on federations of free communes and workers’ councils and incorporating self-managed workers’ militias. This was exactly what the CNT-FAI did in 1936 to resist Franco’s fascists. The militia bodies that were actually formed by the CNT in the revolution were internally self-governing, not hierarchical. Each militia column was administered by its own “*war committee*,” made up of elected delegates, which in turn sent delegates to co-ordinate action on a specific front. Similarly, the Makhnovists during the Russian Revolution also organised in a democratic manner, subject to the decisions of the local workers’ councils and their congresses.

Thus Anarchist theory and practice indicate that defence of a revolution need not involve a hierarchical system like the Bolshevik Red Army where the election of officers, soldiers’ councils and self-governing assemblies were abolished by Trotsky in favour of officers appointed from above (see Trotsky’s article **The Path of the Red Army** in which he freely admits to abolishing the soldiers “*organs of revolutionary self-government*” the Soviets of Soldiers’ Deputies as well as “*the system of election*” of commanders by the soldiers themselves in favour of a Red Army “*built from above*” with appointed commanders).

As can be seen, the only armed force for the defence of the an anarchist society would be the voluntary, self-managed militia bodies organised by the free communes and federations of workers’ associations. The militias would be unified and co-ordinated by federations of communes while delegates from each militia unit would co-ordinate the actual fighting. In times of peace the militia members would be living and working among the rest of the populace, and, thus, they would tend to have the same outlook and interests as their fellow workers.

Instead of organising a new state, based on top-down command and hierarchical power, anarchists argue that a revolutionary people can build and co-ordinate a militia of their own and control the defence of their revolution directly and democratically, through their own organisations (such as unions, councils of delegates elected from the shop floor and community, and so on). Where they have had the chance, anarchists have done so, with remarkable success. Therefore, an anarchist society can be defended against attempts to re-impose hierarchy and bosses (old or new).

For more discussion of this issue, see section J.7.6 (“*How could an anarchist revolution defend itself?*”)



## I.6 What about the “*Tragedy of the Commons*”? Surely communal ownership will lead to overuse and environmental destruction?

It should first be noted that the paradox of the “*Tragedy of the Commons*” is actually an application of the “*tragedy of the free-for-all*” to the issue of the “*commons*” (communally owned land). Resources that are “*free for all*” have all the problems associated with what is called the “*Tragedy of the Commons*,” namely the overuse and destruction of such resources; but unfortunately for the capitalists who refer to such examples, they do not involve true “*commons*.”

The “*free-for-all*” land in such examples becomes depleted (the “*tragedy*”) because hypothetical shepherds each pursue their maximum individual gain without regard for their peers or the land. What is individually rational (e.g., grazing the most sheep for profit), when multiplied by each shepherd acting in isolation, ends up grossly irrational (e.g., ending the livelihood of every shepherd). What works for one cannot work as well for everyone in a given area. But, as discussed below, because such land is not communally **managed** (as true commons are), the so-called Tragedy of the Commons is actually an indictment of what is, essentially, laissez-faire capitalist economic practices!

As Allan Engler points out, “[s]upporters of capitalism cite what they call the tragedy of the commons to explain the wanton plundering of forests, fish and waterways, but common property is not the problem. When property was held in common by tribes, clans and villages, people took no more than their share and respected the rights of others. They cared for common property and when necessary acted together to protect it against those who would damage it. Under capitalism, there is no common property. (Public property is a form of private property, property owned by the government as a corporate person.) Capitalism recognises only private property and free-for-all property. Nobody is responsible for free-for-all property until someone claims it as his own. He then has a right to do as he pleases with it, a right that is uniquely capitalist. Unlike common or personal property, capitalist property is not valued for itself or for its utility. It is valued for the revenue it produces for its owner. If the capitalist owner can maximise his revenue by liquidating it, he has the right to do that.” [Apostles of Greed, pp. 58–59]

Therefore, as Colin Ward argues, “[l]ocal, popular, control is the surest way of avoiding the tragedy of the commons.” [Reflected in Water, p. 20] Given that a social anarchist society is a communal, decentralised one, it will have little to fear from irrational overuse or abuse of communally owned and used resources.

So, the **real** problem is that a lot of economists and sociologists conflate this scenario, in which **unmanaged** resources are free for all, with the situation that prevailed in the use of “*commons*,” which were communally **managed** resources in village and tribal communities. E.P. Thompson, for example, notes that Garret Hardin (who coined the phrase “*Tragedy of the Commons*”) was “*historically uninformed*” when he assumed that commons were “*pastures open to all. It is expected*

*that each herdsman will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons.*” [“*Custom, Law and Common Right*”, **Customs in Common**, p. 108f] The commons, in fact, were managed by common agreements between those who used them. Similarly, those who argue that the experience of the Soviet Union and Eastern Block shows that “*common*” property leads to pollution and destruction of the resources also show a lack of awareness of what common property actually is (it is no co-incidence that libertarian capitalists use such an argument). This is because the resources in question were **not** owned or managed in common — the fact that these countries were dictatorships excludes popular control of resources. Thus the Soviet Union does not, in fact, show the dangers of having “*commons*.” Rather it shows the danger of not subjecting those who control a resource to public control (and it is no co-incidence that the USA is far more polluted than Western Europe — in the USA, like in the USSR, the controllers of resources are not subject to popular control and so pass pollution on to the public). The Eastern block shows the danger of state owned resource use rather than commonly owned resource use, particularly when the state in question is not under even the limited control of its subjects implied in representative democracy.

This confusion has, of course, been used to justify the stealing of communal property by the rich and the state. The continued acceptance of this “confusion” in political debate is due to the utility of the theory for the rich and powerful, who have a vested interest in undermining pre-capitalist social forms and stealing communal resources. Therefore, most examples used to justify the “*tragedy of the commons*” are **false** examples, based on situations in which the underlying social context is radically different from that involved in using true commons.

In reality, the “*tragedy of the commons*” comes about only after wealth and private property, backed by the state, starts to eat into and destroy communal life. This is well indicated by the fact that commons existed for thousands of years and only disappeared after the rise of capitalism — and the powerful central state it requires — had eroded communal values and traditions. Without the influence of wealth concentrations and the state, people get together and come to agreements over how to use communal resources, and have been doing so for millennia. That was how the commons were managed, so “*the tragedy of the commons*” would be better called the “*tragedy of private property*.” Gerrard Winstanley, the Digger (and proto-anarchist), was only expressing a widespread popular sentiment when he complained that “*in Parishes where Commons lie the rich Norman Freeholders, or the new (more covetous) Gentry overstock the Commons with sheep and cattle, so that the inferior Tenants and poor labourers can hardly keep a cow but half starve her*.” [quoted by Maurice Dobb, **Studies in the Development of Capitalism**, p. 173] Colin Ward points to a more recent example, that of Spain after the victory of Franco:

*“The water history of Spain demonstrates that the tragedy of the commons is not the one identified by Garrett Hardin. Communal control developed an elaborate and sophisticated system of fair shares for all. The private property recommended by Hardin resulted in the selfish individualism that he thought was inevitable with common access, or in the lofty indifference of the big landowners.”* [Colin Ward, **Op. Cit.**, p. 27]

As E.P. Thompson notes in an extensive investigation on this subject, the tragedy “*argument [is] that since resources held in common are not owned and protected by anyone, there is an inexorable economic logic that dooms them to over-exploitation... Despite its common sense air, what it overlooks is that commoners themselves were not without common sense. Over time and over space*

*the users of commons have developed a rich variety of institutions and community sanctions which have effected restraints and stints upon use... As the old ... institutions lapsed, so they fed into a vacuum in which political influence, market forces, and popular assertion contested with each other without common rules.” [Op. Cit., p. 107]*

In practice, of course, both political influence and market forces are dominated by wealth — *“There were two occasions that dictated absolute precision: a trial at law and a process of enclosure. And both occasions favoured those with power and purses against the little users.”* Popular assertion means little when the state enforces property rights in the interests of the wealthy. Ultimately, *“Parliament and law imposed capitalist definitions to exclusive property in land.”* [E.P. Thompson, Op. Cit., p. 134 and p. 163]

The working class is only *“left alone”* to starve. In practice, the privatisation of communal land has led to massive ecological destruction, while the possibilities of free discussion and agreement are destroyed in the name of *“absolute”* property rights and the power and authority which goes with them.

For more on this subject, try **The Question of the Commons**, Bonnie M. McCoy and James M. Acheson (ed.), Tucson, 1987 and **The Evolution of Co-operation** by Robert Axelrod, Basic Books, 1984.

### **I.6.1 How can anarchists explain how the use of property *“owned by everyone in the world”* will be decided?**

First, we need to point out the fallacy normally lying behind this objection. It is assumed that because everyone owns something, that everyone has to be consulted in what it is used for. This, however, applies the logic of private property to non-capitalist social forms. While it is true that everyone owns collective *“property”* in an anarchist society, it does not mean that everyone *uses* it. Carlo Cafiero, one of the founders of communist-anarchism, states the obvious:

*“The common wealth being scattered right across the planet, while belonging by right to the whole of humanity, those who happen to be within reach of that wealth and in a position to make use of it will utilise it in common. The folk from a given country will use the land, the machines, the workshops, the houses, etc., of that country and they will all make common use of them. As part of humanity, they will exercise here, in fact and directly, their rights over a portion of mankind’s wealth. But should an inhabitant of Peking visit this country, he [or she] would enjoy the same rights as the rest: in common with the others, he would enjoy all the wealth of the country, just as he [or she] would have in Peking.”* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 250]

Anarchists, therefore, think that those who *use* a part of society’s wealth have the most say in what happens to it (e.g. workers control the means of production they use and the work they do when using it). This does not mean that those using it can do what they like to it. Users would be subject to recall by local communities if they are abusing their position (for example, if a workplace was polluting the environment, then the local community could act to stop, or if need be, close down the workplace). Thus use rights (or usufruct) replace property rights in a free society, combined with a strong dose of *“think globally, act locally.”*

It is no coincidence that societies that are stateless are also without private property. As Murray Bookchin points out “*an individual appropriation of goods, a personal claim to tools, land, and other resources ... is fairly common in organic [i.e. aboriginal] societies... By the same token, co-operative work and the sharing of resources on a scale that could be called communistic is also fairly common... But primary to both of these seemingly contrasting relationships is the practice of usufruct.*” [The Ecology of Freedom, p. 50]

Such stateless societies are based upon “*the principle of usufruct, the freedom of individuals in a community to appropriate resources merely by the virtue of the fact they are using them... Such resources belong to the user as long as they are being used. Function, in effect, replaces our hallowed concept of possession.*” [Bookchin, Op. Cit., p. 50] The future stateless society anarchists hope for would also be based upon such a principle. In effect, critics of social anarchism confuse property with possession and think that abolishing property automatically abolishes possession and use rights. However, as argued in section B.3, property and possession are distinctly different. In the words of Charlotte Wilson:

*“Property is the domination of an individual, or a coalition of individuals, over things; it is not the claim of any person or persons to the use of things — this is usufruct [or possession], a very different matter. Property means the monopoly of wealth, the right to prevent others using it, whether the owner needs it or not. Usufruct implies the claim to the use of such wealth as supplies the user’s needs. If any individual shuts off a portion of it (which he is not using, and does not need for his own use) from his fellows, he is defrauding the whole community.”* [Three Essays on Anarchism, p. 17]

Thus an anarchist society has a simple and effective means of deciding how communally owned resources are used, one based on possession and usufruct.

As for deciding what a given area of commons is used for, that falls to the local communities who live next to them. If, for example, a local self-managed factory wants to expand and eat into the commons, then the local community who uses (and so controls) the local commons would discuss it and come to an agreement concerning it. If a minority **really** objects, they can use direct action to put their point across. But anarchists argue that rational debate among equals will not result in too much of that. Or suppose an individual wanted to set up an allotment in a given area, which had not been allocated as a park. Then he or she would notify the community assembly by appropriate means (e.g. on a notice board or newspaper), and if no one objected at the next assembly or in a set time-span, the allotment would go ahead, as no one else desired to use the resource in question.

Other communities would be confederated with this one, and joint activity would also be discussed by debate, with a community (like an individual) being free **not** to associate if they so desire. Other communities could and would object to ecologically and individually destructive practices. The interrelationships of both ecosystems and freedom is well known, and its doubtful that free individuals would sit back and let some amongst them destroy **their** planet.

Therefore, those who use something control it. This means that “*users groups*” would be created to manage resources used by more than one person. For workplaces this would (essentially) be those who worked there (with, possibly, the input of consumer groups and co-operatives). Housing associations made up of tenants would manage housing and repairs. Resources that are used by associations within society, such as communally owned schools, workshops, computer

networks, and so forth, would be managed on a day-to-day basis by those who use them. User groups would decide access rules (for example, time-tables and booking rules) and how they are used, making repairs and improvements. Such groups would be accountable to their local community. Hence, if that community thought that any activities by a group within it was destroying communal resources or restricting access to them, the matter would be discussed at the relevant assembly. In this way, interested parties manage their own activities and the resources they use (and so would be very likely to have an interest in ensuring their proper and effective use), but without private property and its resulting hierarchies and restrictions on freedom.

Lastly, let us examine clashes of use rights, i.e. cases where two or more people or communities/collectives desire to use the same resource. In general, such problems can be resolved by discussion and decision making by those involved. This process would be roughly as follows: if the contesting parties are reasonable, they would probably mutually agree to allow their dispute to be settled by some mutual friend whose judgement they could trust, or they would place it in the hands of a jury, randomly selected from the community or communities in question. This would take place if they could not come to an agreement between themselves to share the resource in question.

One thing is certain, however, such disputes are much better settled without the interference of authority or the re-creation of private property. If those involved do not take the sane course described above and instead decide to set up a fixed authority, disaster will be the inevitable result. In the first place, this authority will have to be given power to enforce its judgement in such matters. If this happens, the new authority will undoubtedly keep for itself the best of what is disputed, and allot the rest to its friends! By re-introducing private property, such authoritarian bodies would develop sooner, rather than later, with two new classes of oppressors being created – the property owners and the enforcers of “*justice*.”

It is a strange fallacy to suppose that two people who meet on terms of equality and disagree could not be reasonable or just, or that a third party with power backed up by violence will be the incarnation of justice itself. Common sense should certainly warn us against such an illusion. Historical “*counterexamples*” to the claim that people meeting on terms of equality cannot be reasonable or just are suspect, since the history of disagreements with unjust or unreasonable outcomes (e.g. resulting in war) generally involve conflicts between groups with unequal power and within the context of private property and hierarchical institutions.

And, we should note, it is equally as fallacious, as Leninists claim, that only centralisation can ensure common access and common use. Centralisation, by removing control from the users into a body claiming to represent “*society*”, replaces the dangers of abuse by a group of workers with the dangers of abuse by a bureaucracy invested with power and authority over **all** workers. If rank and file workers can abuse their position and restrict access for their own benefit, so can the individuals gathered round a centralised body (whether that body is, in theory, accountable by election or not). Indeed, it is far more likely to occur. Thus **decentralisation** is the key to common ownership and access, **not** centralisation.

Communal “*property*” needs communal structures in order to function. Use rights, and discussion among equals, replace property rights in a free society. Freedom cannot survive if it is caged behind laws enforced by public or private states.

## I.6.2 Doesn't any form of communal ownership involve restricting individual liberty?

This point is expressed in many different forms. John Henry MacKay (an individualist anarchist) puts the point as follows:

*“Would you [the social anarchist], in the system of society which you call ‘free Communism’ prevent individuals from exchanging their labour among themselves by means of their own medium of exchange? And further: Would you prevent them from occupying land for the purpose of personal use?” ... [The] question was not to be escaped. If he answered ‘Yes!’ he admitted that society had the right of control over the individual and threw overboard the autonomy of the individual which he had always zealously defended; if on the other hand he answered ‘No!’ he admitted the right of private property which he had just denied so emphatically.” [Patterns of Anarchy, p. 31]*

However, as is clearly explained above and in sections B.3 and I.5.7, anarchist theory has a simple and clear answer to this question. To see what this answer is it simply a case of remembering that use rights replace property rights in an anarchist society. In other words, individuals can exchange their labour as they see fit and occupy land for their own use. This in no way contradicts the abolition of private property, because occupancy and use is directly opposed to private property. Therefore, in a free communist society individuals can use land and such tools and equipment as they personally “*use and occupancy*” as they wish — they do not have to join the free communist society. If they do not, however, they cannot place claims on the benefits others receive from co-operation and their communal life.

This can be seen from Charlotte Wilson’s discussions on anarchism written a few years before MacKay published his “*inescapable*” question. Wilson argues that anarchism “*proposes ... [t]hat usufruct of instruments of production — land included — should be free to all workers, or groups of workers*” and that “*the necessary connections between the various industries ... should be managed on the ... voluntary principle.*” She asks the question: “*Does Anarchism ... then ... acknowledge ... no personal property?*” She answers by noting that “*every man [or woman] is free to take what he [or she] requires*” and so “*it is hardly conceivable that personal necessities and conveniences will not be appropriated.*” For “*[w]hen property is protected by no legal enactments, backed by armed force, and is unable to buy personal service, its resuscitation on such a scale as to be dangerous to society is little to be dreaded. The amount appropriated by each individual ... must be left to his [or her] own conscience, and the pressure exercised upon him [or her] by the moral sense and distinct interests of his [or her] neighbours.*” This is because:

*“Property is the domination of an individual, or a coalition of individuals, over things; it is not the claim of any person or persons to the use of things — this is, usufruct, a very different matter. Property means the monopoly of wealth, the right to prevent others using it, whether the owner needs it or not. Usufruct implies the claim to the use of such wealth as supplies the users needs. If any individual shuts off a portion of it (which he is not using, and does not need for his own use) from his fellows, he is defrauding the whole community.” [Anarchist Essays, pp. 22–23 and p. 40]*

In other words, **possession** replaces private property in a free society. This applies to those who decide to join a free communist society and those who desire to remain outside. This is clear from Kropotkin's argument that an communist-anarchist revolution would leave self-employed artisans and peasants alone if they did not desire to join the free commune (see **Act for Yourselves**, pp. 104–5 and **The Conquest of Bread**, p. 61 and pp. 95–6). Thus the leading theorist of free communism did not think the occupying of land for personal use (or a house or the means of production) entailed the "*right of private property*." Obviously John Henry MacKay had not read his Proudhon!

This can be seen even clearer when Kropotkin argued that "[a]ll things belong to all, and provided that men and women contribute their share of labour for the production of necessary objects, they are entitled to their share of all that is produced by the community at large." [**The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution**, p. 6] He goes on to state that "*free Communism ... places the products reaped or manufactured in common at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he [or she] pleases in his [or her] own home.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 7] This obviously implies a situation of "*occupancy and use*" (with those who are actually using a resource controlling it).

This clearly means, as the biographers of Kropotkin noted, that an Individualist Anarchist like Tucker (or MacKay) "*partly misinterprets*" Kropotkin when he "*suggests that [Kropotkin's] idea of communal organisation would prevent the individual from working on his [or her] own if he wished (a fact which Kropotkin always explicitly denied, since the basis of his theory was the voluntary principle).*" [G. Woodcock and I. Avakumovic, **The Anarchist Prince**, p. 280]

Thus the case of the non-member of free communism is clear — they would also consume what they have produced or exchanged with others in their own home (i.e. land used for their own "*personal use*"). The land and resources do **not**, however, become private property simply because they revert back into common ownership once they are no longer "*occupied and used.*" In other words, **possession** replaces **property**. Thus communist-anarchists agree with Individualist Anarchist John Beverley Robinson when he wrote:

*"There are two kinds of land ownership, proprietorship or property, by which the owner is absolute lord of the land to use it or hold it out of use, as it may please him; and possession, by which he is secure in the tenure of land which he uses and occupies, but has no claim on it at all if he ceases to use it. For the secure possession of his crops or buildings or other products, he needs nothing but the possession of the land he uses."*  
[**Patterns of Anarchy**, p. 273]

This system, we must note, was used in the rural collectives during the Spanish Revolution, with people free to remain outside the collective working only as much land and equipment as they could "*occupy and use*" by their own labour. Similarly, the individuals within the collective worked in common and took what they needed from the communal stores. See Gaston Leval's **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution** for details (and section I.8).

Mackay's comments raise another interesting point. Given that Individualist Anarchists oppose the current system of private property in land, **their** system entails that "*society ha[s] the right of control over the individual.*" If we look at the "*occupancy and use*" land system favoured by the likes of Tucker, we discover that it is based on restricting property in land (and so the owners of land). Tucker argued that if "*the Anarchistic view*" of "*occupancy and use*" would prevail then any defence associations would not protect anyone in the possession of more than they could personally use, nor would they force tenants to pay rent to landlords of housing. [**The Individualist**

Anarchists, pp. 159–62] Thus the “*prevailing view*”, i.e. society, would limit the amount of land which individuals could acquire, controlling their actions and violating their autonomy. Which, we must say, is not surprising as individualism requires the supremacy of the rest of society over the individual in terms of rules relating to the ownership and use of possessions (or “*property*”) — as the Individualist Anarchists themselves implicitly acknowledge, as can be seen.

John Henry MacKay goes on to state that “*every serious man must declare himself: for Socialism, and thereby for force and against liberty, or for Anarchism, and thereby for liberty and against force.*” [Op. Cit., p. 32] Which, we must note, is a strange statement, as individualist anarchists like Benjamin Tucker considered themselves socialists and opposed capitalist private property (while, confusingly, many of them calling their system of possession “*property*” — see section G.2.2).

However, MacKay’s statement begs the question, does private property support liberty? He does not address or even acknowledge the fact that private property will inevitably lead to the owners of such property gaining control over the individuals who use, but do not own, that property and so denying them liberty (see section B.4). As Proudhon argued:

*“The purchaser draws boundaries, fences himself in, and says, ‘This is mine; each one by himself, each one for himself.’ Here, then, is a piece of land upon which, henceforth, no one has right to step, save the proprietor and his friends; which can benefit nobody, save the proprietor and his servants. Let these multiply, and soon the people ... will have nowhere to rest, no place of shelter, no ground to till. They will die of hunger at the proprietor’s door, on the edge of that property which was their birth-right; and the proprietor, watching them die, will exclaim, ‘So perish idlers and vagrants.’”* [What is Property?, p. 118]

Of course, the non-owner can gain access to the property by selling their liberty to the property-owner, by agreeing to submit to the owners authority. Little wonder that Proudhon argued that the “*second effect of property is despotism.*” [Op. Cit., p. 259] Moreover, given that Tucker argued that the state was “*the assumption of sole authority over a given area and all within it*” we can see that MacKay’s argument ignores the negative aspects of property and its similarity with the state [The Individualist Anarchists, p. 24]. After all, MacKay would be the first to argue that the property owner must be sovereign of their property (and not subject to any form of control). In other words, the property owner must assume sole authority over the given area they own and all within it. Little wonder Emile Pouget, echoing Proudhon, argued that:

*“Property and authority are merely differing manifestations and expressions of one and the same ‘principle’ which boils down to the enforcement and enshrinement of the servitude of man. Consequently, the only difference between them is one of vantage point: viewed from one angle, slavery appears as a **property crime**, whereas, viewed from a different angle, it constitutes an **authority crime.**”* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, p. 66]

Neither does MacKay address the fact that private property requires extensive force (i.e. a state) to protect it against those who use it or could use it but do not own it.

In other words, MacKay ignores two important aspects of private property. Firstly, that private property is based upon force, which must be used to ensure the owner’s right to exclude others



(the main reason for the existence of the state). And secondly, he ignores the anti-libertarian nature of “*property*” when it creates wage labour – the other side of “*private property*” – in which the liberty of employees is obviously restricted by the owners whose property they are hired to use. Unlike in a free communist society, in which members of a commune have equal rights, power and say within a self-managed association, under “*private property*” the owner of the property governs those who use it. When the owner and the user is identical, this is not a problem (i.e. when possession replaces property) but once possession becomes property then despotism, as Proudhon noted, is created.

Therefore, it seems that in the name of “*liberty*” John MacKay and a host of other “*individualists*” end up supporting authority and (effectively) some kind of state. This is hardly surprising as private property is the opposite of personal possession, not its base.

Therefore, far from communal property restricting individual liberty (or even personal use of resources) it is in fact its only defence.

## I.7 Won't Libertarian Socialism destroy individuality?

No. Libertarian socialism only suppresses individuality for those who are so shallow that they can't separate their identity from what they own. However, be that as it may, this is an important objection to any form of socialism and, given the example of "socialist" Russia, needs to be discussed more.

The basic assumption behind this question is that capitalism encourages individuality, but this assumption can be faulted on many levels. As Kropotkin noted, "*individual freedom [has] remained, both in theory and in practice, more illusory than real*" [Ethics, p. 27] and that "*the want of development of the personality [leading to herd-psychology] and the lack of individual creative power and initiative are certainly one of the chief defects of our time.*" [Op. Cit., p. 28] In effect, modern capitalism has reduced individuality to a parody of what it could be (see section I.7.4). As Alfie Kohn points out, "*our miserable individuality is screwed to the back of our cars in the form of personalised license plates.*" Little wonder Emma Goldman argued that:

*"The oft repeated slogan of our time is ... that ours is an era of individualism ... Only those who do probe beneath the surface might be led to entertain this view. Have not the few accumulated the wealth of the world? Are they not the masters, the absolute kings of the situation? Their success, however, is due not to individualism, but the inertia, the cravenness, the utter submission of the mass. The latter wants but to be dominated, to be led, to be coerced. As to individualism, at no time in human history did it have less chance of expression, less opportunity to assert itself in a normal, healthy manner."* [Anarchism and Other Essays, pp. 70–1]

So we see a system which is apparently based on "egoism" and "individualism" but whose members are free to expand as standardised individuals, who hardly express their individuality at all. Far from increasing individuality, capitalism standardises it and so restricts it — that it survives at all is more an expression of the strength of humanity than any benefits of the capitalist system. This impoverishment of individuality is hardly surprising in a society based on hierarchical institutions which are designed to assure obedience and subordination.

So, can we say that libertarian socialism will **increase** individuality or is this conformity and lack of "*individualism*" a constant feature of the human race? In order to make some sort of statement on this, we have to look at non-hierarchical societies and organisations. We will discuss tribal cultures as an example of non-hierarchical societies in section I.7.1. Here, however, we indicate how anarchist organisations will protect and increase an individual's sense of self.

Anarchist organisations and tactics are designed to promote individuality. They are decentralised, participatory organisations and so they give those involved the "*social space*" required to express themselves and develop their abilities and potential in ways restricted under capitalism. As Gaston Leval notes in his book on the anarchist collectives during the Spanish Revolution,

*“so far as collective life is concerned, the freedom of each is the right to participate spontaneously with one’s thought, one’s will, one’s initiative to the full extent of one’s capacities. A negative liberty is not liberty; it is nothingness.”* [Collectives in the Spanish Revolution, p. 346]

By being able to take part in and manage the decision making processes which directly affect you, your ability to think for yourself is increased and so you are constantly developing your abilities and personality. The spontaneous activity described by Leval has important psychological impacts. As Eric Fromm notes, *“[i]n all spontaneous activity, the individual embraces the world. Not only does his [sic] individual self remain intact; it becomes stronger and more solidified. For the self is as strong as it is active.”* [Escape from Freedom, p. 225]

Therefore, individuality does not atrophy within an anarchist organisation and becomes stronger as it participates and acts within the social organisation. In other words, individuality requires community. As Max Horkheimer once observed, *“individuality is impaired when each man decides to fend for himself... The absolutely isolated individual has always been an illusion. The most esteemed personal qualities, such as independence, will to freedom, sympathy, and the sense of justice, are social as well as individual virtues. The fully developed individual is the consummation of a fully developed society.”* [The Eclipse of Reason, p. 135]

The sovereign, self-sufficient individual is as much a product of a healthy community as it is from individual self-realisation and the fulfilment of desire. Kropotkin, in *Mutual Aid*, documented the tendency for **community** to enrich and develop **individuality**. As he proved, this tendency is seen throughout human history, which suggests that the abstract individualism of capitalism is more the exception than the rule in social life. In other words, history indicates that by working together with others as equals individuality is strengthened far more than in the so-called *“individualism”* associated with capitalism.

This communal support for individuality is hardly surprising as individuality is a product of the interaction between **social** forces and individual attributes. The more an individual cuts themselves off from social life, the more likely their individuality will suffer. This can be seen from the 1980’s when neo-liberal governments supporting the *“radical”* individualism associated with free market capitalism were elected in both Britain and the USA. The promotion of market forces lead to social atomisation, social disruption and a more centralised state. As *“the law of the jungle”* swept across society, the resulting disruption of social life ensured that many individuals became impoverished ethically and culturally as society became increasingly privatised.

In other words, many of the characteristics which we associate with a developed individuality (namely ability to think, to act, to hold ones own opinions and standards and so forth) are (essentially) **social** skills and are encouraged by a well developed community. Remove that social background and these valued aspects of individuality are undermined by fear, lack of social interaction and atomisation. Taking the case of workplaces, for example, surely it is an obvious truism that a hierarchical working environment will marginalise the individual and ensure that they cannot express their opinions, exercise their thinking capacities to the full or manage their own activity. This will have in impact in all aspects of an individual’s life.

Hierarchy in all its forms produces oppression and a crushing of individuality (see section B.1). In such a system, the *“business”* side of group activities would be *“properly carried out”* but at the expense of the individuals involved. Anarchists agree with John Stuart Mill when he asks, under such *“benevolent dictatorship,”* *“what sort of human beings can be formed under such a regimen? What development can either their thinking or their active faculties attain under it? ... Their moral capacities are equally stunted. Wherever the sphere of action of human beings is artificially*

*circumscribed, their sentiments are narrowed and dwarfed.*” [Representative Government, pp. 203–4] Like anarchists, Mill tended his critique of political associations into all forms of associations and stated that if “*mankind is to continue to improve*” then in the end one form of association will predominate, “*not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief, and workpeople without a voice in the management, but the association of labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves.*” [The Principles of Political Economy, p. 147]

Hence, anarchism will protect and develop individuality by creating the means by which all individuals can participate in the decisions that affect them, in all aspects of their lives. Anarchism is built upon the central assertion that individuals and their institutions cannot be considered in isolation from one another. Authoritarian organisations will create a servile personality, one that feels safest conforming to authority and what is considered normal. A libertarian organisation, one that is based upon participation and self-management will encourage a strong personality, one that knows his or her own mind, thinks for itself and feels confident in his or her own powers.

Therefore, as Bakunin argued, liberty “*is not a fact springing from isolation but from reciprocal action, a fact not of exclusion, but, on the contrary, of social interaction — for freedom of every individual is simply the reflection of his humanity or his human right in the consciousness of all free men, his brothers, his equals.*” Freedom “*is something very positive, very complex, and above all eminently social, since it can be realised only by society and only under conditions of strict equality and solidarity.*” Hierarchical power, by necessity, kills individual freedom as it is “*characteristic of privilege and of every privileged position to kill the minds and hearts of men*” and “*power and authority corrupt those who exercise them as much as those who are compelled to submit to them.*” [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 266, p. 268, p. 269 and p. 249]

A libertarian re-organisation of society will be based upon, and encourage, a self-empowerment and self-liberation of the individual and by participation within self-managed organisations, individuals will educate themselves for the responsibilities and joys of freedom. As Carole Pateman points out, “*participation develops and fosters the very qualities necessary for it; the more individuals participate the better able they become to do so.*” [Participation and Democratic Theory, pp. 42–43]

Such a re-organisation (as we will see in section J) is based upon the tactic of **direct action**. This tactic also encourages individuality by encouraging the individual to fight directly, by their own self-activity, that which they consider to be wrong. As Voltairine de Cleyre puts it:

*“Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist ... Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct action ... [direct actions] are the spontaneous retorts of those who feel oppressed by a situation.”* [Direct Action]

Therefore, anarchist tactics base themselves upon self-assertion and this can only develop individuality. Self-activity can only occur when there is an independent, free-thinking self. As self-management is based upon the principle of direct action (“*all co-operative experiments are essentially direct action*”) we can suggest that individuality will have little to fear from an anarchist society. Indeed, anarchists strongly stress the importance of individuality within a society:

*“[T]o destroy individuality is to destroy society. For society is only realised and alive in the individual members. Society has no motive that does not issue from its individual members, no end that does not centre in them, no mind that is not there. ‘Spirit of the age,’ ‘public opinion,’ ‘commonweal or good,’ and like phrases have no meaning if they are thought of as features of something that hovers or floats between man and woman. They name what resides in and proceeds from individuals. Individuality and community, therefore, are equally constitutive of our idea of human life.”* [J. Burns-Gibson quoted by William R. McKercher, **Freedom and Authority**, p. 31]

Little wonder, then, that anarchism “recognises and values individuality which means character, conduct and the springs of conduct, free initiative, creativeness, spontaneity, autonomy.” [J. Burns-Gibson, quoted by William R. McKercher, **Op. Cit.**, p. 31f] As Kropotkin put it, anarchism “seeks the most complete development of individuality combined with the highest development of voluntary association in all its aspects ... ever changing, ever modified...” [**Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 123]

For anarchists, like Mill, real liberty requires social equality. For “[i]f individuals are to exercise the maximum amount of control over their own lives and environment then authority structures in these areas must be so organised that they can participate in decision making.” [Pateman, **Op. Cit.**, p. 43] Hence individuality will be protected, encouraged and developed in an anarchist society far more than in a class ridden, hierarchical society like capitalism. As Kropotkin argued:

*“[Anarchist] Communism is the best basis for individual development and freedom; not that individualism which drives men to the war of each against all ... but that which represents the full expansion of man’s [and woman’s] faculties, the superior development of what is original in him [or her], the greatest fruitfulness of intelligence, feeling and will.”* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 141]

It is because wonders are so enriching to life, and none is more wonderful than individuality, that anarchists oppose capitalism in the name of socialism – libertarian socialism, the free association of free individuals.

### **I.7.1 Do tribal cultures indicate that communalism defends individuality?**

Yes. In many tribal cultures (what some people call “primitive”), we find a strong respect for individuals. As Paul Radin points out, “[i]f I were to state ... what are the outstanding features of aboriginal civilisation, I ... would have no hesitation in answering that ... respect for the individual, irrespective of age or sex” is the first one. [**The World of Primitive Man**, p. 11]

Murray Bookchin comments on Radin’s statement as follows, “respect for the individual, which Radin lists first as an aboriginal attribute, deserves to be emphasised, today, in an era that rejects the collective as destructive of individuality on the one hand, and yet, in an orgy of pure egotism, has actually destroyed all the ego boundaries of free-floating, isolated, and atomised individuals on the other. A strong collectivity may be even more supportive of the individual as close studies of certain aboriginal societies reveal, than a ‘free market’ society with its emphasis on an egoistic, but impoverished, self” [**Remaking Society**, p. 48]

This individualisation associated with tribal cultures was also noted by Howard Zinn. He quotes Gary Nash describing Iroquois culture (which appears typical of most Native American tribes):

*“No laws and ordinances, sheriffs and constables, judges and juries, or courts or jails — the apparatus of authority in European societies — were to be found in the north-east woodlands prior to European arrival. Yet boundaries of acceptable behaviour were firmly set. Though priding themselves on the autonomous individual, the Iroquois maintained a strict sense of right and wrong ...”* [quoted by Zinn in **A People’s History of the United States**, p. 21]

This respect for individuality existed in a society based on communistic principles. As Zinn notes, in the Iroquois *“land was owned in common and worked in common. Hunting was done together, and the catch was divided among the members of the village. Houses were considered common property and were shared by several families. The concept of private ownership of land and homes was foreign to the Iroquois.”* In this communal society women *“were important and respected”* and families were matrilineal. Power was shared between the sexes (unlike the European idea of male domination). Similarly, children *“while taught the cultural heritage of their people and solidarity with the tribe, were also taught to be independent, not to submit to overbearing authority. They were taught equality of status and the sharing of possessions.”* [Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 20]

As Zinn stresses, Native American tribes *“paid careful attention to the development of personality, intensity of will, independence and flexibility, passion and potency, to their partnership with one another and with nature.”* [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 21–2]

Thus tribal societies indicate that community defends individuality, with communal living actually encouraging a strong sense of individuality. This is to be expected, as equality is the only condition in which individuals can be free and so in a position to develop their personality to its full. Furthermore, this communal living took place within an anarchist environment:

*“The foundation principle of Indian government had always been the rejection of government. The freedom of the individual was regarded by practically all Indians north of Mexico as a canon infinitely more precious than the individual’s duty to his [or her] community or nation. This anarchistic attitude ruled all behaviour, beginning with the smallest social unity, the family. The Indian parent was constitutionally reluctant to discipline his [or her] children. Their every exhibition of self-will was accepted as a favourable indication of the development of maturing character...”* [Van Every, quoted by Zinn, **Op. Cit.**, p. 136]

In addition, Native American tribes also indicate that communal living and high standards of living can and do go together. The Cherokees, for example, in the 1870s, *“land was held collectively and life was contented and prosperous”* with the Department of the Interior recognising that it was *“a miracle of progress, with successful production by people living in considerable comfort, a level of education ‘equal to that furnished by an ordinary college in the States,’ flourishing industry and commerce, an effective constitutional government, a high level of literacy, and a state of ‘civilisation and enlightenment’ comparable to anything known: ‘What required five hundred years for the Britons to accomplish in this direction they have accomplished in one hundred years,’ the Department declared in wonder.”* [Noam Chomsky, **Year 501**, p. 231]

Senator Henry Dawes of Massachusetts visited “*Indian Territory*” in 1883 and described what he found in glowing terms:

*“There was not a pauper in that nation, and the nation did not owe a dollar. It built its own capitol, in which we had this examination, and it built its schools and its hospitals.”*  
No family lacked a home. [Cited by Chomsky, *Op. Cit.*, p. 231]

(It must be mentioned that Dawes recommended that the society must be destroyed because “[t]hey have got as far as they can go, because they own their land in common...there is no enterprise to make your home any better than that of your neighbours. There is no selfishness, which is the bottom of civilisation. Till this people will consent to give up their lands, and divide them among their citizens so that each can own the land he cultivates, they will not make much more progress.” The introduction of capitalism — as usual by state action — resulted in poverty and destitution, again showing the link between capitalism and high living standards is not clear cut, regardless of claims otherwise).

Undoubtedly, having access to the means of production ensured that members of such cultures did not have to place themselves in situations which could produce a servile character structure. As they did not have to follow the orders of a boss they did not have to learn to obey others and so could develop their own abilities to govern themselves. This self-government allowed the development of a custom in such tribes called “*the principle of non-interference*” in anthropology. This is the principle of defending someone’s right to express the opposing view and it is a pervasive principle in the tribal world, and it is so much so as to be safely called a “*universal*”.

The principle of non-interference is a powerful principle that extends from the personal to the political, and into every facet of daily life. Most modern people are aghast when they realise the extent to which it is practised, but it has proven itself to be an integral part of living anarchy (as many of these communities can be termed, although they would be considered imperfect anarchist societies in some ways). It means that people simply do not limit the activities of others, period. This in effect makes absolute tolerance a custom, or as the modern would say, a law. But the difference between law and custom is important to point out. Law is dead, and Custom lives (see section I.7.3).

As modern people we have so much baggage that relates to “*interfering*” with the lives of others that merely visualising the situation that would eliminate this daily pastime for many is impossible. But think about it. First of all, in a society where people do not interfere with each other’s behaviour, people tend to feel trusted and empowered by this simple social fact. Their self-esteem is already higher because they are trusted with the responsibility for making learned and aware choices. This is not fiction; individual responsibility is a key aspect of social responsibility.

Therefore, given the strength of individuality documented in tribes with little or no hierarchical structures within them, can we not conclude that anarchism will defend individuality and even develop it in ways blocked by capitalism? At the very least we can say “*possibly*,” and that is enough to allow us to question that dogma that capitalism is the only system based on respect for the individual.

## I.7.2 Is this not worshipping the past or the “*noble savage*”?

No. However, this is a common attack on socialists by supporters of capitalism and on anarchists by Marxists. Both claim that anarchism is “*backward looking*”, opposed to “*progress*” and desire a society based on inappropriate ideas of freedom. In particular, ideological capitalists maintain that all forms of socialism base themselves on the ideal of the “*noble savage*” and ignore the need for laws and other authoritarian social institutions to keep people “*in check*” (see, for example, free market capitalist guru Frederick von Hayek’s work, particularly his **Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism**).

Anarchists are well aware of the limitations of the “*primitive communist*” societies they have used as example of anarchistic tendencies within history or society. They are also aware of the problems associated with using **any** historical period as an example of “*anarchism in action*.” Take for example the “*free cities*” of Medieval Europe, which was used by Kropotkin as an example of the potential of decentralised, confederated communes. He was sometimes accused of being a “*Medievalist*” (as was William Morris) while all he was doing was indicating that capitalism need not equal progress and that alternative social systems have existed which have encouraged freedom in ways capitalism restricts.

In a similar way, Marxists often accuse Proudhon of being “*petty-bourgeois*” and looking backward to a pre-industrial society of artisans and peasants. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. Proudhon came from a area of French which, like many other parts of that country at the time, was essentially pre-industrial and based on peasant and artisan production. He therefore based his socialist ideas on the needs of working people as they required them at the time. Unlike Marx, who argued that industrialisation (i.e. proletarianisation) was the pre-conditions of socialism, Proudhon wanted justice and freedom for working people in the here and now, not some (unspecified) time in the future after capitalism had fully developed. He was “*petit-bourgeois*” only in so far as the French working class at the time was “*petit-bourgeois*” and was “*proletarian*” in so far as his fellow working people were.

When Proudhon did look at large-scale production (such as railways, factories and so on) he proposed co-operative associations to run them. These associations would maintain the dignity of the worker by maintaining the essential feature of artisan and peasant live, namely the control of the work and product by the labourer. Thus he used the experience of the past (artisan production) to inform his analysis of current events (industrialisation) to create a solution to the social problem which built upon and extended a freedom crushed by capitalism (namely workers’ self-management in production). Rather than being backward looking and worshipping a past which was disappearing, Proudhon analysed the present **and** past, drew any positive features he could from both and applied them to the present and the future (see also section H.2.1).

Again it is hardly surprising to find that many supporters of capitalism ignore the insights that can be gained by studying tribal cultures and the questions they raise about capitalism and freedom. Instead, they duck the issues raised by these insights and accuse socialists of idealising “*the noble savage*.” As indicated, nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, this claim has been directed towards Rousseau (often considered the father of socialist and anarchist “*idealisation*” of the “*noble savage*”) even though Rousseau expressly rejected any “*return to nature*.” He stated that “*must societies be totally abolished? Must **meum** and **tuum** be annihilated, and must we return again to the forests to live among bears? This is a deduction in the manner of my adversaries, which I would as soon anticipate as let them have the shame of drawing.*” [**The Social Contract and**



Discourses, p. 112] Sadly, Rousseau failed to understand that his adversaries, both then and now, seem to know no shame (similarly, Rousseau is often thought of idealising “*natural man*” but actually wrote that “*men in a state of nature, having no moral relations or determinate obligations one with another, could not be either good or bad, virtuous or vicious*” [Op. Cit., p. 64]). This also seems to be the case when anarchists look through history, draw libertarian currents from it and are denounced as backward looking utopians.

What libertarians socialists point out from this analysis of history is that the atomised individual associated with capitalist society is not “*natural*” and that capitalist social relationships help to weaken individuality. All the many attacks on libertarian socialist analysis of past societies is a product of capitalists attempts to deny history and state that “*Progress*” reaches its final resting place in capitalism. As David Watson argues:

*“When we consider people living under some of the harshest, most commanding conditions on earth, who can nevertheless do what they like when the notion occurs to them, we should be able to witness the contemporary doubt about civilisation’s superiority without growing indignant. Primitivism, after all, reflects not only a glimpse of life before the rise of the state, but also a legitimate response to real conditions of life under civilisation ... Most people do not live in aboriginal societies, and most tribal peoples themselves now face wholly new contexts which will have to be confronted in new ways if they are to survive as peoples. But their lifeways, their histories, remind us that **other modes of being are possible**. Reaffirmation of our primal past offers insight into our history — not the only possible insight, to be sure, but one important, legitimate entry point for a reasoned discussion about (and an impassioned reaction to) this world we must leave behind.”* [Beyond Bookchin, p. 240]

This essential investigation of history and modern society to see what other ways of living have and do exist is essential. It is too easy to forget that what exists under modern capitalism has not always existed (as neo-classical economics does, to a large degree). It is also useful to remember what many people now consider as “*normal*” was not always the case. As we discussed in section F.8.6, the first generation of industrial wage slaves **hated** the system, considering it both tyranny and unnatural. Studying history, previous cultures and the process of hierarchical society and the oppressed resistance to it can enrich our analysis and activity in the here and now and help us to envision an anarchist society, the problems it could face and possible solutions to them.

If the challenge for anarchists is to smash power-relations and domination, it would make sense to get to the root of the problem. Hierarchy, slavery, coercion, patriarchy, and so on far outdate capitalism and it is hardly enough to just analyse the economic system of capitalism, which is merely the current and most insidious form of hierarchical civilisation. Similarly, without looking to cultures and communities that functioned quite well before the rise of the state, hierarchies and classes, anarchists do not really have much solid ground to prove to people that anarchy is desirable or possible. For this reason, historical analysis and the celebration of the positive aspects of tribal and other societies is essential.

Moreover, as George Orwell points out, attacks that reject this critical analysis as worshipping the “*noble savage*” miss the point:

*“In the first place he [the defender of modern life] will tell you that it is impossible to ‘go back’ ... and will then accuse you of being a medievalist and begin to descant upon*

*the horrors of the Middle Ages ... As a matter of fact, most attacks upon the Middle Ages and the past generally by apologists of modernity are beside the point, because their essential trick is to project a modern man, with his squeamishness and his high standard of comfort, into an age when such things were unheard of. But notice that in any case this is not an answer. For dislike of the mechanised future does not imply the smallest reverence for any period of the past ... When one pictures it merely as an objective; there is no need to pretend that it has ever existed in space and time.” [The Road to Wigan Pier, p. 183]*

We should also note that such attacks on anarchist investigations of past cultures assumes that these cultures have **no** good aspects at all and so indicates a sort of intellectual “*all or nothing*” approach to modern life. The idea that past (and current) civilisations may have got **some** things right and others wrong and should be investigated is rejected for a totally uncritical “*love it or leave*” approach to modern society. Of course, the well known “*free market*” capitalist love of 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalist life and values warrants no such claims of “*past worship*” by the supporters of the system.

Therefore attacks on anarchists as supporters of the “*noble savage*” ideal indicate more about the opponents of anarchism and their fear of looking at the implications of the system they support than about anarchist theory.

### I.7.3 Is the law required to protect individual rights?

No, far from it. While it is obvious that, as Kropotkin put it, “[*n*]o society is possible without certain principles of morality generally recognised. If everyone grew accustomed to deceiving his fellow-men; if we never could rely on each other’s promise and words; if everyone treated his fellow as an enemy, against whom every means of warfare is justified — no society could exist.” [Kropotkin’s **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 73] this does not mean that a legal system (with its resultant bureaucracy, vested interests and inhumanity) is the best way to protect individual rights within a society.

What anarchists propose instead of the current legal system (or an alternative law system based on religious or “*natural*” laws) is **custom** — namely the development of living “*rules of thumb*” which express what a society considers as right at any given moment.

However, the question arises, if a fixed set of principles are used to determine the just outcome, in what way would this differ from laws?

The difference is that the “*order of custom*” would prevail rather than the “*rule of law*”. **Custom** is a body of living institutions that enjoys the support of the body politic, whereas **law** is a codified (read dead) body of institutions that separates social control from moral force. This, as anyone observing modern Western society can testify, alienates everyone. A **just outcome** is the predictable, but not necessarily the inevitable outcome of interpersonal conflict because in a traditional anarchistic society people are trusted to do it themselves. Anarchists think people have to grow up in a social environment free from the confusions generated by a fundamental discrepancy between morality, and social control, to fully appreciate the implications. However, the essential ingredient is the investment of trust, by the community, in people to come up with **functional solutions** to interpersonal conflict. This stands in sharp contrast with the present

situation of people being infantilised by the state through a constant bombardment of fixed social structures removing all possibility of people developing their own unique solutions.

Therefore, anarchists recognise that social custom changes with society. What was once considered “normal” or “natural” may become to be seen as oppressive and hateful. This is because the “conception of good or evil varies according to the degree of intelligence or of knowledge acquired. There is nothing unchangeable about it.” [Kropotkin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 92] Only by removing the dead hand of the past can society’s ethical base develop and grow with the individuals that make it up (see section A.2.19 for a discussion of anarchist ethics).

We should also like to point out here that laws (or “*The Law*”) also restrict the development of an individual’s sense of ethics or morality. This is because it relieves them of the responsibility of determining if something is right or wrong. All they need to know is whether it is legal. The morality of the action is irrelevant. This “nationalisation” of ethics is very handy for the would be capitalist, governor or other exploiter. In addition, capitalism also restricts the development of an individual’s ethics because it creates the environment where these ethics can be bought. To quote Shakespeare’s **Richard III**:

*“Second Murderer: Some certain dregs of conscience are yet within me.*

*First Murderer : Remember our reward, when the deed’s done.*

*Second Murderer : Zounds! He dies. I had forgot the reward.*

*First Murderer : Where’s thy conscience now?*

*Second Murderer : O, in the Duke of Gloucester’s purse.”*

Therefore, as far as “*The Law*” defending individual rights, it creates the necessary conditions (such as the de-personalisation of ethics, the existence of concentrations wealth, and so on) for undermining individual ethical behaviour, and so respect for other individual’s rights. As English libertarian socialist Edward Carpenter put it, “*I think we may fairly make the following general statement, viz., that legal ownership is essentially a negative and anti-social thing, and that unless qualified or antidoted by human relationship, it is pretty certain to be positively harmful. In fact, when a man’s chief plea is ‘The law allows it,’ you may be pretty sure he is up to some mischief!*” [quoted by William R. McKercher, **Freedom and Authority**, p. 48]

The state forces an individual a relationship with a governing body. This means “*taking away from the individual his [or her] direct interest in life and in his surroundings ... blunting his [or her] moral sense ... teaching that he [or she] must never reply on himself [or herself] ... [but] upon a small part of men who are elected to do everything ... [which] destroys to a large extent his [or her] perception of right and wrong.*” [J. B. Smith, quoted by McKercher, *Op. Cit.*, p. 67f]

Individual rights, for anarchists, are best protected in a social environment based on the self-respect and sympathy. Custom, because it is based on the outcome of numerous individual actions and thought does not have this problem and reflects (and encourages the development of) individual ethical standards and so a generalised respect for others. Thus, “*under anarchism all rules and laws will be little more than suggestions for the guidance of juries which will judge not only the facts but the law, the justice of the law, its applicability to the given circumstances, and the penalty or damage to be inflicted because if its infraction ... under Anarchism the law will be so flexible that it will shape itself to every emergency and need no alteration. And it will be regarded as just in proportion to its flexibility, instead of as now in proportion to its rigidity.*” [Benjamin Tucker, **The**

**Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 160–1] Tucker, like other individualist Anarchists, believed that the role of juries had been very substantial in the English common-law tradition and that they had been gradually emasculated by the state. This system of juries, based on common-law/custom could be the means of ensuring justice in a free society.

Tolerance of other individuals depends far more on the attitudes of the society in question than on its system of laws. In other words, even if the law does respect individual rights, if others in society disapprove of an action then they can and will act to stop it (or restrict individual rights). All that the law can do is try to prevent this occurring. Needless to say, governments can (and have) been at the forefront of ignoring individual rights when it suits them.

In addition, the state perverts social customs for its own, and the interests of the economically and socially powerful. As Kropotkin argued, *“as society became more and more divided into two hostile classes, one seeking to establish its domination, the other struggling to escape, the strife began. Now the conqueror was in a hurry to secure the results of his actions in a permanent form, he tried to place them beyond question, to make them holy and venerable by every means in his power. Law made its appearance under the sanction of the priest, and the warriors club was placed at its service. Its office was to render immutable such customs as were to the advantage of the dominant minority... If law, however, presented nothing but a collection of prescriptions serviceable to rulers, it would find some difficulty in insuring acceptance and obedience. Well, the legislators confounded in one code the two currents of custom ... , the maxims which represent principles of morality and social union wrought out as a result of life in common, and the mandates which are meant to ensure external existence to inequality. Customs, absolutely essential to the very being of society, are, in the code, cleverly intermingled with usages imposed by the ruling caste, and both claim equal respect from the crowd... Such was the law; and it has maintained its two-fold character to this day.”* [Kropotkin’s **Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 205] In other words, *“[t]he law has used Man’s social feelings to get passed not only moral precepts which were acceptable to Man, but also orders which were useful only to the minority of exploiters against whom he would have rebelled.”* [Kropotkin quoted by Malatesta in **Anarchy**, pp. 21–22]

Therefore anarchists argue that state institutions are not only unneeded to create an ethical society (i.e. one based on respecting individuality) but activity undermines such a society. That the economically and politically powerful state that a state is a necessary condition for a free society and individual space is hardly surprising. Malatesta put it as follows:

*“A government cannot maintain itself for long without hiding its true nature behind a pretence of general usefulness ... it cannot impose acceptances of the privileges of the few if it does not pretend to be the guardian of the rights of all.”* [Anarchy, p. 21]

Therefore, it is important to remember why the state exists and so whatever actions and rights it promotes for the individual it exists to protect the powerful against the powerless. Any human rights recognised by the state are a product of social struggle and exist because of past victories in the class war and not due to the kindness of ruling elites. In addition, capitalism itself undermines the ethical foundations of any society by encouraging people to grow *“accustomed to deceiving his fellow-men”* and women and treating *“his fellow as an [economic] enemy, against whom every means of warfare is justified.”* Hence capitalism undermines the basic social context within which individuals develop and need to become fully human and free. Little wonder that a strong state has always been required to introduce a free market — firstly, to protect wealth from

the increasingly dispossessed and secondly, to try to hold society together as capitalism destroys the social fabric which makes a society worth living in.

### I.7.4 Does capitalism protect individuality?

Given that many people claim that **any** form of socialism will destroy liberty (and so individuality) it is worthwhile to consider whether capitalism actually does protect individuality. As noted briefly in section I.7 the answer must be no. Capitalism seems to help create a standardisation which helps to distort individuality and the fact that individuality does exist under capitalism says more about the human spirit than capitalist social relationships.

So, why does a system apparently based on the idea of individual profit result in such a deadening of the individual? There are four main reasons:

- 1) capitalism produces a hierarchical system which crushes self-government in many areas of life;
- 2) there is the lack of community which does not provide the necessary supports for the encouragement of individuality;
- 3) there is the psychological impact of “*individual profit*” when it becomes identified purely with monetary gain (as in capitalism);
- 4) the effects of competition in creating conformity and mindless obedience to authority.

We have discussed point one on many occasions (see sections B.1 and B.4). As Emma Goldman put it, under capitalism, the individual “*must sell his [or her] labour*” and so their “*inclination and judgement are subordinated to the will of a master.*” This, naturally, represses individual initiative and the skills needed to know and express ones own mind (as she put it, this “*condemns millions of people to be mere nonentities, living corpses without originality or power of initiative ... who pile up mountains of wealth for others and pay for it with a grey, dull and wretched existence for themselves*”). “*There can be no freedom in the large sense of the word,*” Goldman stressed, “*so long as mercenary and commercial considerations play an important part in the determination of personal conduct.*” [Red Emma Speaks, p. 36]

Given the social relationships it is based on, capitalism cannot foster individuality but only harm it. As Kropotkin argued, “*obedience towards individuals or metaphysical entities ... lead to depression of initiative and servility of mind.*” [Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 285]

As far as point two goes, we have discussed it already in this section and will not repeat ourselves (see sections I.7 and I.7.1).

The last two points are worth discussing more thoroughly, and we will do so here.

Taking the third point first, when this kind of “greed” becomes the guiding aspect of an individual’s life (and the society they live in) they usually end up sacrificing their own ego to it. Instead of the individual dominating their “greed,” “greed” dominates them and so they end up being possessed by one aspect of themselves. This “*selfishness*” hides the poverty of the ego who practices it.

As Erich Fromm argues:

*“Selfishness is not identical with self-love but with its very opposite. Selfishness is one kind of greediness. Like all greediness, it contains an insatiability, as a consequence of which there is never any real satisfaction. Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction... this type of person is basically not fond of himself, but deeply dislikes himself.*

*“The puzzle in this seeming contradiction is easy to solve. Selfishness is rooted in this very lack of fondness for oneself... He does not have the inner security which can exist only on the basis of genuine fondness and affirmation.” [The Fear of Freedom, pp. 99–100]*

In other words, the “selfish” person allows their greed to dominate their ego and they sacrifice their personality feeding this new “God.” This was clearly seen by Max Stirner who denounced this as a “one-sided, unopened, narrow egoism” which leads the ego being “ruled by a passion to which he brings the rest as sacrifices” (see section G.6). Like all “spooks,” capitalism results in the self-negation of the individual and so the impoverishment of individuality. Little wonder, then, that a system apparently based upon “egoism” and “individualism” ends up weakening individuality.

The effects of competition on individuality are equally as destructive.

Indeed, a “culture dedicated to creating standardised, specialised, predictable human components could find no better way of grinding them out than by making every possible aspect of life a matter of competition. ‘Winning out’ in this respect does not make rugged individualists. It shapes conformist robots.” [George Leonard, quoted by Alfie Kohn, *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*, p. 129]

Why is this?

Competition is based upon outdoing others and this can only occur if you are doing the same thing they are. However, individuality is the most unique thing there is and “unique characteristics by definition cannot be ranked and participating in the process of ranking demands essential conformity.” [Alfie Kohn, *Op. Cit.*, p. 130] According to Kohn in his extensive research into the effects of competition, the evidence suggests that it in fact “encourages rank conformity” as well as undermining the “substantial and authentic kind of individualism” associated by such free thinkers as Thoreau. [*Op. Cit.*, p. 129]

As well as impoverishing individuality by encouraging conformity, competition also makes us less free thinking and rebellious:

*“Attitude towards authorities and general conduct do count in the kinds of competitions that take place in the office or classroom. If I want to get the highest grades in class, I will not be likely to challenge the teacher’s version of whatever topic is being covered. After a while, I may cease to think critically altogether... If people tend to ‘go along to get along,’ there is even more incentive to go along when the goal is to be number one. In the office or factory where co-workers are rivals, beating out the next person for a promotion means pleasing the boss. Competition acts to extinguish the Promethean fire of rebellion.” [Op. Cit., p. 130]*

In section I.4.11 ( “If libertarian socialism eliminates the profit motive, won’t creativity suffer?”) we noted that when an artistic task is turned into a contest, children’s work reveal significantly

less spontaneity and creativity. In other words, competition reduces creativity and so individuality because creativity is “*anti-conformist at its core: it is nothing if not a process of idiosyncratic thinking and risk-taking. Competition inhibits this process.*” [Op. Cit., p. 130]

Competition, therefore, will result in a narrowing of our lives, a failing to experience new challenges in favour of trying to win and be “*successful.*” It turns “*life into a series of contests [and] turns us into cautious, obedient people. We do not sparkle as individuals or embrace collective action when we are in a race.*” [Op. Cit., p. 131]

So, far from defending individuality, capitalism places a lot of barriers (both physical and mental) in the path of individuals who are trying to express their freedom. Anarchism exists precisely because capitalism has not created the free society it supporters claimed it would during its struggle against the absolutist state.

## I.8 Does revolutionary Spain show that libertarian socialism can work in practice?

Yes. As Murray Bookchin puts it, “[i]n Spain, millions of people took large segments of the economy into their own hands, collectivised them, administered them, even abolished money and lived by communistic principles of work and distribution — all of this in the midst of a terrible civil war, yet without producing the chaos or even the serious dislocations that were and still are predicted by authoritarian ‘radicals.’ Indeed, in many collectivised areas, the efficiency with which an enterprise worked by far exceeded that of a comparable one in nationalised or private sectors. This ‘green shoot’ of revolutionary reality has more meaning for us than the most persuasive theoretical arguments to the contrary. On this score it is not the anarchists who are the ‘unrealistic day-dreamers,’ but their opponents who have turned their backs to the facts or have shamelessly concealed them.” [“Introductory Essay,” in *The Anarchist Collectives*, Sam Dolgoff (ed.), p. xxxix]

Sam Dolgoff’s book is by far the best English source on the Spanish collectives and deserves to be quoted at length (as we do below). He quotes French Anarchist Gaston Leval comments that in those areas which defeated the fascist uprising on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1936 a profound social revolution took place based, mostly, on anarchist ideas:

*“In Spain, during almost three years, despite a civil war that took a million lives, despite the opposition of the political parties ... this idea of libertarian communism was put into effect. Very quickly more than 60% of the land was very quickly collectively cultivated by the peasants themselves, without landlords, without bosses, and without instituting capitalist competition to spur production. In almost all the industries, factories, mills, workshops, transportation services, public services, and utilities, the rank and file workers, their revolutionary committees, and their syndicates reorganised and administered production, distribution, and public services without capitalists, high-salaried managers, or the authority of the state.*

*“Even more: the various agrarian and industrial collectives immediately instituted economic equality in accordance with the essential principle of communism, ‘From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs.’ They co-ordinated their efforts through free association in whole regions, created new wealth, increased production (especially in agriculture), built more schools, and bettered public services. They instituted not bourgeois formal democracy but genuine grass roots functional libertarian democracy, where each individual participated directly in the revolutionary reorganisation of social life. They replaced the war between men, ‘survival of the fittest,’ by the universal practice of mutual aid, and replaced rivalry by the principle of solidarity ...*

*“This experience, in which about eight million people directly or indirectly participated, opened a new way of life to those who sought an alternative to anti-social capitalism on the one hand, and totalitarian state bogus socialism on the other.” [Op. Cit., pp. 6–7]*



Thus about eight million people directly or indirectly participated in the libertarian based new economy during the short time it was able to survive the military assaults of the fascists and the attacks and sabotage of the Communists. This in itself suggests that libertarian socialist ideas are of a practical nature.

Lest the reader think that Dolgoff and Bookchin are exaggerating the accomplishments and ignoring the failures of the Spanish collectives, in the following subsections we will present specific details and answer some objections often raised by misinformed critics. We will try to present an objective analysis of the revolution, its many successes, its strong points and weak points, the mistakes made and possible lessons to be drawn from the experience, both from the successes and the mistakes.

This libertarian influenced revolution has (generally) been ignored by historians, or its existence mentioned in passing. Some so-called historians and “*objective investigators*” have slandered it and lied about (when not ignoring) the role anarchists played in it. Communist histories are particularly unreliable (to use a polite word for their activities) but it seems that almost every political perspective has done this (including liberal, right-wing libertarian, Stalinist, Trotskyist, Marxist, and so on). Indeed, the myths generated by Marxists of various shades are quite extensive (see the appendix on “*Marxists and Spanish Anarchism*” for a reply to some of the more common ones).

Thus any attempt to investigate what actually occurred in Spain and the anarchists’ role in it is subject to a great deal of difficulty. Moreover, the positive role that Anarchists played in the revolution and the positive results of our ideas when applied in practice are also downplayed, if not ignored. Indeed, the misrepresentations of the Spanish Anarchist movement are downright amazing (see Jerome R. Mintz’s wonderful book **The Anarchists of Casa Viejas** for a refutation of the historians claims, a refutation based on oral history, as well as J. Romero Maura’s, “*The Spanish case*”, contained in **Anarchism Today**, edited by J. Joll and D. Apter. Both are essential reading to understand the distortions of historians about the Spanish anarchist movement).

All we can do here is present a summary of the social revolution that took place and attempt to explode a few of the myths that have been created around the work of the C.N.T. and F.A.I. during those years.

In addition, we must stress that this section of the FAQ can be nothing but an introduction to the Spanish Revolution. We concentrate on the economic and political aspects of the revolution as we cannot cover the social transformations that occurred. All across non-fascist Spain traditional social relationships between men and women, adults and children, individual and individual were transformed, revolutionised, in a libertarian way. C.N.T. militant Abel Paz gives a good indication of this when he wrote:

*“Industry is in the hands of the workers and all the production centres conspicuously fly the red and black flags as well as inscriptions announcing that they have really become collectives. The revolution seems to be universal. Changes are also evident in social relations. The former barriers which used to separate men and woman arbitrarily have been destroyed. In the cafes and other public places there is a mingling of the sexes which would have been completely unimaginable before. The revolution has introduced a fraternal character to social relations which has deepened with practice and show clearly that the old world is dead.” [Durruti: **The People Armed**, p. 243]*

The social transformation empowered individuals and these, in turn, transformed society. Anarchist militant Enriqueta Rovira presents a vivid picture of the self-liberation the revolution generated:

*“The atmosphere then [during the revolution], the feelings were very special. It was beautiful. A feeling of — how shall I say it — of power, not in the sense of domination, but in the sense of things being under **our** control, of under anyone’s. Of **possibility**. We **had** everything. We had Barcelona: It was ours. You’d walk out in the streets, and they were ours — here, CNT; there, **comite** this or that. It was totally different. Full of possibility. A feeling that we could, together, really **do** something. That we could make things different.”* [quoted by Martha A. Ackelsberg and Myrna Margulies Breithart, *“Terrains of Protest: Striking City Women”*, pp. 151–176, **Our Generation**, vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 164–5]

Moreover, the transformation of society that occurred during the revolution extended to all areas of life and work. For example, the revolution saw *“the creation of a health workers’ union, a true experiment in socialised medicine. They provided medical assistance and opened hospitals and clinics.”* [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 192] We discuss this example in some detail in section I.5.12 and so will not do so here. Therefore, we must stress that this section of the FAQ is just an introduction to what happened and does not (indeed, cannot) discuss all aspects of the revolution. We just present an overview, bringing out the libertarian aspects of the revolution, the ways workers’ self-management was organised, how the collectives organised and what they did.

Needless to say, many mistakes were made during the revolution. We point out and discuss some of them in what follows. Moreover, much of what happened did not correspond exactly with what many people consider as the essential steps in a communist (libertarian or otherwise) revolution. Economically, for example, few collectives reached beyond a mutualist or collectivist state. Politically, the fear of a fascist victory made many anarchists accept collaboration with the state as a lesser evil. However, to dismiss the Spanish Revolution because it did not meet the ideas laid out by a handful of revolutionaries would be sectarian and elitist nonsense. No working class revolution is pure, no mass struggle is without its contradictions, no attempt to change society will be perfect. *“It is only those who do nothing who make no mistakes,”* as Kropotkin so correctly pointed out. [**Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 143] The question is whether the revolution creates a system of institutions which will allow those involved to discuss the problems they face and correct the decisions they make. In this, the Spanish Revolution clearly succeeded, creating organisations based on the initiative, autonomy and power of working class people.

For more information about the social revolution, Sam Dolgoff’s **The Anarchist Collectives** is an excellent starting place. Gaston Leval’s **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution** is another essential text. Jose Pierat’s **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution** and Vernon Richards’ **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution** are excellent critical anarchist works on the revolution and the role of the anarchists. Robert Alexander’s **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War** is a good general overview of the anarchist’s role in the revolution and civil war, as is Burnett Bolloten’s **The Spanish Civil War**. Noam Chomsky’s excellent essay *“Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship”* indicates how liberal books on the Spanish Civil War can be misleading, unfair and essentially ideological

in nature (this classic essay can be found in *The Chomsky Reader* and *American Power and the New Mandarins*). George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* cannot be bettered as an introduction to the subject (Orwell was in the POUM militia at the Aragon Front and was in Barcelona during the May Days of 1937).

### **I.8.1 Wasn't the Spanish Revolution primarily a rural phenomenon and therefore inapplicable as a model for modern industrialised societies?**

Quite the reverse. More urban workers took part in the revolution than in the countryside. So while it is true that collectivisation was extensive in rural areas, the revolution also made its mark in urban areas and in industry.

In total, the "regions most affected" by collectivisation "were Catalonia and Aragon, were about 70 per cent of the workforce was involved. The total for the whole of Republican territory was nearly 800,000 on the land and a little more than a million in industry. In Barcelona workers' committees took over all the services, the oil monopoly, the shipping companies, heavy engineering firms such as Volcano, the Ford motor company, chemical companies, the textile industry and a host of smaller enterprises... Services such as water, gas and electricity were working under new management within hours of the storming of the Atarazanas barracks ...a conversion of appropriate factories to war production meant that metallurgical concerns had started to produce armed cars by 22 July ... The industrial workers of Catalonia were the most skilled in Spain ... One of the most impressive feats of those early days was the resurrection of the public transport system at a time when the streets were still littered and barricaded." Five days after the fighting had stopped, 700 tramcars rather than the usual 600, all painted in the colours of the CNT-FAI were operating in Barcelona." [Antony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 91–2]

About 75% of Spanish industry was concentrated in Catalonia, the stronghold of the anarchist labour movement, and widespread collectivisation of factories took place there. However, collectivisation was not limited to Catalonia and took place all across urban as well as rural Republican Spain. As Sam Dolgoff rightly observes, "[t]his refutes decisively the allegation that anarchist organisational principles are not applicable to industrial areas, and if at all, only in primitive agrarian societies or in isolated experimental communities." [The Anarchist Collectives, pp. 7–8]

There had been a long tradition of peasant collectivism in the Iberian Peninsula, as there was among the Berbers and in the ancient Russian *mir*. The historians Costa and Reparaz maintain that a great many Iberian collectives can be traced to "a form of rural libertarian-communism [which] existed in the Iberian Peninsula before the Roman invasion. Not even five centuries of oppression by Catholic kings, the State and the Church have been able to eradicate the spontaneous tendency to establish libertarian communistic communities." [cited, *Op. Cit.*, p. 20] So it is not surprising that there were collectives in the countryside.

According to Augustin Souchy, "[i]t is no simple matter to collectivise and place on firm foundations an industry employing almost a quarter of a million textile workers in scores of factories scattered in numerous cities. But the Barcelona syndicalist textile union accomplished this feat in a short time. It was a tremendously significant experiment. The dictatorship of the bosses was toppled, and wages, working conditions and production were determined by the workers and their elected delegates. All functionaries had to carry out the instructions of the membership and report back di-

rectly to the men on the job and union meetings. The collectivisation of the textile industry shatters once and for all the legend that the workers are incapable of administrating a great and complex corporation” [cited, *Op. Cit.*, p. 94].

Moreover, Spain in the 1930s was not a “backward, peasant country,” as is sometimes supposed. Between 1910 and 1930, the industrial working class more than doubled to over 2,500,000. This represented just over 26% of the working population (compared to 16% twenty years previously). In 1930, 45 per cent of the working population were engaged in agriculture. [Ronald Fraser, *The Blood of Spain*, p. 38] In Catalonia alone, 200,000 workers were employed in the textile industry and 70,000 in metal-working and machinery manufacturing. This was very different than the situation in Russia at the end of World War I, where the urban working class made up only 10% of the population.

Capitalist social relations had also penetrated agriculture much more thoroughly than in “backward, underdeveloped” countries by the 1930s. In Russia at the end of World War I, for example, agriculture mostly consisted of small farms on which peasant families worked mainly for their own subsistence, bartering or selling their surplus. In Spain, however, agriculture was oriented to the world market and by the 1930s approximately 90% of farm land was in the hands of the bourgeoisie. [Fraser, *Op. Cit.*, p. 37] Spanish agribusiness also employed large numbers of labourers who did not own enough land to support themselves. The revolutionary labour movement in the Spanish countryside in the 1930s was precisely based on this large population of rural wage-earners (the socialist UGT land workers union had 451,000 members in 1933, 40% of its total membership, for example).

Therefore the Spanish Revolution cannot be dismissed as a product a of pre-industrial society. The urban collectivisations occurred predominately in the most heavily industrialised part of Spain and indicate that anarchist ideas are applicable to modern societies (indeed, the CNT organised most of the unionised urban working class). By 1936 agriculture itself was predominately capitalist (with 2% of the population owning 67% of the land). The revolution in Spain was the work (mostly) of rural and urban wage labourers (joined with poor peasants) fighting a well developed capitalist system.

Therefore, the anarchist revolution in Spain has many lessons for revolutionaries in developed capitalist countries and cannot be dismissed as a product of industrial backwardness.

### **I.8.2 How were the anarchists able to obtain mass popular support in Spain?**

Anarchism was introduced in Spain in 1868 by Giuseppe Fanelli, an associate of Michael Bakunin, and found fertile soil among both the workers and the peasants of Spain.

The peasants supported anarchism because of the rural tradition of Iberian collectivism mentioned in the last section. The urban workers supported it because its ideas of direct action, solidarity and free federation of unions corresponded to their needs in their struggle against capitalism and the state.

In addition, many Spanish workers were well aware of the dangers of centralisation and the republican tradition in Spain was very much influenced by federalist ideas (coming, in part, from Proudhon’s work). The movement later spread back and forth between countryside and cities as

union organisers and anarchist militants visited villages and as peasants came to industrial cities like Barcelona, looking for work.

Therefore, from the start anarchism in Spain was associated with the labour movement (as Bakunin desired) and so anarchists had a practical area to apply their ideas and spread the anarchist message. By applying their principles in everyday life, the anarchists in Spain ensured that anarchist ideas became commonplace and accepted in a large section of the population.

This acceptance of anarchism cannot be separated from the structure and tactics of the C.N.T. and its fore-runners. The practice of direct action and solidarity encouraged workers to rely on themselves to identify and solve their own problems. The decentralised structure of the anarchist unions had an educational effect of their members. By discussing issues, struggles, tactics, ideals and politics in their union assemblies, the members of the union educated themselves and, by the process of self-management in the struggle, prepared themselves for a free society. The very organisational structure of the C.N.T. ensured the dominance of anarchist ideas and the political evolution of the union membership. As one C.N.T. militant from Casas Viejas put it, new members “asked for too much, because they lacked education. They thought they could reach the sky without a ladder ... they were beginning to learn ... There was good faith but lack of education. For that reason we would submit ideas to the assembly, and the bad ideas would be thrown out.” [quoted by J. Mintz, *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas*, p. 27]

It was by working in the union meetings that anarchists influenced their fellow workers. The idea that the anarchists, through the F.A.I, controlled the C.N.T is a myth. Not all anarchists in the C.N.T were members of the F.A.I, for example. Almost all F.A.I members were also rank-and-file members of the C.N.T. who took part in union meetings as equals. Anarchists were not members of the FAI indicate this. Jose Borrás Casacarosa notes that “[o]ne has to recognise that the F.A.I. did not intervene in the C.N.T. from above or in an authoritarian manner as did other political parties in the unions. It did so from the base through militants ... the decisions which determined the course taken by the C.N.T. were taken under constant pressure from these militants.” Jose Campos notes that F.A.I. militants “tended to reject control of confederal committees and only accepted them on specific occasions ... if someone proposed a motion in assembly, the other F.A.I. members would support it, usually successfully. It was the individual standing of the *faista* in open assembly.” [quoted by Stuart Christie, *We, the Anarchists*, p. 62]

This explains the success of anarchism in the CNT. Anarchist ideas, principles and tactics, submitted to the union assemblies, proved to be good ideas and were not thrown out. The structure of the organisation, in other words, decisively influenced the **content** of the decisions reached as ideas, tactics, union policy and so on were discussed by the membership and those which best applied to the members lives were accepted and implemented. The C.N.T assemblies showed the validity of Bakunin’s arguments for self-managed unions as a means of ensuring workers’ control of their own destinies and organisations. As he put it, the union “sections could defend their rights and their autonomy [against union bureaucracy] in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings ... In these great meetings of the sections, the items on the agenda were amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed.” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 247] The C.N.T was built on such “popular assemblies,” with the same radicalising effect. It showed, in practice, that bosses (capitalist as well as union ones) were not needed – workers can manage their own affairs directly. As a school for anarchism it could not be bettered as it showed that anarchist principles were not utopian. The C.N.T, by being based on workers’ self-management

of the class struggle, prepared its members for workers' self-management of the revolution and the new society.

The Spanish Revolution also shows the importance of anarchist education and media. In a country with a very high illiteracy rate, huge quantities of literature on social revolution were disseminated and read out loud at meetings by those who could read to those who could not. Anarchist ideas were widely discussed. "*There were tens of thousands of books, pamphlets and tracts, vast and daring cultural and popular educational experiments (the Ferrer schools) that reached into almost every village and hamlet throughout Spain.*" [The Anarchist Collectives, p. 27] The discussion of political, economic and social ideas was continuous, and "*the centro [local union hall] became the gathering place to discuss social issues and to dream and plan for the future. Those who aspired to learn to read and write would sit around ... studying.*" [Jerome R. Mintz, *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas*, p. 160] One anarchist militant described it as follows:

*"With what joy the orators were received whenever a meeting was held ... We spoke that night about everything: of the ruling inequality of the regime and of how one had a right to a life without selfishness, hatred, without wars and suffering. We were called on another occasion and a crowd gathered larger than the first time. That's how the pueblo started to evolve, fighting the present regime to win something by which they could sustain themselves, and dreaming of the day when it would be possible to create that society some depict in books, others by word of mouth. Avid for learning, they read everything, debated, discussed, and chatted about the different modes of perfect social existence."* [Perez Cordon, quoted by Jerome R. Mintz, *Op. Cit.*, p. 158]

Newspapers and periodicals were extremely important. By 1919, more than 50 towns in Andalusia had their own libertarian newspapers. By 1934 the C.N.T. (the anarcho-syndicalist labour union) had a membership of around one million and the anarchist press covered all of Spain. In Barcelona the C.N.T. published a daily, **Solidaridad Obrera** (Worker Solidarity), with a circulation of 30,000. The FAI's magazine **Tierra y Libertad** (Land and Liberty) had a circulation of 20,000. In Gijon there was **Vida Obrera** (Working Life), in Seville **El Productor** (The Producer), and in Saragossa **Accion y Cultura** (Action and Culture), each with a large circulation. There were many more.

As well as leading struggles, organising unions, and producing books, papers and periodicals, the anarchists also organised libertarian schools, cultural centres, co-operatives, anarchist groups (the F.A.I.), youth groups (the Libertarian Youth) and women's organisations (the Free Women movement). They applied their ideas in all walks of life and so ensured that ordinary people saw that anarchism was practical and relevant to them.

This was the great strength of the Spanish Anarchist movement. It was a movement "*that, in addition to possessing a revolutionary ideology [sic], was also capable of mobilising action around objectives firmly rooted in the life and conditions of the working class ... It was this ability periodically to identify and express widely felt needs and feelings that, together with its presence at community level, formed the basis of the strength of radical anarchism, and enabled it to build a mass base of support.*" [Nick Rider, "*The practice of direct action: the Barcelona rent strike of 1931*", p. 99, from *For Anarchism*, pp. 79–105]

Historian Temma Kaplan stressed this in her work on the Andalusian anarchists. She argued that the anarchists were "*rooted in*" social life and created "*a movement firmly based in working-class culture.*" They "*formed trade unions, affinity groups such as housewives' sections, and broad*

*cultural associations such as workers' circles, where the anarchist press was read and discussed.* Their "great strength ... lay in the merger of communal and militant trade union traditions. In towns where the vast majority of worked in agriculture, agricultural workers' unions came to be identified with the community as a whole ... anarchism ... show[ed] that the demands of agricultural workers and proletarians could be combined with community support to create an insurrectionary situation ... It would be a mistake ... to argue that 'village anarchism' in Andalusia was distinct from militant unionism, or that the movement was a surrogate religion." [Anarchists of Andalusia: 1868–1903, p. 211, p. 207, pp. 204–5]

The Spanish anarchists, before and after the C.N.T was formed, fought in and out of the factory for economic, social and political issues. This refusal of the anarchists to ignore any aspect of life ensured that they found many willing to hear their message, a message based around the ideas of individual liberty. Such a message could do nothing but radicalise workers for "*the demands of the C.N.T went much further than those of any social democrat: with its emphasis on true equality, autogestion [self-management] and working class dignity, anarchosindicalism made demands the capitalist system could not possibly grant to the workers.*" [J. Romero Maura, "The Spanish case", p. 79, from *Anarchism Today*, edited by J. Joll and D. Apter]

Strikes, due to the lack of strike funds, depended on mutual aid to be won, which fostered a strong sense of solidarity and class consciousness in the CNT membership. Strikes did not just involve workers. For example, workers in Jerez responded to bosses importing workers from Malaga "*with a weapon of their own — a boycott of those using strikebreakers. The most notable boycotts were against landowners near Jerez who also had commercial establishments in the city. The workers and their wives refused to buy there, and the women stationed themselves nearby to discourage other shoppers.*" [Jerome R. Mintz, *Op. Cit.*, p. 102]

The structure and tactics of the C.N.T encouraged the politicisation, initiative and organisational skills of its members. It was a federal, decentralised body, based on direct discussion and decision making from the bottom up. "*The C.N.T tradition was to discuss and examine everything*", as one militant put it. In addition, the C.N.T created a viable and practical example of an alternative method by which society could be organised. A method which was based on the ability of ordinary people to direct society themselves and which showed in practice that special ruling authorities are undesirable and unnecessary.

The very structure of the C.N.T and the practical experience it provided its members in self-management produced a revolutionary working class the likes of which the world has rarely seen. As Jose Peirats points out, "*above the union level, the C.N.T was an eminently political organisation ..., a social and revolutionary organisation for agitation and insurrection.*" [Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution, p. 239]

The C.N.T. was organised in such a way as to encourage solidarity and class consciousness. Its organisation was based on the *sindicato unico* (one union) which united all workers of the same workplace in the same union. Instead of organising by trade, and so dividing the workers into numerous different unions, the C.N.T united all workers in a workplace into the same organisation, all trades, skilled and unskilled, where in a single organisation and so solidarity was increased and encouraged as well as increasing their fighting power by eliminating divisions within the workforce. All the unions in an area were linked together into a local federation, the local federations into a regional federation and so on. As J. Romero Maura argues, the "*territorial basis of organisation linkage brought all the workers from one area together and fomented working-class*

*solidarity over and above corporate [industry or trade] solidarity.* [“*The Spanish case*”, p. 75, from **Anarchism Today**, edited by J. Joll and D. Apter]

Thus the structure of the C.N.T. encouraged class solidarity and consciousness. In addition, being based on direct action and self-management, the union ensured that working people became accustomed to managing their own struggles and acting for themselves, directly. This prepared them to manage their own personal and collective interests in a free society (as seen by the success of the self-managed collectives created in the revolution). Thus the process of self-managed struggle and direct action prepared people for the necessities of the social revolution and the an anarchist society – it built, as Bakunin argued, the seeds of the future in the present.

In other words, *“the route to radicalisation ... came from direct involvement in struggle and in the design of alternative social institutions.”* Every strike and action empowered those involved and created a viable alternative to the existing system. For example, while the strikes and food protests in Barcelona at the end of the First World War *“did not topple the government, patterns of organisation established then provided models for the anarchist movement for years to follow.”* [Martha A. Ackelsberg and Myrna Margulies Breithart, *“Terrains of Protest: Striking City Women”*, pp. 151–176, **Our Generation**, vol. 19, No. 1, p. 164] The same could be said of every strike, which confirmed Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s stress on the strike as not only creating class consciousness and confidence but also the structures necessary to not only fight capitalism, but to replace it.

It was the revolutionary nature of the C.N.T. that created a militant membership who were willing and able to use direct action to defend their liberty. Unlike the Marxist led German workers, organised in a centralised fashion and trained in the obedience required by hierarchy, who did nothing to stop Hitler, the Spanish working class (like their comrades in anarchist unions in Italy) took to the streets to stop fascism.

The revolution in Spain did not “just happen”; it was the result of nearly seventy years of persistent anarchist agitation and revolutionary struggle, including a long series of peasant uprisings, insurrections, industrial strikes, protests, sabotage and other forms of direct action that prepared the peasants and workers organise popular resistance to the attempted fascist coup in July 1937 and to take control of the economy when they had defeated it in the streets.

### I.8.3 How were Spanish industrial collectives organised?

Marta A. Ackelsberg gives us an excellent short summary of how the industrial collectives where organised:

*“In most collectivised industries, general assemblies of workers decided policy, while elected committees managed affairs on a day-to-day basis.”* [**Free Women of Spain**, p. 73]

The collectives were based on workers’ democratic self-management of their workplaces, using productive assets that were under the custodianship of the entire working community and administered through federations of workers’ associations. Augustin Souchy writes:

*“The collectives organised during the Spanish Civil War were workers’ economic associations without private property. The fact that collective plants were managed by those who worked in them did not mean that these establishments became their private prop-*



*erty. The collective had no right to sell or rent all or any part of the collectivised factory or workshop, The rightful custodian was the C.N.T., the National Confederation of Workers Associations. But not even the C.N.T. had the right to do as it pleased. Everything had to be decided and ratified by the workers themselves through conferences and congresses.”* [cited in **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 67]

According to Souchy, in Catalonia “every factory elected its administrative committee composed of its most capable workers. Depending on the size of the factory, the function of these committees included inner plant organisation, statistics, finance, correspondence, and relations with other factories and with the community... Several months after collectivisation the textile industry of Barcelona was in far better shape than under capitalist management. Here was yet another example to show that grass roots socialism from below does not destroy initiative. Greed is not the only motivation in human relations.” [Op. Cit., p 95]

Thus the individual collective was based on a mass assembly of those who worked there. This assembly nominated administrative staff who were mandated to implement the decisions of the assembly and who had to report back to, and were accountable to, that assembly. For example, in Castellon de la Plana “[e]very month the technical and administrative council presented the general assembly of the Syndicate with a report which was examined and discussed if necessary, and finally introduced when this majority thought it of use. Thus all the activities were known and controlled by all the workers. We find here a practical example of libertarian democracy.” [Collectives in the Spanish Revolution, p. 303]

So, in general, the industrial collectives were organised from the bottom-up, with policy in the hands of workers’ assemblies who elected the administration required, including workplace committees and managers. However, power rested at the base of the collective, with “all important decisions [being] taken by the general assemblies of the workers, ... [which] were widely attended and regularly held... if an administrator did something which the general assembly had not authorised, he was likely to be deposed at the next meeting.” An example of this process can be seen from the Casa Rivieria company. After the defeat of the army coup “a control committee (Comite de Control) was named by the Barcelona Metal Workers’ Union to take over temporary control of the enterprises... A few weeks after July 19<sup>th</sup>, there was the first general assembly of the firm’s workers ... It elected an enterprise committee (Comite de Empresa) to take control of the firm on a more permanent basis... Each of the four sections of the firm — the three factories and the office staff — held their own general assemblies at least once a week. There they discussed matters ranging from the most important affairs to the most trivial.” [Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 469 and p. 532]

A plenum of syndicates met in December of 1936 and formulated norms for socialisation in which the inefficiency of the capitalist industrial system was analysed. The report of the plenum stated:

*“The major defect of most small manufacturing shops is fragmentation and lack of technical/commercial preparation. This prevents their modernisation and consolidation into better and more efficient units of production, with better facilities and co-ordination... For us, socialisation must correct these deficiencies and systems of organisation in every industry... To socialise an industry, we must consolidate the different units of each branch of industry in accordance with a general and organic plan which will avoid com-*

*petition and other difficulties impeding the good and efficient organisation of production and distribution...*” [cited by Souchy, **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 83]

As Souchy points out, this document is very important in the evolution of collectivisation, because it indicates a realisation that “*workers must take into account that partial collectivisation will in time degenerate into a kind of bourgeois co-operativism,*” [Op. Cit., p. 83] as discussed earlier. Thus many collectives did not compete with each other for profits, as surpluses were pooled and distributed on a wider basis than the individual collective – in most cases industry-wide.

We have already noted some examples of the improvements in efficiency realised by collectivisation during the Spanish Revolution ( section I.4.10). Another example was the baking industry. Souchy reports that, “[a]s in the rest of Spain, Barcelona’s bread and cakes were baked mostly at night in hundreds of small bakeries. Most of them were in damp, gloomy cellars infested with roaches and rodents. All these bakeries were shut down. More and better bread and cake were baked in new bakeries equipped with new modern ovens and other equipment.” [Op. Cit., p. 82]

Therefore, the collectives in Spain were marked by workplace democracy and a desire to co-operate within and across industries. This attempt at libertarian socialism, like all experiments, had its drawbacks as well as successes and these will be discussed in the next section as well as some of the conclusions drawn from the experience.

#### **I.8.4 How were the Spanish industrial collectives co-ordinated?**

The methods of co-operation tried by the collectives varied considerably. Initially, there were very few attempts to co-ordinate economic activities beyond the workplace. This is hardly surprising, given that the overwhelming need was to restart production, convert a civilian economy to a wartime one and to ensure that the civilian population and militias were supplied with necessary goods. This, unsurprisingly enough, led to a situation of anarchist mutualism developing, with many collectives selling the product of their own labour on the market (in other words, a form of simple commodity production).

This led to some economic problems as there existed no framework of institutions between collectives to ensure efficient co-ordination of activity and so led to pointless competition between collectives (which led to even more problems). As there were initially no confederations of collectives nor mutual/communal banks this led to the inequalities that initially existed between collectives (due to the fact that the collectives took over rich and poor capitalist firms) and it made the many ad hoc attempts at mutual aid between collectives difficult and temporary.

Therefore, the collectives were (initially) a form of “*self-management straddling capitalism and socialism, which we maintain would not have occurred had the Revolution been able to extend itself fully under the direction of our syndicates.*” [Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 227–8] As economic and political development are closely related, the fact that the C.N.T. did not carry out the **political** aspect of the revolution meant that the revolution in the economy was doomed to failure. As Leval stresses, in “*the industrial collectives, especially in the large towns, matters proceeded differently as a consequence of contradictory factors and of opposition created by the co-existence of social currents emanating from different social classes.*” [Op. Cit., p. 227]

Given that the C.N.T. program of libertarian communism recognised that a fully co-operative society must be based upon production for use, C.N.T. militants fought against this system of mu-

tualism and for inter-workplace co-ordination. They managed to convince their fellow workers of the difficulties of mutualism by free debate and discussion within their unions and collectives.

Therefore, the degree of socialisation varied over time (as would be expected). Initially, after the initial defeat of Franco's forces, there was little formal co-ordination and organisation. The most important thing was to get production started again. However, the needs of co-ordination soon became obvious (as predicted in anarchist theory and the programme of the CNT). Gaston Leval gives the example of Hospitalet del Llobregat with regards to this process:

*“Local industries went through stages almost universally adopted in that revolution ... [I]n the first instance, **comites** nominated by the workers employed in them [were organised]. Production and sales continued in each one. But very soon it was clear that this situation gave rise to competition between the factories... creating rivalries which were incompatible with the socialist and libertarian outlook. So the CNT launched the watchword: ‘All industries must be ramified in the Syndicates, completely socialised, and the regime of solidarity which we have always advocated be established once and for all.*

*“The idea won support immediately” [Op. Cit., pp. 291–2]*

Another example was the woodworkers' union which a massive debate on socialisation and decided to do so (the shopworkers' union had a similar debate, but the majority of workers rejected socialisation). According to Ronald Fraser a *“union delegate would go round the small shops, point out to the workers that the conditions were unhealthy and dangerous, that the revolution was changing all this, and secure their agreement to close down and move to the union-built Double-X and the 33 EU.”* [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 222]

This process went on in many different unions and collectives and, unsurprisingly, the forms of co-ordination agreed to lead to different forms of organisation in different areas and industries, as would be expected in a free society. However, the two most important forms can be termed syndicalisation and confederalism (we will ignore the forms created by the collectivisation decree as these were not created by the workers themselves).

*“Syndicalisation”* (our term) meant that the C.N.T.'s industrial union ran the whole industry. This solution was tried by the woodworkers' union after extensive debate. One section of the union, *“dominated by the F.A.I. [the anarchist federation], maintained that anarchist self-management meant that the workers should set up and operate autonomous centres of production so as to avoid the threat of bureaucratisation.”* [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 222] However, those in favour of syndicalisation won the day and production was organised in the hands of the union, with administration posts and delegate meetings elected by the rank and file.

However, the *“major failure ... (and which supported the original anarchist objection) was that the union became like a large firm ... [and its] structure grew increasingly rigid.”* According to one militant, *“From the outside it began to look like an American or German trust”* and the workers found it difficult to secure any changes and *“felt they weren't particularly involved in decision making.”*

In the end, the major difference between the union-run industry and a capitalist firm organisationally appeared to be that workers could vote for (and recall) the industry management at relatively regular General Assembly meetings. While a vast improvement on capitalism, it is

hardly the best example of participatory self-management in action although the economic problems caused by the Civil War and Stalinist led counter-revolution obviously would have had an effect on the internal structure of any industry and so we cannot say that the form of organisation created was totally responsible for any marginalisation that took place.

The other important form of co-operation was what we will term “*confederalisation*.” This form of co-operation was practised by the Badalona textile industry (and had been defeated in the woodworkers’ union). It was based upon each workplace being run by its elected management, sold its own production, got its own orders and received the proceeds. However, everything each mill did was reported to the union which charted progress and kept statistics. If the union felt that a particular factory was not acting in the best interests of the industry as a whole, it was informed and asked to change course. According to one militant, the union “*acted more as a socialist control of collectivised industry than as a direct hierarchised executive*” [Op. Cit., p. 229]

This system ensured that the “*dangers of the big ‘union trust’ as of the atomised collective were avoided*” [Fraser, Op. Cit., p. 229] as well as maximising decentralisation of power. Unlike the syndicalisation experiment in the woodworkers’ industry, this scheme was based on horizontal links between workplaces (via the C.N.T. union) and allowed a maximum of self-management and mutual aid. The ideas of an anarchist economy sketched in section I.3 reflects in many ways the actual experiments in self-management which occurred during the Spanish Revolution.

Therefore, the industrial collectives co-ordinated their activity in many ways, with varying degrees of direct democracy and success. As would be expected, mistakes were made and different solutions found. When reading this section of the FAQ its important to remember that an anarchist society can hardly be produced “*overnight*” and so it is hardly surprising that the workers of the C.N.T. faced numerous problems and had to develop their self-management experiment as objective conditions allowed them to.

Unfortunately, thanks to fascist aggression and Communist Party back-stabbing, the experiment did not last long enough to fully answer all the questions we have about the viability of the solutions they tried. Given the time, however, we are sure they would have solved the problems they faced.

### **I.8.5 How were the Spanish agricultural co-operatives organised and co-ordinated?**

Jose Peirats describes collectivisation among the peasantry as follows:

*“The expropriated lands were turned over to the peasant syndicates, and it was these syndicates that organised the first collectives. Generally the holdings of small property owners were respected, always on the condition that only they or their families would work the land, without employing wage labour. In areas like Catalonia, where the tradition of petty peasant ownership prevailed, the land holdings were scattered. There were no great estates. Many of these peasants, together with the C.N.T., organised collectives, pooling their land, animals, tools, chickens, grain, fertiliser, and even their harvested crops.*”

*“Privately owned farms located in the midst of collectives interfered with efficient cultivation by splitting up the collectives into disconnected parcels. To induce owners to move, they were given more or even better land located on the perimeter of the collective.*

*“The collectivist who had nothing to contribute to the collective was admitted with the same rights and the same duties as the others. In some collectives, those joining had to contribute their money (Gironella in Catalonia, Lagunarrota in Aragon, and Cervera del Maestra in Valencia).” [cited **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 112]*

Peirats also notes that in conducting their internal affairs, all the collectives scrupulously and zealously observed democratic procedures. For example, *“Hospitalet de Llobregat held regular general membership meetings every three months to review production and attend to new business. The administrative council, and all other committees, submitted full reports on all matters. The meeting approved, disapproved, made corrections, issued instructions, etc.” [Ibid., p. 119]*

Dolgoft observes that *“supreme power was vested in, and actually exercised by, the membership in general assemblies, and all power derived from, and flowed back to, the grass roots organisations of the people”* and quotes Gaston Leval:

*“Regular general membership meetings were convoked weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly... and these meetings were completely free of the tensions and recriminations which inevitably emerge when the power of decisions is vested in a few individuals — even if democratically elected. The Assemblies were open for everyone to participate in the proceedings. Democracy embraced all social life. In most cases, even the ‘individualists’ who were not members of the collective could participate in the discussions, and they were listened to by the collectivists.” [Op. Cit., p 119f]*

It was in these face-to-face assemblies that decisions upon the distribution of resources were decided both within and without the collective. Here, when considering the importance of mutual aid, appeals were made to an individual’s sense of empathy. As one activist remembers:

*“There were, of course, those who didn’t want to share and who said that each collective should take care of itself. But they were usually convinced in the assemblies. We would try to speak to them in terms they understood. We’d ask, ‘Did you think it was fair when the cacique [local boss] let people starve if there wasn’t enough work?’ and they said, ‘Of course not.’ They would eventually come around. Don’t forget, there were three hundred thousand collectivists [in Aragon], but only ten thousand of us had been members of the C.N.T.. We had a lot of educating to do.” [Felix Carrasquer, quoted by Martha A. Ackelsberg in **Free Women of Spain**, p. 79]*

In addition, regional federations of collectives were formed in many areas of Spain (for example, in Aragon and the Levant). The federations were created at congresses to which the collectives in an area sent delegates. These congresses agreed a series of general rules about how the federation would operate and what commitments the affiliated collectives would have to each other. The congress elected an administration council, which took responsibility for implementing agreed policy.

These federations had many tasks. They ensured the distribution of surplus produce to the front line and to the cities, cutting out middlemen and ensuring the end of exploitation. They

also arranged for exchanges between collectives to take place. In addition, the federations allowed the individual collectives to pool resources together in order to improve the infrastructure of the area (building roads, canals, hospitals and so on) and invest in means of production which no one collective could afford.

In this way individual collectives pooled their resources, increased and improved the means of production they had access to as well as improving the social infrastructure of their regions. All this, combined with an increase of consumption at the point of production and the feeding of militia men and women fighting the fascists at the front.

Rural collectivisations allowed the potential creative energy that existed among the rural workers and peasants to be unleashed, an energy that had been wasted under private property. The popular assemblies allowed community problems and improvements to be identified and solved directly, drawing upon the ideas and experiences of everyone and enriched by discussion and debate. This enabled rural Spain to be transformed from one marked by poverty and fear, into one of hope and experimentation (see the next section for a few examples of this experimentation).

Therefore self-management in collectives combined with co-operation in rural federations allowed an improvement in quality of rural life. From a purely economic viewpoint, production increased and as Benjamin Martin summarises, “[t]hough it is impossible to generalise about the rural land take-overs, there is little doubt that the quality of life for most peasants who participated in co-operatives and collectives notably improved.” [The Agony of Modernisation, p. 394]

More importantly, however, this improvement in the quality of life included an increase in freedom as well as in consumption. To requote the member of the Beceite collective in Aragon we cited in section A.5.6, “it was marvellous... to live in a collective, a free society where one could say what one thought, where if the village committee seemed unsatisfactory one could say. The committee took no big decisions without calling the whole village together in a general assembly. All this was wonderful.” [Ronald Fraser, Blood of Spain, p. 288]

### I.8.6 What did the agricultural collectives accomplish?

Here are a few examples cited by Jose Peirats:

*“In Montblanc the collective dug up the old useless vines and planted new vineyards. The land, improved by modern cultivation with tractors, yielded much bigger and better crops... Many Aragon collectives built new roads and repaired old ones, installed modern flour mills, and processed agricultural and animal waste into useful industrial products. Many of these improvements were first initiated by the collectives. Some villages, like Calanda, built parks and baths. Almost all collectives established libraries, schools, and cultural centres.”* [cited **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 116]

Gaston Leval points out that “the Peasant Federation of Levant ... produced more than half of the total orange crop in Spain: almost four million kilos (1 kilo equals about 2 and one-fourth pounds). It then transported and sold through its own commercial organisation (no middlemen) more than 70% of the crop. (The Federations’s commercial organisation included its own warehouses, trucks, and boats. Early in 1938 the export section established its own agencies in France: Marseilles, Perpignan, bordeaux, Cherbourg, and Paris.) Out of a total of 47,000 hectares in all Spain devoted to rice

production, the collective in the Province of Valencia cultivated 30,000 hectares.” [cited in *Ibid.*, p. 124]

To quote Peirats again:

*“Preoccupation with cultural and pedagogical innovations was an event without precedent in rural Spain. The Amposta collectivists organised classes for semi-literates, kindergartens, and even a school of arts and professions. The Seros schools were free to all neighbours, collectivists or not. Grau installed a school named after its most illustrious citizen, Joaquin Costa. The Calanda collective (pop. only 4,500) schooled 1,233 children. The best students were sent to the Lyceum in Caspe, with all expenses paid by the collective. The Alcoriza (pop. 4,000) school was attended by 600 children. Many of the schools were installed in abandoned convents. In Granadella (pop. 2,000), classes were conducted in the abandoned barracks of the Civil Guards. Graus organised a print library and a school of arts and professions, attended by 60 pupils. The same building housed a school of fine arts and high grade museum. In some villages a cinema was installed for the first time. The Penalba cinema was installed in a church. Viladecana built an experimental agricultural laboratory.*

*“The collectives voluntarily contributed enormous stocks of provisions and other supplies to the fighting troops. Utiel sent 1,490 litres of oil and 300 bushels of potatoes to the Madrid front (in addition to huge stocks of beans, rice, buckwheat, etc.). Porales de Tujana sent great quantities of bread, oil, flour, and potatoes to the front, and eggs, meat, and milk to the military hospital.*

*“The efforts of the collectives take on added significance when we take into account that their youngest and most vigorous workers were fighting in the trenches. 200 members of the little collective of Vilaboi were at the front; from Viledecans, 60; Amposta, 300; and Calande, 500.” [Ibid., pp. 116–120]*

Peirats sums up the accomplishments of the agricultural collectives as follows:

*“In distribution the collectives’ co-operatives eliminated middlemen, small merchants, wholesalers, and profiteers, thus greatly reducing consumer prices. The collectives eliminated most of the parasitic elements from rural life, and would have wiped them out altogether if they were not protected by corrupt officials and by the political parties. Non-collectivised areas benefited indirectly from the lower prices as well as from free services often rendered by the collectives (laundries, cinemas, schools, barber and beauty parlours, etc.).” [Ibid., p114]*

Leval emphasises the following achievements (among others):

*“In the agrarian collectives solidarity was practised to the greatest degree. Not only was every person assured of the necessities, but the district federations increasingly adopted the principle of mutual aid on an inter-collective scale. For this purpose they created common reserves to help out villages less favoured by nature. In Castile special institutions for this purpose were created. In industry this practice seems to have begun in Hospitalet, on the Catalan railways, and was applied later in Alcoy. Had the political compromise*

*not impeded open socialisation, the practices of mutual aid would have been much more generalised... A conquest of enormous importance was the right of women to livelihood, regardless of occupation or function. In about half of the agrarian collectives, the women received the same wages as men; in the rest the women received less, apparently on the principle that they rarely live alone... In all the agrarian collectives of Aragon, Catalonia, Levant, Castile, Andalusia, and Estremadura, the workers formed groups to divide the labour or the land; usually they were assigned to definite areas. Delegates elected by the work groups met with the collective's delegate for agriculture to plan out the work. This typical organisation arose quite spontaneously, by local initiative... In addition ... the collective as a whole met in weekly, bi-weekly or monthly assembly ... The assembly reviewed the activities of the councillors it named, and discussed special cases and unforeseen problems. All inhabitants — men and women, producers and non-producers — took part in the discussion and decisions ... In land cultivation the most significant advances were: the rapidly increased use of machinery and irrigation; greater diversification; and forestation. In stock raising: the selection and multiplication of breeds; the adaptation of breeds to local conditions; and large-scale construction of collective stock barns.” [Ibid., pp. 166–167]*

Martha A. Ackelsberg sums up the experience well:

*“The achievements of these collectives were extensive. In many areas they maintained, if not increased, agricultural production [not forgetting that many young men were at the front line], often introducing new patterns of cultivation and fertilisation... collectivists built chicken coups, barns, and other facilities for the care and feeding of the community's animals. Federations of collectives co-ordinated the construction of roads, schools, bridges, canals and dams. Some of these remain to this day as lasting contributions of the collectives to the infrastructure of rural Spain.” [The Free Women of Spain, p. 79]*

She also points to inter-collective solidarity, noting that the “collectivists also arranged for the transfer of surplus produce from wealthier collectives to those experiencing shortages.” [Ibid.]

Therefore, as well as significant economic achievements, the collectives ensured social and political ones too. Solidarity was practised and previously marginalised people took direct and full management of the affairs of their communities, transforming them to meet their own needs and desires.

### **I.8.7 I've heard that the rural collectives were created by force. Is this true?**

No, it is not. The myth that the rural collectives were created by “terror,” organised and carried out by the anarchist militia, was started by the Stalinists of the Spanish Communist Party. More recently, some right-wing Libertarians have warmed up and repeated these Stalinist fabrications. Anarchists have been disproving these allegations since 1936 and it is worthwhile to do so again here.

As Vernon Richards notes, “[h]owever discredited Stalinism may appear to be today the fact remains that the Stalinist lies and interpretation of the Spanish Civil War still prevail, presumably



*because it suits the political prejudices of those historians who are currently interpreting it.*" [Introduction to Gaston Leval's **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 11] Here we shall present evidence to refute claims that the rural collectives were created by force.

Firstly, we should point out that rural collectives were created in many different areas of Spain, such as the Levant (900 collectives), Castile (300) and Estremadura (30), where the anarchist militia did not exist. In Catalonia, for example, the C.N.T. militia passed through many villages on its way to Aragon and only around 40 collectives were created unlike the 450 in Aragon. In other words, the rural collectivisation process occurred independently of the existence of anarchist troops, with the majority of the 1,700 rural collectives created in areas without a predominance of anarchist troops.

One historian, Ronald Fraser, seems to imply that the Aragon Collectives were imposed upon the Aragon population. As he puts it the "*collectivisation, carried out under the general cover, if not necessarily the direct agency, of C.N.T. militia columns, represented a revolutionary minority's attempt to control not only production but consumption for egalitarian purposes and the needs of the war.*" [**Blood of Spain**, p. 370] Notice that he does not suggest that the anarchist militia actually **imposed** the collectives, a claim for which there is little or no evidence. Moreover, Fraser presents a somewhat contradictory narrative to the facts he presents. On the one hand, he talks of a policy of "*obligatory*" collectivism imposed on the peasants by the C.N.T., while on the other hand he presents extensive evidence that the collectives did not have a 100% membership rate. How can collectivisation be obligatory if people remain outside the collectives? Similarly, he talks of how **some** C.N.T. militia leaders justified forced collectivisation in terms of the war effort while acknowledging the official C.N.T. policy of opposing forced collectivisation, an opposition expressed in practice as only around 5% of the collectives were total (and expressed in his own book as collectivists interviewed continually note that people remained outside their collectives!).

Thus Fraser's attempts to paint the Aragon collectives as a form of "*war communism*" imposed upon the population by the C.N.T. and obligatory for all fails to co-incidence with the evidence he presents.

Earlier he states that "[t]here was no need to dragoon them [the peasants] at pistol point [into collectives]: the coercive climate, in which 'fascists' were being shot, was sufficient. 'Spontaneous' and 'forced' collectives existed, as did willing and unwilling collectivists within them." [Op. Cit., p.349] Therefore, his suggestion that the Aragon collectives were imposed upon the rural population is based upon the insight that there was a "*coercive climate*" in Aragon at the time. Of course a civil war against fascism would produce a "*coercive climate*," particularly at the front line, and so the C.N.T. can hardly be blamed for that. In addition, in a life and death struggle against fascism, in which the fascists were systematically murdering vast numbers of anarchists, socialists and republicans in the areas under their control, it is hardly surprising that some anarchist troops took the law into their own hands and murdered some of those who supported and would help the fascists. Given what was going on in fascist Spain, and the experience of fascism in Germany and Italy, the C.N.T. militia knew exactly what would happen to them and their friends and family if they lost.

The question does arise, however, of whether the climate was made so coercive by the war and the nearness of the anarchist militia that individual choice was impossible.

The facts speak for themselves — rural collectivisation in Aragon embraced more than 70% of the population in the area saved from fascism. Around 30% of the population felt safe enough not to join a collective, a sizeable percentage.

If the collectives had been created by anarchist terror or force, we would expect a figure of 100% membership in the collectives. This was not the case, indicating the basically voluntary nature of the experiment (we should point out that other figures suggest a lower number of collectivists which makes the forced collectivisation argument even less likely). Historian Antony Beevor (while noting that there “*had undoubtedly been pressure, and no doubt force was used on some occasions in the fervour after the rising*”) just stated the obvious when he wrote that “*the very fact that every village was a mixture of collectivists and individualists shows that peasants had not been forced into communal farming at the point of a gun.*” [The Spanish Civil War, p. 206] In addition, if the C.N.T. militia had forced peasants into collectives we would expect the membership of the collectives to peak almost overnight, not grow slowly over time. However, this is what happened:

*“At the regional congress of collectives, held at Caspe in mid-February 1937, nearly 80 000 collectivists were represented from ‘almost all the villages of the region.’ This, however, was but a beginning. By the end of April the number of collectivists had risen to 140 000; by the end of the first week of May to 180 000; and by the end of June to 300 000.”* [Graham Kelsey, “Anarchism in Aragon,” pp. 60–82, **Spain in Conflict 1931–1939**, Martin Blinkhorn (ed.), p. 61]

If the collectives had been created by force, then their membership would have been 300 000 in February, 1937, not increasing steadily to reach that number four months later. Neither can it be claimed that the increase was due to new villages being collectivised, as almost all villages had sent delegates in February. This indicates that many peasants joined the collectives because of the advantages associated with common labour, the increased resources it placed at their hands and the fact that the surplus wealth which had in the previous system been monopolised by the few was used instead to raise the standard of living of the entire community.

The voluntary nature of the collectives is again emphasised by the number of collectives which allowed smallholders to remain outside. According to evidence Fraser presents (on page 366), an F.A.I. schoolteacher is quoted as saying that the forcing of smallholders into the collective “*wasn’t a widespread problem, because there weren’t more than twenty or so villages where collectivisation was total and no one was allowed to remain outside...*” Instead of forcing the minority in a village to agree with the wishes of the majority, the vast majority (95%) of Aragon collectives stuck to their libertarian principles and allowed those who did not wish to join to remain outside.

So, only around 20 were “*total*” collectives (out of 450) and around 30% of the population felt safe enough **not** to join. In other words, in the vast majority of collectives those joining could see that those who did not were safe. These figures should not be discounted, as they give an indication of the basically spontaneous and voluntary nature of the movement. As was the composition of the new municipal councils created after July 19<sup>th</sup>. As Graham Kesley notes, “[w]hat is immediately noticeable from the results is that although the region has often been branded as one controlled by anarchists to the total exclusion of all other forces, the C.N.T. was far from enjoying the degree of absolute domination often implied and inferred.” [Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State, p. 198]

In his account of the rural revolution, Burnett Bolloten notes that it “*embraced more than 70 percent of the population*” in liberated Aragon and that “*many of the 450 collectives of the region were largely voluntary*” although “*it must be emphasised that this singular development was in some measure due to the presence of militiamen from the neighbouring region of Catalonia, the immense majority of whom were members of the C.N.T. and F.A.I.*” [The Spanish Civil War, p. 74]

As Gaston Leval points out, *“it is true that the presence of these forces ... favoured indirectly these constructive achievements by preventing active resistance by the supporters of the bourgeois republic and of fascism.”* [Collectives in the Spanish Revolution, p. 90]

In other words, the presence of the militia changed the balance of class forces in Aragon by destroying the capitalist state (i.e. the local bosses — caciques — could not get state aid to protect their property) and many landless workers took over the land. The presence of the militia ensured that land could be taken over by destroying the capitalist *“monopoly of force”* that existed before the revolution (the power of which will be highlighted below) and so the C.N.T. militia allowed the possibility of experimentation by the Aragonese population.

This class war in the countryside is reflected by Bollothen’s statement that *“[if] the individual farmer viewed with dismay the swift and widespread collectivisation of agriculture, the farm workers of the Anarchosindicalist C.N.T. and the Socialist UGT saw it as the commencement of a new era.”* [The Spanish Civil War, p. 63] Both were mass organisations and supported collectivisation.

Therefore, anarchist militia allowed the rural working class to abolish the artificial scarcity of land created by private property (and enforced by the state). The rural bosses obviously viewed with horror the possibility that they could not exploit day workers’ labour. As Bollothen points out *“the collective system of agriculture threaten[ed] to drain the rural labour market of wage workers.”* [Op. Cit., p. 62] Little wonder the richer peasants and landowners hated the collectives.

Bollothen also quotes a report on the district of Valderrobes which indicates popular support for the collectives:

*“Collectivisation was nevertheless opposed by opponents on the right and adversaries on the left. If the eternally idle who have been expropriated had been asked what they thought of collectivisation, some would have replied that it was robbery and others a dictatorship. But, for the elderly, the day workers, the tenant farmers and small proprietors who had always been under the thumb of the big landowners and heartless usurers, it appeared as salvation”* [Op. Cit., p. 71]

However, most historians ignore the differences in class that existed in the countryside. They ignore it and explain the rise in collectives in Aragon (and ignore those elsewhere) as the result of the C.N.T. militia. Fraser, for example, states that *“[v]ery rapidly collectives ... began to spring up. It did not happen on instructions from the C.N.T. leadership — no more than had the [industrial] collectives in Barcelona. Here, as there, the initiative came from C.N.T. militants; here, as there, the ‘climate’ for social revolution in the rearguard was created by C.N.T. armed strength: the anarcho-syndicalists’ domination of the streets of Barcelona was re-enacted in Aragon as the C.N.T. militia columns, manned mainly by Catalan anarcho-syndicalist workers, poured in. Where a nucleus of anarcho-syndicalists existed in a village, it seized the moment to carry out the long-awaited revolution and collectivised spontaneously. Where there was none, villagers could find themselves under considerable pressure from the militias to collectivise...”* [Op. Cit., p. 347]

In other words, he implies that the revolution was mostly imported into Aragon from Catalonia. However, the majority of C.N.T. column leaders were opposed to the setting up of the Council of Aragon (a confederation for the collectives) [Fraser, Op. Cit., p. 350]. Hardly an example of Catalan C.N.T. imposed social revolution. The evidence we have suggests that the Aragon C.N.T. was a widespread and popular organisation, suggesting that the idea that the collectives were imported into Aragon by the Catalan C.N.T. is simply false.

Fraser states that in “some [of the Aragonese villages] there was a flourishing C.N.T., in others the UGT was strongest, and in only too many there was no unionisation at all.” [Blood of Spain, p. 348] The question arises of how extensive was that strength. The evidence we have suggests that it was extensive, strong and growing, so indicating that rural Aragon was not without a C.N.T. base, a base that makes the suggestion of imposed collectives a false one.

Murray Bookchin summarises the strength of the C.N.T. in rural Aragon as follows:

*“The authentic peasant base of the C.N.T. [by the 1930s] now lay in Aragon ...[C.N.T. growth in Zaragoza] provided a springboard for a highly effective libertarian agitation in lower Aragon, particularly among the impoverished labourers and debt-ridden peasantry of the dry steppes region.” [The Spanish Anarchists, p. 203]*

Graham Kelsey, in his social history of the C.N.T. in Aragon between 1930 and 1937, provides the necessary evidence to more than back Bookchin’s claim of C.N.T. growth. Kelsey points out that as well as the “spread of libertarian groups and the increasing consciousness among C.N.T. members of libertarian theories ...contribu[ting] to the growth of the anarchosyndicalist movement in Aragon” the existence of “agrarian unrest” also played an important role in that growth [Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State, pp. 80–81]. This all lead to the “revitalisation of the C.N.T. network in Aragon” [p. 82] and so by 1936, the C.N.T. had built upon the “foundations laid in 1933... [and] had finally succeeded in translating the very great strength of the urban trade-union organisation in Zaragoza into a regional network of considerable extent.” [Op. Cit., p. 134]

Kelsey and other historians note the long history of anarchism in Aragon, dating back to the late 1860s. However, before the 1910s there had been little gains in rural Aragon by the C.N.T. due to the power of local bosses (called **caciques**):

*“Local landowners and small industrialists, the **caciques** of provincial Aragon, made every effort to enforce the closure of these first rural anarchosyndicalist cells [created after 1915]. By the time of the first rural congress of the Aragonese C.N.T. confederation in the summer of 1923, much of the progress achieved through the organisation’s considerable propaganda efforts had been countered by repression elsewhere.” [Graham Kelsey, “Anarchism in Aragon,” p. 62]*

A C.N.T. activist indicates the power of these bosses and how difficult it was to be a union member in Aragon:

*“Repression is not the same in the large cities as it is in the villages where everyone knows everybody else and where the Civil Guards are immediately notified of a comrade’s slightest movement. Neither friends nor relatives are spared. All those who do not serve the state’s repressive forces unconditionally are pursued, persecuted and on occasions beaten up.” [cited by Kelsey, Op. Cit., p. 74]*

However, while there were some successes in organising rural unions, even in 1931 “propaganda campaigns which led to the establishment of scores of village trade-union cells, were followed by a counter-offensive from village **caciques** which forced them to close.” [Ibid. p. 67] But even in the face of this repression the C.N.T. grew and “from the end of 1932... [there was] a successful

*expansion of the anarchosindicalist movement into several parts of the region where previously it had never penetrated.” [Kesley, **Anarchosindicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State**, p. 185]*

This growth was built upon in 1936, with increased rural activism which had slowly eroded the power of the **caciques** (which in part explains their support for the fascist coup). After the election of the Popular Front, years of anarchist propaganda and organisation paid off with a massive increase in rural membership in the C.N.T.:

*“The dramatic growth in rural anarcho-sindicalist support in the six weeks since the general election was emphasised in the [Aragon C.N.T.’s April] congress’s agenda... the congress directed its attention to rural problems ... [and agreed a programme which was] exactly what was to happen four months later in liberated Aragon.” [Kesley, “Anarchism in Aragon”, p. 76]*

In the aftermath of a regional congress, held in Zaragoza at the start of April, a series of intensive propaganda campaigns was organised through each of the provinces of the regional confederation. Many meetings were held in villages which had never before heard anarcho-sindicalist propaganda. This was very successful and by the beginning of June, 1936, the number of Aragon unions had topped 400, compared to only 278 one month earlier (an increase of over 40% in 4 weeks). [*Ibid.*, pp. 75–76]

This increase in union membership reflects increased social struggle by the Aragonese working population and their attempts to improve their standard of living, which was very low for most of the population. A journalist from the conservative-Catholic **Heraldo de Aragon** visited lower Aragon in the summer of 1935 and noted “[t]he hunger in many homes, where the men are not working, is beginning to encourage the youth to subscribe to misleading teachings.” [cited by Kesley, *Ibid.*, p. 74]

Little wonder, then, the growth in C.N.T. membership and social struggle Kesley indicates:

*“Evidence of a different kind was also available that militant trade unionism in Aragon was on the increase. In the five months between mid-February and mid-July 1936 the province of Zaragoza experienced over seventy strikes, more than had previously been recorded in any entire year, and things were clearly no different in the other two provinces ... the great majority of these strikes were occurring in provincial towns and villages. Strikes racked the provinces and in at least three instances were actually transformed into general strikes.” [*Ibid.*, p. 76]*

Therefore, in the spring and summer of 1936, we see a massive growth in C.N.T. membership which reflects growing militant struggle by the urban and rural population of Aragon. Years of C.N.T. propaganda and organising had ensured this growth in C.N.T. influence, a growth which is also reflected in the creation of collectives in liberated Aragon during the revolution. Therefore, the construction of a collectivised society was founded directly upon the emergence, during the five years of the Second Republic, of a mass trade-union movement infused by libertarian, anarchist principles. These collectives were constructed in accordance with the programme agreed at the Aragon C.N.T. conference of April 1936 which reflected the wishes of the rural membership of the unions within Aragon (and due to the rapid growth of the C.N.T. afterwards obviously reflected popular feelings in the area).

In the words of Graham Kesley, “*libertarian dominance in post-insurrection Aragon itself reflected the predominance that anarchists had secured before the war; by the summer of 1936 the C.N.T. had succeeded in establishing throughout Aragon a mass trade-union movement of strictly libertarian orientation, upon which widespread and well-supported network the extensive collective experiment was to be founded.*” [Ibid., p. 61]

Additional evidence that supports a high level of C.N.T. support in rural Aragon can be provided by the fact that it was Aragon that was the centre of the December 1933 insurrection organised by the C.N.T. As Bookchin notes, “*only Aragon rose on any significant scale, particularly Saragossa ... many of the villages declared libertarian communism and perhaps the heaviest fighting took place between the vineyard workers in Rioja and the authorities*” [M. Bookchin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 238]

It is unlikely for the C.N.T. to organise an insurrection in an area within which it had little support or influence. According to Kesley’s in-depth social history of Aragon, “*it was precisely those areas which had most important in December 1933 ... which were now [in 1936], in seeking to create a new pattern of economic and social organisation, to form the basis of libertarian Aragon.*” [G. Kesley, *Anarchosyndicalism, Libertarian Communism and the State*, p. 161] After the revolt, thousands of workers were jailed, with the authorities having to re-open closed prisons and turn at least one disused monastery into a jail due to the numbers arrested.

Therefore, it can be seen that the majority of collectives in Aragon were the product of C.N.T. (and UGT) influenced workers taking the opportunity to create a new form of social life, a form marked by its voluntary and directly democratic nature. Far from being unknown in rural Aragon, the C.N.T. was well established and growing at a fast rate — “*Spreading out from its urban base... the C.N.T., first in 1933 and then more extensively in 1936, succeeded in converting an essentially urban organisation into a truly regional confederation.*” [Ibid., p. 184]

Therefore the evidence suggests that historians like Fraser are wrong to imply that the Aragon collectives were created by the C.N.T. militia and enforced upon a unwilling population. The Aragon collectives were the natural result of years of anarchist activity within rural Aragon and directly related to the massive growth in the C.N.T. between 1930 and 1936. Thus Kesley is correct to state that:

*“Libertarian communism and agrarian collectivisation were not economic terms or social principles enforced upon a hostile population by special teams of urban anarchosyndicalists ...”* [G. Kesley, *Op. Cit.*, p. 161]

This is not to suggest that there were **no** examples of people joining collectives involuntarily because of the “*coercive climate*” of the front line. And, of course, there were villages which did not have a C.N.T. union within them before the war and so created a collective because of the existence of the C.N.T. militia. But these can be considered as exceptions to the rule.

Moreover, the way the C.N.T. handled such a situation is noteworthy. Fraser indicates such a situation in the village of Alloza. In the autumn of 1936, representatives of the C.N.T. district committee had come to suggest that the villagers collectivise (we would like to stress here that the C.N.T. militia which had passed through the village had made no attempt to create a collective there).

A village assembly was called and the C.N.T. explained their ideas and suggested how to organise the collective. However, who would join and how the villagers would organise the collective

was left totally up to them (the C.N.T. representatives “stressed that no one was to be maltreated”). Within the collective, self-management was the rule.

According to one member, “[o]nce the work groups were established on a friendly basis and worked their own lands, everyone got on well enough,” he recalled. “There was no need for coercion, no need for discipline and punishment... A collective wasn’t a bad idea at all.” [Op. Cit., p. 360] This collective, like the vast majority, was voluntary and democratic — “I couldn’t oblige him to join; we weren’t living under a dictatorship.” [Op. Cit., p. 362] In other words, no force was used to create the collective and the collective was organised by local people directly.

Of course, as with any public good (to use economic jargon), all members of the community had to pay for the war effort and feed the militia. As Kesely notes, “[t]he military insurrection had come at a critical moment in the agricultural calendar. Throughout lower Aragon there were fields of grain ready for harvesting... At the assembly in Albalate de Cinca the opening clause of the agreed programme had required everyone in the district, independent farmers and collectivists alike, to contribute equally to the war effort, thereby emphasising one of the most important considerations in the period immediately following the rebellion.”

In addition, the collectives controlled the price of crops in order to ensure that speculation and inflation were controlled. However, these policies as with the equal duties of individualists and collectivists in the war effort were enforced upon the collectives by the war.

Lastly, in support of the popular nature of the rural collectives, we will indicate the effects of the suppression of the collectives in August 1937 by the Communists, namely the collapse of the rural economy. This sheds considerable light on the question of popular attitudes to the collectives.

In October, the Communist-controlled Regional Delegation of Agrarian Reform acknowledged that “in the majority of villages agricultural work was paralysed causing great harm to our agrarian economy.” This is confirmed by Jose Silva, a Communist Party member and general secretary of the Institute of Agrarian Reform, who commented that after Lister had attacked Aragon, “labour in the fields was suspended almost entirely, and a quarter of the land had not been prepared at the time for sowing.” At a meeting of the agrarian commission of the Aragonese Communist Party (October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1937), Jose Silva emphasised “the little incentive to work of the entire peasant population” and that the situation brought about by the dissolution of the collectives was “grave and critical.” [quoted by Bolloten, Op. Cit., p. 530]

Jose Peirats explains the reasons for this economic collapse as a result of popular boycott:

*“When it came time to prepare for the next harvest, smallholders could not by themselves work the property on which they had been installed [by the communists]. Dispossessed peasants, intransigent collectivists, refused to work in a system of private property, and were even less willing to rent out their labour.” [Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution, p. 258]*

If the collectives were unpopular, created by anarchist force, then why did the economy collapse after the suppression? If Lister had overturned a totalitarian anarchist regime, why did the peasants not reap the benefit of their toil? Could it be because the collectives were essentially a spontaneous Aragonese development and supported by most of the population there? This analysis is backed up by Yaacov Oved’s statement (from a paper submitted to the XII Congress of Sociology, Madrid, July 1990):

*“Those who were responsible for this policy [of “freeing” the Aragon Collectivists], were convinced that the farmers would greet it joyfully because they had been coerced into joining the collectives. But they were proven wrong. Except for the rich estate owners who were glad to get their land back, most of the members of the agricultural collectives objected and lacking all motivation they were reluctant to resume the same effort of in the agricultural work. This phenomenon was so widespread that the authorities and the communist minister of agriculture were forced to retreat from their hostile policy.” [Yaacov Oved, **Communismo Libertario and Communalism in the Spanish Collectivisations (1936–1939)**]*

Even in the face of Communist repression, most of the collectives kept going. This, if nothing else, proves that the collectives were popular institutions. As Yaacov Oved argues in relation to the breaking up of the collectives:

*“Through the widespread reluctance of collectivists to co-operate with the new policy it became evident that most members had voluntarily joined the collectives and as soon as the policy was changed a new wave of collectives was established. However, the wheel could not be turned back. An atmosphere of distrust prevailed between the collectives and the authorities and every initiative was curtailed” [Op. Cit.]*

Jose Peirats sums up the situation after the communist attack on the collectives and the legalisation of the collectives as follows:

*“It is very possible that this second phase of collectivisation better reflects the sincere convictions of the members. They had undergone a sever test and those who had withstood it were proven collectivists. Yet it would be facile to label as anti-collectivists those who abandoned the collectives in this second phase. Fear, official coercion and insecurity weighed heavily in the decisions of much of the Aragonese peasantry.” [Op. Cit., p. 258]*

While the collectives had existed, there was a 20% increase in production (and this is compared to the pre-war harvest which had been “a good crop.” [Fraser, p. 370]); after the destruction of the collectives, the economy collapsed. Hardly the result that would be expected if the collectives were forced upon an unwilling peasantry. The forced collectivisation by Stalin in Russia resulted in a famine. Only the victory of fascism made it possible to restore the so-called “*natural order*” of capitalist property in the Spanish countryside. The same land-owners who welcomed the Communist repression of the collectives also, we are sure, welcomed the fascists who ensured a lasting victory of property over liberty.

So, overall, the evidence suggests that the Aragon collectives, like their counterparts in the Levante, Catalonia and so on, were **popular** organisations, created by and for the rural population and, essentially, an expression of a spontaneous and popular social revolution. Claims that the anarchist militia created them by force of arms are **false**. While acts of violence **did** occur and some acts of coercion **did** take place (against C.N.T. policy, we may add) these are the exceptions to the rule. Bolloten’s summary best fits the facts:



*“But in spite of the cleavages between doctrine and practice that plagued the Spanish Anarchists whenever they collided with the realities of power, it cannot be overemphasised that notwithstanding the many instances of coercion and violence, the revolution of July 1936 distinguished itself from all others by the generally spontaneous and far-reaching character of its collectivist movement and by its promise of moral and spiritual renewal. Nothing like this spontaneous movement had ever occurred before.” [Op. Cit., p. 78]*

### **I.8.8 But did the Spanish collectives innovate?**

Yes. In contradiction to the old capitalist claim that no one will innovate unless private property exists, the workers and peasants exhibited much more incentive and creativity under libertarian socialism than they had under the private enterprise system. This is apparent from Gaston Leval’s description of the results of collectivisation in Cargagente:

*“Carcagente is situated in the southern part of the province of Valencia. The climate of the region is particularly suited for the cultivation of oranges... All of the socialised land, without exception, is cultivated with infinite care. The orchards are thoroughly weeded. To assure that the trees will get all the nourishment needed, the peasants are incessantly cleaning the soil. ‘Before,’ they told me with pride, ‘all this belonged to the rich and was worked by miserably paid labourers. The land was neglected and the owners had to buy immense quantities of chemical fertilisers, although they could have gotten much better yields by cleaning the soil...’ With pride, they showed me trees that had been grafted to produce better fruit.*

*“In many places I observed plants growing in the shade of the orange trees. ‘What is this?’ I asked. I learned that the Levant peasants (famous for their ingenuity) have abundantly planted potatoes among the orange groves. The peasants demonstrate more intelligence than all the bureaucrats in the Ministry of Agriculture combined. They do more than just plant potatoes. Throughout the whole region of the Levant, wherever the soil is suitable, they grow crops. They take advantage of the four month [fallow period] in the rice fields. Had the Minister of Agriculture followed the example of these peasants throughout the Republican zone, the bread shortage problem would have been overcome in a few months.” [cited in Dolgoff, **Anarchist Collectives**, p. 153]*

This is just one from a multitude of examples presented in the accounts of both the industrial and rural collectives (for more see section C.2.3 in which we present more examples to refute that charge that “workers’ control would stifle innovation” and I.8.6). The available evidence proves that the membership of the collectives showed a keen awareness of the importance of investment and innovation in order to increase production and to make work both lighter and more interesting **and** that the collectives allowed that awareness to be expressed freely. The Spanish collectives indicate that, given the chance, everyone will take an interest in their own affairs and express a desire to use their minds to improve their surroundings. In fact, capitalism distorts what innovation exists under hierarchy by channelling it purely in how to save money and maximise investor profit, ignoring other, more important, issues.

As Gaston Leval argues, self-management encouraged innovation:

*“The theoreticians and partisans of the liberal economy affirm that competition stimulates initiative and, consequently, the creative spirit and invention without which it remains dormant. Numerous observations made by the writer in the Collectives, factories and socialised workshops permit him to take quite the opposite view. For in a Collective, in a grouping where each individual is stimulated by the wish to be of service to his fellow beings research, the desire for technical perfection and so on are also stimulated. But they also have as a consequence that other individuals join those who were first to get together. Furthermore, when, in present society, an individualist inventor discovers something, it is used only by the capitalist or the individual employing him, whereas in the case of an inventor living in a community not only is his discovery taken up and developed by others, but is immediately applied for the common good. I am convinced that this superiority would very soon manifest itself in a socialised society.” [Collectives in the Spanish Revolution, p. 247]*

Therefore the actual experiences of self-management in Spain supports the points made in section I.4.11. Freed from hierarchy, individuals will creatively interact with the world to improve their circumstances. This is not due to “market forces” but because the human mind is an active agent and unless crushed by authority it can no more stop thinking and acting than the Earth stop revolving round the Sun. In addition, the Collectives indicate that self-management allows ideas to be enriched by discussion, as Bakunin argued:

*“The greatest intelligence would not be equal to a comprehension of the whole. Thence results... the necessity of the division and association of labour. I receive and I give — such is human life. Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination” [God and the State, p. 33]*

The experience of self-management proved Bakunin’s point that society is more intelligent than even the most intelligent individual simply because of the wealth of viewpoints, experience and thoughts contained there. Capitalism impoverishes individuals and society by its artificial boundaries and authority structures.

### **I.8.9 Why, if it was so good, did it not survive?**

Just because something is good does not mean that it will survive.

For example, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising against the Nazis failed but that does not mean that the uprising was a bad cause or that the Nazi regime was correct, far from it. Similarly, while the experiments in workers’ self-management and communal living undertaken across Republican Spain is one of the most important social experiments in a free society ever undertaken, this cannot change the fact that Franco’s forces and the Communists had access to more and better weapons.

Faced with the aggression and terrorism of Franco, and behind him the military might of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the treachery of the Communists, and the aloofness of the Western bourgeois “republics” (whose policy of “non-intervention” was strangely ignored when their citizens aided Franco) it is amazing the revolution lasted as long as it did.

This does not excuse the actions of the anarchists themselves. As is well known, the C.N.T. co-operated with the other anti-fascist parties and trade unions on the Republican side (see next section). This co-operation led to the C.N.T. joining the anti-fascist government and “anarchists” becoming ministers of state. This co-operation, more than anything, helped ensure the defeat of the revolution. While much of the blame can be placed at the door of the would-be “leaders,” who like most leaders started to think themselves irreplaceable and spokespersons for the organisations they were members of, it must be stated that the rank-and-file of the movement did little to stop them. Most of the militant anarchists were at the front-line (and so excluded from union and collective meetings) and so could not influence their fellow workers (it is no surprise that the “*Friends of Durruti*” group were mostly ex-militia men). However, it seems that the mirage of anti-fascist unity proved too much for the majority of C.N.T. members (see section I.8.12).

Some anarchists still maintain that the Spanish anarchist movement had no choice and that collaboration (while having unfortunate effects) was the only choice available. This view was defended by Sam Dolgoff and finds some support in the writings of Gaston Leval, August Souchy and many other anarchists. However, most anarchists today oppose collaboration and think it was a terrible mistake (at the time, this position was held by the majority of non-Spanish anarchists plus a large minority of the Spanish movement, becoming a majority as the implications of collaboration became clear). This viewpoint finds its best expression in Vernon Richard’s **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution** and, in part, in such works as **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution** by Jose Peirats and **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the F.A.I** by Juan Gomaz Casas as well as in a host of pamphlets and articles written by anarchists ever since.

So, regardless of how good a social system is, objective facts will overcome that experiment. Saturnino Carod (a leader of a C.N.T. Militia column at the Aragon Front) sums up the successes of the revolution as well as its objective limitations:

*“Always expecting to be stabbed in the back, always knowing that if we created problems, only the enemy across the lines would stand to gain. It was a tragedy for the anarcho-syndicalist movement; but it was a tragedy for something greater – the Spanish people. For it can never be forgotten that it was the working class and peasantry which, by demonstrating their ability to run industry and agriculture collectively, allowed the republic to continue the struggle for thirty-two months. It was they who created a war industry, who kept agricultural production increasing, who formed militias and later joined the army. Without their creative endeavour, the republic could not have fought the war ...”* [quoted by Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 394]

### **I.8.10 Why did the C.N.T. collaborate with the state?**

As is well known, in September 1936 the C.N.T. joined the Catalan government, followed by the central government in November. This followed on from the decision made on July the 21<sup>st</sup> to not speak of Libertarian Communism until after Franco had been defeated. In other words, to collaborate with other anti-fascist parties and unions in a common front against fascism.

This, initially, involved the C.N.T. agreeing to join a “*Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias*” proposed by the leader of the Catalan government, Louis Companys. This committee was made up of representatives of various anti-fascist parties and groups. From this it was only a matter of

time until the C.N.T joined an official government as no other means of co-ordinating activities existed (see section I.8.13).

The question must arise, **why** did the C.N.T decide to collaborate with the state, forsaking its principles and, in its own way, contribute to the counter-revolution and the loosing of the war. This is an important question. Indeed, it is one Marxists always throw up in arguments with anarchists or in anti-anarchist diatribes. Does the failure of the C.N.T to implement anarchism after July 19<sup>th</sup> mean that anarchist politics are flawed? Or, rather, does the experience of the C.N.T and F.A.I during the Spanish revolution indicate a failure of **anarchists** rather than of **anarchism**, a mistake made under difficult objective circumstances and one which anarchists have learnt from? Needless to say, anarchists argue that the latter answer is the correct one. In other words, as Vernon Richards argues, *“the basis of [his] criticism is not that anarchist ideas were proved to be unworkable by the Spanish experience, but that the Spanish anarchists and syndicalists failed to put their theories to the test, adopting instead the tactics of the enemy.”* [**Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, p. 14] The writers of this FAQ agree.

So, why **did** the CNT collaborate with the state during the Spanish Civil War? Simply put, rather than being the fault of anarchist theory (as Marxists like to claim), its roots can be discovered in the situation facing the Catalan anarchists on July 20<sup>th</sup>. The objective conditions facing the leading militants of the CNT and FAI influenced the decisions they took, decisions which they later justified by **mis-using** anarchist theory.

What was the situation facing the Catalan anarchists on July 20<sup>th</sup>? Simply put, it was an unknown situation. Jose Peirats quotes from the report made by the C.N.T to the **International Workers Association** as follows:

*“Levante was defenceless and uncertain ... We were in a minority in Madrid. The situation in Andalusia was unknown ... There was no information from the North, and we assumed the rest of Spain was in the hands of the fascists. The enemy was in Aragon, at the gates of Catalonia. The nervousness of foreign consular officials led to the presence of a great number of war ships around our ports.”* [quoted in **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 180]

He also notes that:

*“According to the report, the CNT was in absolute control of Catalonia in July 19, 1936, but its strength was less in Levante and still less in central Spain where the central government and the traditional parties were dominant. In the north of Spain the situation was confused. The CNT could have mounted an insurrection on its own ‘with probable success’ but such a takeover would have led to a struggle on three fronts: against the fascists, the government and foreign capitalism. In view of the difficulty of such an undertaking, collaboration with other antifascist groups was the only alternative.”* [Op. Cit., p. 179]

In the words of the CNT report itself:

*“The CNT showed a conscientious scrupulousness in the face of a difficult alternative: to destroy completely the State in Catalonia, to declare war against the Rebels [i.e. the fascists], the government, foreign capitalism, and thus assuming complete control of*

*Catalan society; or collaborating in the responsibilities of government with the other antifascist fractions.*” [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 2, p. 1156]

Moreover, as Gaston Leval later argued, given that the “*general preoccupation [of the majority of the population was] to defeat the fascists ... the anarchists would, if they came out against the state, provoke the antagonism ... of the majority of the people, who would accuse them of collaborating with Franco.*” Implementing an anarchist revolution would, in all likelihood, also “*result ... [in] the instant closing of the frontier and the blockade by sea by both fascists and the democratic countries. The supply of arms would be completely cut off, and the anarchists would rightly be held responsible for the disastrous consequences.*” [quoted in **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 52 and p. 53]

While the supporters of Lenin and Trotsky will constantly point out the objective circumstances in which their heroes made their decisions during the Russian Revolution, they rarely mention those facing the anarchists in Spain on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 1936. It seems hypocritical to point to the Russian Civil War as the explanation of all of Bolshevism’s crimes against the working class (indeed, humanity) while remaining silent on the forces facing the C.N.T.F.A.I at the start of the Spanish Civil War. The fact that if the CNT had decided to implement libertarian communism in Catalonia they would have to face the fascists (commanding the bulk of the Spanish army), the Republican government (commanding the rest) **plus** those sections in Catalonia which supported it is rarely mentioned. Moreover, when the decision to collaborate was made it was **immediately after the defeat of the army uprising in Barcelona** — the situation in the rest of the country was uncertain and when the social revolution was in its early days.

Stuart Christie indicates the dilemma facing the leadership of the CNT at the time:

*“The higher committees of the CNT-FAI-FI[?]L in Catalonia saw themselves caught on the horns of a dilemma: social revolution, fascism or bourgeois democracy. Either they committed themselves to the solutions offered by social revolution, regardless of the difficulties involved in fighting both fascism and international capitalism, or, through fear of fascism (or of the people), they sacrificed their anarchist principles and revolutionary objectives to bolster, to become, part of the bourgeois state ... Faced with an imperfect state of affairs and preferring defeat to a possibly Pyrrhic victory, the Catalan anarchist leadership renounced anarchism in the name of expediency and removed the social transformation of Spain from their agenda.*

*“But what the CNT-FAI leaders failed to grasp was that the decision whether or not to implement Libertarian Communism, was not theirs to make. Anarchism was not something which could be transformed from theory into practice by organisational decree ... [the] spontaneous defensive movement of 19 July had developed a political direct of its own.” [We, the Anarchists!, p. 99]*

Given that the pro-fascist army still controlled a third or more of Spain (including Aragon) and that the CNT was not the dominant force in the centre and north of Spain, it was decided that a war on three fronts would only aid Franco. Moreover, it was a distinct possibility that by introducing libertarian communism in Catalonia, Aragon and elsewhere, the workers’ militias and self-managed industries would have been starved of weapons, resources and credit. That isolation was a real problem can be seen from De Santillan’s later comments on why the CNT joined the government:

*“The Militias Committee guaranteed the supremacy of the people in arms ... but we were told and it was repeated to us endlessly that as long as we persisted in retaining it, that is, as long as we persisted in propping up the power of the people, weapons would not come to Catalonia, now would we be granted the foreign currency to obtain them from abroad, nor would we be supplied with the raw materials for our industry. And since losing the war meant losing everything and returning to a state like that prevailed in the Spain of Ferdinand VII, and in the conviction that the drive given by us and our people could not vanish completely from the new economic life, we quit the Militias Committee to join the Generalidad government.”* [quoted by Stuart Christie, *Op. Cit.*, p. 109]

It was decided to collaborate and reject the basic ideas of anarchism until the war was over. A terrible mistake, but one which can be understood given the circumstances in which it was made. This is not, we stress, to justify the decision but rather to explain it and place it in context. Ultimately, the **experience** of the Civil War saw a blockade of Republic by both “democratic” and fascist governments, the starving of the militias and self-managed collectives of resources and credit as well as a war on two fronts when the State felt strong enough to try and crush the CNT and the semi-revolution its members had started. Unfortunately, the anarchist movement did not have a crystal-ball with which to see the future. Ultimately, even faced with the danger of fascism, the liberals, the right-wing socialists and communists preferred to undermine the anti-fascist struggle by attacking the CNT. In this, history proved Durruti totally correct:

*“For us it is a matter of crushing Fascism once and for all. Yes, and in spite of the Government.*

*“No government in the world fights Fascism to the death. When the bourgeoisie sees power slipping from its grasp, it has recourse to Fascism to maintain itself. The liberal government of Spain could have rendered the fascist elements powerless long ago. Instead it compromised and dallied. Even now at this moment, there are men in this Government who want to go easy on the rebels. You can never tell, you know — he laughed — the present Government might yet need these rebellious forces to crush the workers’ movement ...*

*“We know what we want. To us it means nothing that there is a Soviet Union somewhere in the world, for the sake of whose peace and tranquillity the workers of Germany and China were sacrificed to Fascist barbarians by Stalin. We want revolution here in Spain, right now, not maybe after the next European war. We are giving Hitler and Mussolini far more worry to-day with our revolution than the whole Red Army of Russia. We are setting an example to the German and Italian working class on how to deal with fascism.*

*“I do not expect any help for a libertarian revolution from any Government in the world. Maybe the conflicting interests of the various imperialisms might have some influence in our struggle. That is quite possible ... But we expect no help, not even from our own Government, in the last analysis.”*

*“You will be sitting on a pile of ruins if you are victorious,”* said [the journalist] van Paasen.

Durruti answered: *“We have always lived in slums and holes in the wall. We will know how to accommodate ourselves for a time. For, you must not forget, we can also build. It is we the workers who built these palaces and cities here in Spain and in America and everywhere. We, the workers, can build others to take their place. And better ones! We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth; there is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world here, in our hearts. That world is growing this minute.”* [quoted by Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*, pp. 193-4f]

Isolation, the uneven support for a libertarian revolution across Spain and the dangers of fascism were real problems, but they do not excuse the libertarian movement for its mistakes. As we discuss in sections I.8.11 and I.8.13, the biggest of these mistakes was forgetting basic anarchist ideas and an anarchist approach to the problems facing the Spanish people. If these ideas had been applied in Spain, the outcome of the Civil War and Revolution would have been different.

In summary, while the decision to collaborate is one that can be understood (due to the circumstances under which it was made), it cannot be justified in terms of anarchist theory. Indeed, as we argue in the next section, attempts by the CNT leadership to justify the decision in terms of anarchist principles are not convincing and cannot be done without making a mockery of anarchism.

### **I.8.11 Was the decision to collaborate a product of anarchist theory, so showing anarchism is flawed?**

As we indicated in the last section, the decision to collaborate with the state was made by the CNT due to the fear of isolation. The possibility that by declaring libertarian communism, the CNT would have had to fight the Republican government and foreign interventions **as well as** the military coup influenced the decision reached by the militants of Catalan anarchism. They argued that such a situation would only aid Franco.

Rather than being the product of anarchist ideology, the decision was made in light of the immediate danger of fascism and the situation in other parts of the country. The fact is that the circumstances in which the decision to collaborate was made are rarely mentioned by Marxists, who prefer to quote CNT militant Garcia Oliver’s comment from over a year later:

*“The CNT and the FAI decided on collaboration and democracy, renouncing revolutionary totalitarianism which would lead to the strangulation of the revolution by the anarchist and Confederal dictatorship. We had to choose, between Libertarian Communism, which meant anarchist dictatorship, and democracy, which meant collaboration.”*  
[quoted by Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*, p. 34]

It is this quote, and quotes like it, which is ritualistically trotted out by Marxists when attacking anarchist ideas. They argue that they expose the bankruptcy of anarchist theory. So convinced of this, they rarely bother discussing the problems facing the CNT after the defeat of the military coup we discussed in the last section nor do they compare these quotes to the anarchist theory they claim inspired them. There are good reasons for this. Firstly, if they presented the objective

circumstances the CNT found itself it then their readers may see that the decision, while wrong, is understandable and had nothing to do with anarchist theory. Secondly, by comparing these quotes to anarchist theory they would soon see how at odds they are with it. Indeed, they invoke anarchism to justify conclusions the exact opposite of that theory.

So what can be made of Garcia Oliver's argument?

As Abel Paz notes, “[i]t is clear that the explanations given ... were designed for their political effect, hiding the atmosphere in which these decisions were taken. These declarations were made a year later when the CNT were already far removed from their original positions It is also the period when they had become involved in the policy of collaboration which lead taking part in the Central Government. But in a certain way they shed light on the unknown factors which weighted so heavily on these who took part in the historic Plenum.” [Durruti: *The People Armed*, p. 215]

For example, when the decision was made, the revolution had not started yet. The street fighting had just ended and the Plenum decided “*not to speak about Libertarian Communism as long as part of Spain was in the hands of the fascists.*” [Mariano R. Vesquez, quoted by Paz, *Op. Cit.*, p.214] The revolution took place **from below** in the days following the decision, independently of the wishes of the Plenum. In the words of Abel Paz:

*“When the workers reached their workplaces ... they found them deserted ... The major centres of production had been abandoned by their owners ... The CNT and its leaders had certainly not foreseen this situation; if they had, they had, they would have given appropriate guidance to the workers when they called off the General Strike and ordered a return to work. What happened next was the result of the workers’ spontaneous decision to take matters into their own hands.*

*“Finding the factories deserted, and no instructions from their unions, they resolved to operate the machines themselves.” [The Spanish Civil War, pp. 54–5]*

The rank and file of the CNT, on their own initiative, took advantage of the collapse of state power to transform the economy and social life of Catalonia. Paz stresses that “*no orders were given for expropriation or collectivisation — which proved that the union, which represented the will of the their members until July 18<sup>th</sup>, had now been overtaken by events*” and the “*union leaders of the CNT committees were confronted with a revolution that they had not foreseen ... the workers and peasants had bypassed their leaders and taken collective action.*” [*Op. Cit.*, p. 40 and p. 56]

As the revolution had not yet begun and the CNT Plenum had decided **not** to call for its start, it is difficult to see how “*libertarian communism*” (i.e. the revolution) could “*lead to the strangulation of the revolution*” (i.e. libertarian communism). In other words, this particular rationale put forward by Garcia Oliver could not reflect the real thoughts of those present at the CNT plenum and so, in fact, was a later justification for the CNT's actions.

Similarly, Libertarian Communism is based on self-management, by its nature opposed to dictatorship. According to the CNT's resolution at its congress in Zaragonza in May, 1936, “*the foundation of this administration will be the Commune*” which is “*autonomous*” and “*federated at regional and national levels.*” The commune “*will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms [that] may be agreed by majority vote after free debate.*” It stressed the free nature of society aimed at by the CNT:

*“The inhabitants of a commune are to debate among themselves their internal problems ... Federations are to deliberate over major problems affecting a country or province and*



*all communes are to be represented at their reunions and assemblies, thereby enabling their delegates to convey the democratic viewpoint of their respective communes ... every commune which is implicated will have its right to have its say ... On matters of a regional nature, it is the duty of the regional federation to implement agreements ... So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the commune, to the federation and right on up finally to the confederation.* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 106–7]

Hardly a picture of “anarchist dictatorship”! Indeed, it is far more “democratic” than the capitalist state Oliver describes as “democracy.”

Clearly, these often quoted words of Garcia Oliver cannot be taken at face value. Made in 1937, they present an attempt to misuse anarchist ideals to defend the anti-anarchist activities of the CNT leadership rather than a meaningful explanation of the decisions made on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 1936.

Moreover, the decision made then clearly stated that Libertarian Communism would be back on the agenda once Franco was defeated. Oliver’s comments were applicable **after** Franco was defeated just as much as when they were made. The real reasons for the decision to collaborate lies elsewhere, namely in the objective circumstances facing the CNT after the defeat of the army in Barcelona, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1936, and **not** in anarchist theory.

This can clearly be seen from the report made by the CNT to the **International Workers Association** to justify the decision to forget anarchist theory and collaborate with bourgeois parties and join the government. The report states that “*the CNT, loyal to its ideals and its purely anarchist nature, did not attack the forms of the State, nor try publicly to penetrate or dominate it ... none of the political or juridical institutions were abolished.*” [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 2, p. 1156]

In other words, according to this report, “anarchist” ideals do not, in fact, mean the destruction of the state, but rather the **ignoring** of the state. That this is nonsense, concocted to justify the CNT leaderships’ betrayal of its ideals, is clear. To do so we just need to look at Bakunin and Kropotkin and look at the activities of the CNT **before** the start of the war.

Bakunin had argued that “*the revolution must set out from the first to radically and totally destroy the State*” and that the “*natural and necessary consequence of this destruction*” will include the “*dissolution of army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and priesthood.*” Capital would be expropriated (i.e. the “*confiscation of all productive capital and means of production on behalf of workers’ associations, who are to put them to use*”) and the state replaced by “*the federative Alliance of all working men’s associations*” which “*will constitute the Commune.*” [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 170] Similarly, Kropotkin had stressed that the “*Commune ... must break the State and replace it by the Federation.*” [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 83]

Thus anarchism has always been clear on what to do with the state, and it is obviously not what the CNT did to it! Nor had the CNT always taken this perspective. Before the start of the Civil War, the CNT had organised numerous insurrections against the state. For example, in the spontaneous revolt of CNT miners in January 1932, the workers “*seized town halls, raised the black-and-red flags of the CNT, and declared **comunismo liberatario.***” In Tarassa, the same year, the workers again “*seiz[ed] town halls*” and the town “*swept by street fighting.*” The revolt in January 1933 began with “*assaults by Anarchist action groups ... on Barcelona’s military barracks ... Serious fighting occurred in working-class **barrios** and the outlying areas of Barcelona ...*

*Uprising occurred in Tarassa, Sardanola-Ripollet, Lerida, in several pueblos in Valencia province, and in Andalusia.*” In December 1933, the workers “reared barricades, attacked public buildings, and engaged in heavy street fighting ... many villages declared libertarian communism.” [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 225, p. 226, p. 227 and p. 238]

It seems that the CNT leadership’s loyalty to “*its ideals and its purely anarchist nature*” which necessitated “*not attack[ing] the forms of the State*” was a very recent development! That enemies of anarchism quote Garcia Oliver’s words from 1937 or from this document and others like it in order to draw conclusions about anarchist theory says more about their politics than about anarchism!

As can be seen, the rationales later developed to justify the betrayal of anarchist ideas and the revolutionary workers of Spain have no real relationship to anarchist theory. They were created to justify a non-anarchist approach to the struggle against fascism, an approach based on ignoring struggle from below and instead forging alliances with parties and unions at the top (in the style of the UGT “*Workers’ Alliance*” the CNT had correctly argued against before the war).

Rather than trying to cement a unity with other organisations at the top level, the leadership of the CNT should have applied their anarchist ideas by inciting the oppressed to enlarge and consolidate their gains (which they did anyway). This would have liberated all the potential energy within the country (and elsewhere), energy that clearly existed as can be seen from the spontaneous collectivisations that occurred after the fateful Plenum of July 20<sup>th</sup> and the creation of volunteer workers’ militia columns sent to liberate those parts of Spain which had fallen to Franco.

The role of anarchists, therefore, was that of “*inciting the people to abolish capitalistic property and the institutions through which it exercises its power for the exploitation of the majority by a minority*” and “*to support, to incite and encourage the development of the social revolution and to frustrate any attempts by the bourgeois capitalist state to reorganise itself, which it would seek to do.*” This would involve “*seeking to destroy bourgeois institutions through the creation of revolutionary organisms.*” [Vernon Richards, **Op. Cit.**, p. 44, p. 46 and p. 193]

In other words, to encourage, what Bakunin called the “*federation of the standing barricades,*” made up of “*delegates ... vested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times*” which could have been the initial framework for both defending and extending the revolution (to “*defend the revolution*” a “*communal militia*” would be organised, the revolution would “*radiate ... outwards*” and communes would “*federate ... for common defence.*”) [Michael Bakunin, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 155 and p. 142] The equivalent of the “*Sections*” of the French Revolution, what Kropotkin argued “*laid the foundations of a new, free, social organisation*” and expressed “*the principles of anarchism.*” [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 206 and p. 204] Indeed, such an organisation already existing in embryo in the CNT’s **barrios** defence committees which had led and co-ordinated the struggle against the military coup throughout the city.

Later, a delegate meeting from the various workplaces (CNT and UGT organised as well as unorganised ones) would have to had been arranged to organise, to again quote Bakunin, “*the federal Alliance of workers associations*” which would “*constitute the Commune*” and complement the “*federation of the standing barricades.*” [**Op. Cit.**, p. 155] In more modern terminology, a federation of workers’ councils combined with a federation of workers’ militias and community assemblies. Without this, the revolution was doomed as was the war against Franco’s forces.

Such a development, applying the basic ideas of anarchism (and as expounded in the CNT’s May resolution on Libertarian Communism), was not an impossibility. After all, the CNT-FAI

organised something similar in Aragon. The fear that if libertarian communism was implemented then a civil war within the anti-fascist forces would occur (so aiding Franco) was a real one. Unfortunately, the conclusion drawn from that fear, namely to win the war against Franco before talking about the revolution, was the wrong one. After all, a civil war within the Republican side **did** occur, when the state had recovered enough to do start it. Similarly, with the fear of a blockade by foreign governments. This happened away, confirming Durruti's comment that he "*did not expect help for a libertarian revolution from any government in the world ... not even from our own government in the last analysis.*" [quoted by Vernon Richards, *Op. Cit.*, p. 194f] Organising a full and proper delegate meeting in the first days of the revolution would have allowed these ideas to be discussed by the whole membership of the CNT and, perhaps, a different decision may have been reached on the subject of collaboration.

By thinking they could postpone the revolution until after the war, the CNT leadership made two mistakes. Firstly, they should have known that their members would hardly miss this opportunity to implement their ideas so making their decision redundant (and a statist backlash inevitable). Secondly, they abandoned their anarchist ideas, failing to understand that the struggle against fascism would never be effective without the active participation of the working class. Such participation could never be achieved by placing the war before the revolution and by working in top-down, statist structures or within a state.

Indeed, the mistake made by the CNT, while understandable, cannot be justified given that their consequences had been predicted by numerous anarchists beforehand, including Kropotkin decades previously in an essay on the Paris Commune. In that essay he refutes the two assumptions of the CNT leadership — first, of placing the war before the revolution and, second, that the struggle could be waged by authoritarian structures or a state.

Kropotkin had explicitly attacked the mentality and logic behind the official CNT line of not mentioning Libertarian Communism "*until such time as we had captured that part of Spain that was in the hands of the rebels.*" Kropotkin had lambasted those who had argued "*Let us first make sure of victory, and then see what can be done.*" His comments are worth quoting at length:

*"Make sure of victory! As if there were any way of transforming society into a free commune without laying hands upon property! As if there were any way of defeating the enemy so long as the great mass of the people is not directly interested in the triumph of the revolution, in witnessing the arrival of material, moral and intellectual well-being for all! They sought to consolidate the Commune first of all while postponing the social revolution for later on, while the only effective way of proceeding was to **consolidate the Commune by the social revolution!***

*"It was the same with the governmental principle. In proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle ... If we admit, in fact, that a central government is absolutely useless to regulate the relations of communes between each other, why do we grant its necessity to regulate the mutual relations of the groups that constitute the Commune? ... A government within the Commune has no more right to exist than a government over the Commune."* [Words of a Rebel, p. 97]

Kropotkin's argument was sound, as the CNT discovered. By waiting until victory in the war they were defeated. Kropotkin also indicated the inevitable effects of the CNT's actions in co-operating with the state and joining representative bodies. In his words:

*“Paris ... sent her devoted sons to the Hotel-de-Ville [the town hall]. Indeed, immobilised there by fetters of red tape, forced to discuss when action was needed, and losing the sensitivity that comes from continual contact with the masses, they saw themselves reduced to impotence. Paralysed by their distancing from the revolutionary centre — the people — they themselves paralysed the popular initiative.” [Op. Cit., pp. 97–8]*

Which, in a nutshell, was what happened to the leading militants of the CNT who collaborated with the state. Kropotkin was proved right, as was anarchist theory from Bakunin onwards. As Vernon Richards argues, *“there can be no excuse”* for the CNT's decision, as *“they were not mistakes of judgement but the deliberate abandonment of the principles of the CNT.”* [**Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 41–2] It seems difficult to blame anarchist theory for the decisions of the CNT when that theory argues the opposite position.

However, while the experience of Spain confirms anarchist theory **negatively**, it also confirms it **positively** by the Council of Aragon. The Council of Aragon was created by a meeting of delegates from CNT unions, village collectives and militia columns to protect the new society the people of Aragon were building. Its creation exposes as false the claim that anarchism failed in during the Spanish Civil War. In Aragon, the CNT **did** follow the ideas of anarchism, abolishing both the state and capitalism. If they had followed this example in Catalonia, the outcome of the Civil War may have been different.

In spite of opposition from the two Catalan militia leaders, the Aragonese delegates at the Bujaraloz assembly, encouraged by Durruti, supported the proposals and the Regional Defence Council of Aragón was born with the specific objective of implementing libertarian communism. The meeting also decided to press for the setting up of a National Defence Committee which would link together a series of regional bodies that were organised on principles similar to the one now established in Aragon.

The formation of the Regional Defence Council was an affirmation of commitment to the principles of libertarian communism. This principled stand for revolutionary social and economic change stands at odds with the claims that the Spanish Civil War indicates the failure of anarchism. After all, in Aragon the CNT **did** act in accordance with anarchist theory and its own history and politics.

Therefore, the activities of the CNT during the Civil War cannot be used to discredit anarchism although it can be used to show that anarchists can and do make terrible decisions in difficult circumstances. That Marxists always point to this event in anarchist history is unsurprising, for it was a terrible mistake.

However, to use this to generalise about anarchism is false as it, firstly, requires a dismissal of the objective circumstances the decision was made in (see last section) and, secondly, it means ignoring anarchist theory and history. It also gives the impression that anarchism as a revolutionary theory must be evaluated purely from one event in its history. The experiences of the Makhnovists in the Ukraine, the U.S.I and U.A.I. in the factory occupations of 1920 and fighting fascism in Italy, the insurrections of the C.N.T. during the 1930s, the Council of Aragon created by the CNT in the Spanish Revolution and so on, are all ignored when evaluating anarchism.

Hardly convincing, although handy for Marxists. As is clear from, for example, the experiences of the Makhnovists and the Council of Aragon, that anarchism has been applied successfully on a large scale, both politically and economically, in revolutionary situations.

As Emma Goldman argued, the “*contention that there is something wrong with Anarchism ... because the leading comrades in Spain failed Anarchism seems to be very faulty reasoning ... the failure of one or several individuals can never take away from the depth and truth of an ideal.*” [Vision on Fire, p. 299] This is even more the case when anarchists can point to anarchist theory and other examples of anarchism in action which fully followed anarchist ideas. That opponents of anarchism fail to mention these examples suggests their case against anarchism, based on the experience of the CNT in the Spanish Civil War, is deeply flawed.

Rather than show the failure of anarchism, the experience of the Spanish Revolution indicates the failure of anarchists to apply their ideas in practice. Faced with extremely difficult circumstances, they compromised their ideas in the name of anti-fascist unity. Sadly, their compromises **confirmed** (rather than refuted) anarchist theory as they led to the defeat of both the revolution and the civil war.

### **I.8.12 Was the decision to collaborate imposed on the CNT’s membership?**

A few words have to be said about the development of the CNT and FAI post 19<sup>th</sup> of July. It is clear that the CNT and FAI changed in nature and were the not same organisations as they were **before** July 1936. Both organisations became more centralised and bureaucratic, with the membership excluded from many major decisions. As Peirats argues:

*“In the CNT and among militant anarchists there had been a tradition of the most scrupulous respect for the deliberations and decisions of the assemblies, the grassroots of the federalist organisation. Those who held administrative office had been merely the mandatories of those decisions. The regular motions adopted by the National congresses spelled out to the Confederation and its representative committees ineluctable obligations of a basic and general nature incumbent upon very affiliated member regardless of locality or region. And the forming of such general motions was the direct responsibility of all of the unions by means of motions adopted at their respective general assemblies. Similarly, the Regional or Local Congresses would establish the guidelines of requirement and problems that obtained only at regional or local levels. In both instances, sovereignty resided always with the assemblies of workers whether in their unions or in their groups.*

*“This sense of rigorous, everyday federalist procedure was abruptly amended from the very outset of the revolutionary phase... This amendment of the norms of the organisation was explained away by reference to the exceptional turn of events, which required a greater agility of decisions and resolutions, which is to say a necessary departure from the circuitous procedures of federalist practice which operated from the bottom upwards.”* [The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, vol. 1, p. 213]

In other words, the CNT had become increasingly hierarchical, with the higher committees becoming transformed into executive bodies rather than administrative ones (“*it is safe to assert*

*that the significant resolutions in the organisation were adopted by the committees, very rarely by the mass constituency. Certainly, circumstances required quick decisions from the organisation, and it was necessary to take precautions to prevent damaging leaks. These necessities tempted the committees to abandon the federalist procedures of the organisation.*" [Jose Peirats, **Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 188]).

Ironically, rather than the “*anarchist leaders*” of the CNT failing to “*seize power*” as Trotsky and his followers lament, they did — **in their own organisations**. Such a development proved to be a disaster and re-enforced the anarchist critique against hierarchical and centralised organisations. The CNT higher committees became isolated from the membership, pursued their own policies and compromised and paralysed the creative work being done by the rank and file — as predicted in anarchist theory. However, be that as it may, as we will indicate below, it would be false to assert that these higher committees simply imposed the decision to collaborate on their memberships (as, for example, Vernon Richards seems to imply in his **Lessons of the Spanish Revolution**). While it is true that the committees presented many decisions as a **fait accompli** the rank-and-file of the C.N.T and F.A.I did not simply follow orders and ratify all decisions blindly.

In any revolutionary situation decisions have to be made fast and sometimes without consulting the base of the organisation. However, such decisions must be accountable to the membership who must discuss and ratify them (this was the policy within the CNT militias, for example). The experience of the CNT and FAI in countless strikes, insurrections and campaigns had proven the decentralised, federal structure was more than capable of pursuing the class war — revolution is no exception as it is the class war in its most concentrated form. In other words, the organisational principles of the CNT and FAI were more than adequate for a revolutionary situation.

The centralising tendencies, therefore, cannot be blamed on the exception circumstances of the war. Rather, it is the policy of collaboration which explains them. Unlike the numerous strikes and revolts that occurred before July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1936, the CNT higher committees had started to work within the state structure. This, by its very nature, must generate hierarchical and centralising tendencies as those involved must adapt to the states basic structure and form. The violations of CNT policy flowed from the initial decision to compromise in the name of “*anti-fascist unity*” and a vicious circle developed — each compromise pushed the CNT leadership further into the arms of the state, which increased hierarchical tendencies, which in turn isolated these higher committees of the CNT from the masses, which in turn encouraged a conciliatory policy by those committees.

This centralising and hierarchical tendency did not mean that the higher committees of the CNT simply imposed their will on the rest of the organisation. It is very clear that the decision to collaborate had, initially, the passive support of the majority of the CNT and FAI (probably because they thought the war would be over after a few weeks or months). This can be seen from various facts. As visiting French anarchist Sebastian Faure noted, while “*effective participation in central authority has had the approval of the majority within the unions and in the groups affiliated to the FAI, that decision has in many places encountered the opposition of a fairly substantial minority. Thus there has been no unanimity.*” [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 183]

In the words of Peirats:

*“Were all of the militants of the same mind? ... Excepting some vocal minorities which expressed their protests in their press organs and through committees, gatherings, plenums and assemblies, the dismal truth is that the bulk of the membership was in thrall to a certain fatalism which was itself a direct consequence of the tragic realities of the war.” [Op. Cit., p. 181]*

And:

*“We have already seen how, on the economic plane, militant anarchism forged ahead, undaunted, with its work of transforming the economy. It is not to be doubted — for to do so would have been to display ignorance of the psychology of libertarian rank and file of the CNT — that a muffled contest, occasionally erupting at plenums and assemblies and manifest in some press organs broke out as soon as the backsliding began. In this connection, the body of opinion hostile to any possible deviation in tactics and principles was able to count throughout upon spirited champions.” [Op. Cit., p. 210]*

Thus, within the libertarian movement, there was a substantial minority who opposed the policy of collaboration and made their opinions known in various publications and meetings. While many (if not most) revolutionary anarchists volunteered for the militias and so were not active in their unions as before, there were various groups (such as Catalan Libertarian Youth, the Friends of Durruti, other FAI groups, and so on) which were opposed to collaboration and argued their case openly in the streets, collectives, organisational meetings and so on. Moreover, outside the libertarian movement the two tiny Trotskyist groups also argued against collaboration, as did sections of the POUM. Therefore it is impossible to state that the CNT membership were unaware of the arguments against the dominant policy. Also the Catalan CNT’s higher committees, for example, after the May Days of 1937 could not get union assemblies or plenums to expel the Friends of Durruti nor to get them to withhold financial support for the Libertarian Youth, who opposed collaboration vigorously in their publications, nor get them to call upon various groups of workers to stop distributing opposition publications in the public transit system or with the daily milk. [Abe Bluestein in Gomez Casas’s **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 10]

This suggests that in spite of centralising tendencies, the higher committees of the CNT were still subject to some degree of popular influence and control and should not be seen as having dictatorial powers over the organisation. While many decisions were presented as **fait accompli** to the union plenums (often called by the committees at short notice), in violation of past CNT procedures, the plenums could not be railroaded into any ratifying any decision the committees wanted. The objective circumstances associated with the war against Franco and fascism convinced most C.N.T. members and libertarian activists that working with other parties and unions within the state was the only feasible option. To do otherwise was to weaken the war effort by provoking another Civil War in the anti-Franco camp. While such a policy did not work (when it was strong enough the Republican state did start a civil war against the C.N.T. which gutted the struggle against fascism) it cannot be argued that it was imposed upon the membership nor that they did not hear opposing positions. Sadly, the call for anti-fascist unity dominated the minds of the libertarian movement.

In the early stages, the majority of rank-and-file militants believed that the war would be over in a matter of weeks. After all, a few days had been sufficient to rout the army in Barcelona and

other industrial centres. This inclined them to, firstly, tolerate (indeed, support) the collaboration of the CNT with the “*Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias*” and, secondly, to start expropriating capitalism in the belief that the revolution would soon be back on track (the opportunity to start introducing anarchist ideas was simply too good to waste, regardless of the wishes of the CNT Plenum). They believed that the revolution and libertarian communism, as debated and adopted by the CNT’s Zaragoza Congress of May that year, was an inseparable aspect of the struggle against economic and social oppression and proceeded appropriately. The ignoring of the state, rather than its destruction, was seen as a short-term compromise, soon to be corrected. Sadly, there were wrong – collaboration had a logic all its own, one which got worse as the war dragged on (and soon it was too late).

Which, we must note indicates the superficial nature of most Marxist attacks on anarchism using the CNT as the key evidence. After all, it was the anarchists and anarchist influenced members of the CNT who organised the collectives, militias and started the transformation of Spanish society. They did so inspired by anarchism and in an anarchist way. To praise their actions, while attacking “anarchism”, shows a lack of logic – it was anarchism which inspired these actions. Indeed, these actions have more in common with anarchist ideas than the actions and rationales of the CNT leadership. Thus, to attack “anarchism” by pointing to the anti-anarchist actions of a few leaders while ignoring the anarchist actions of the majority is flawed.

Therefore, to summarise, it is clear that while the internal structure of the CNT was undermined and authoritarian tendencies increased by its collaboration with the state, the CNT was not transformed into a mere appendage to the higher committees of the organisation. The union plenums could and did reject the calls made by the leadership of the CNT. Support for “*anti-fascist unity*” was widespread among the CNT membership (in spite of the activities and arguments of large minority of anarchists) and was reflected in the policy of collaboration pursued by the organisation. While the CNT higher committees were transformed into a bureaucratic leadership, increasingly isolated from the rank and file, it cannot be argued that their power was absolute nor totally at odds with the wishes of the membership. Ironically, but unsurprisingly, the divergences from the C.N.T’s previous libertarian organisational principles confirmed anarchist theory and became a drag on the revolution and a factor in its defeat.

As we argued in section I.8.11, the initial compromise with the state, the initial betrayal of anarchist theory and CNT policy, contained all the rest. Moreover, rather than refute anarchism, the experience of the CNT after it had rejected anarchist theory confirmed the principles of anarchism – centralised, hierarchical organisations hindered and ultimately destroyed the revolution.

The experience of the C.N.T and F.A.I suggests that those, like Leninists, who argue for **more** centralisation and for “*democratic*” hierarchical structures have refused to understand, let alone learn from, history. The increased centralisation within the C.N.T aided and empowered the leadership (a minority) and disempowered the membership (the majority). Rather than federalism hindering the revolution, it, as always, was centralism which did so.

Therefore, in spite of a sizeable minority of anarchists **within** the C.N.T and F.A.I arguing against the dominate policy of “*anti-fascist unity*” and political collaboration, this policy was basically agreed to by the C.N.T membership and was not imposed upon them. The membership of the C.N.T could, and did, reject suggestions of the leadership and so, in spite of the centralisation of power that occurred in the C.N.T due to the policy of collaboration, it cannot be argued that this policy was alien to the wishes of the rank-and-file.



### I.8.13 What political lessons were learned from the revolution?

The most important political lesson learned from the Spanish Revolution is that a revolution cannot compromise with existing power structures. In this, it just confirmed anarchist theory.

The Spanish Revolution is a clear example of the old maxim, “*those who only make half a revolution dig their own graves.*” Essentially, the most important political lesson of the Spanish Revolution is that a social revolution will only succeed if it follows an anarchist path and does not seek to compromise in the name of fighting a “*greater evil.*” As Kropotkin put it, a “*revolution that stops half-way is sure to be soon defeated.*” [The Great French Revolution, vol. 2, p. 553]

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, after the fascist coup had been defeated in Barcelona, the C.N.T. sent a delegation of its members to meet the leader of the Catalan Government. A plenum of C.N.T. union shop stewards, in the light of the fascist coup, agreed that libertarian communism would be “*put off*” until Franco had been defeated (the rank and file ignored them and collectivised their workplaces). They organised a delegation to visit the Catalan president to discuss the situation:

*“The delegation... was intransigent ... Either Companys [the Catalan president] must accept the creation of a Central Committee [of Anti-Fascist Militias] as the ruling organisation or the C.N.T. would **consult the rank and file and expose the real situation to the workers.** Companys backed down.” [Abel Paz, Durruti: the people Armed, p. 216, our emphasis]*

The C.N.T. committee members used their new-found influence in the eyes of Spain to unite with the leaders of other organisations/parties but not the rank and file. This process led to the creation of the “*Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias*”, in which political parties as well as labour unions were represented. This committee was not made up of mandated delegates from workplaces, communities or barricades, but of representatives of existing organisations, nominated by committees. Instead of a genuine confederal body (made up of mandated delegates from workplace, militia and neighbourhood assemblies) the C.N.T. created a body which was not accountable to, nor could reflect the ideas of, ordinary working class people expressed in their assemblies. The state and government was not abolished by self-management, only ignored.

This first betrayal of anarchist principles led to all the rest, and so to the defeat of the revolution and the civil war. As Emma Goldman argued, the Spanish anarchists had “*come to realise that once they went into the so-called united-front, they could do nothing else but go further. In other words, the one mistake, the one wrong step inevitably led to others as it always does. I am more than ever convinced that if the comrades had remained firm on their own grounds they would have remained stronger than they are now. But I repeat, once they had made common cause for the period of the anti-Fascist war, they were driven by the logic of events to go further.*” [Vision on Fire, pp. 100–1]

The most obvious problem, of course, was that collaboration with the state ensured that a federation of workers’ associations could not be created to co-ordinate the struggle against fascism and the social revolution. As Stuart Christie argues, “[b]y imposing their leadership from above, these partisan committees suffocated the mushrooming popular autonomous revolutionary centres — the grass-roots factory and local revolutionary committees — and prevented them from proving themselves as an efficient and viable means of co-ordinating communications, defence and provisioning. They also prevented the Local Revolutionary committees from integrating with each other to form a regional, provincial and national federal network which would facilitate the revolution-

ary task of social and economic reconstruction.” [We, the Anarchists!, pp. 99–100] Without such a federation, it was only a matter of time before the C.N.T joined the bourgeois government.

Rather than being an example of “dual power” as many Trotskyists maintain, the “Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias” created on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1936, was, in fact, an organ of class collaboration and a handicap to the revolution. Stuart Christie was correct to call it an “artificial and hybrid creation,” a “compromise, an artificial political solution, an officially sanctioned appendage of the Generalidad government” which “drew the CNT-FAI leadership inexorably into the State apparatus, until then its principal enemy.” [Op. Cit., p. 105] Only a true federation of delegates from the fields, factories and workplaces could have been the framework of a true organisation of (to use Bakunin’s expression) “the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses.” [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 197–8]

Therefore, the C.N.T forgot a basic principle of anarchism, namely “the destruction ... of the States.” Instead, like the Paris Commune, the C.N.T thought that “in order to combat ... reaction, they had to organise themselves in reactionary Jacobin fashion, forgetting or sacrificing what they themselves knew were the first conditions of revolutionary socialism.” The real basis of the revolution, the basic principle of anarchism, was that the “future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.” [Bakunin, Op. Cit., p. 198, p. 202 and p. 204] By not doing this, by working in a top-down compromise body rather than creating a federation of workers’ councils, the C.N.T leadership could not help eventually sacrificing the revolution in favour of the war.

Of course, if a full plenum of CNT unions and *barrios* defence committees, with delegates invited from UGT and unorganised workplaces, had taken place there is no guarantee that the decision reached would have been in line with anarchist theory. The feelings for antifascist unity were strong. However, the decision would have been fully discussed by the rank and file of the union, under the influence of the revolutionary anarchists who were later to join the militias and leave for the front. It is likely, given the wave of collectivisation and what happened in Aragon, that the decision would have been different and the first step would have made to turn this plenum into the basis of a free federation of workers associations — i.e. the framework of an anarchist and self-managed society — which could have smashed the state and ensured no other appeared to take its place.

The basic idea of anarchism, the need to create a federation of workers councils, was ignored. In the name of “antifascist” unity, the C.N.T worked with parties and classes which hated both them and the revolution. In the words of Sam Dolgoff “both before and after July 19<sup>th</sup>, an unwavering determination to crush the revolutionary movement was the leitmotif behind the policies of the Republican government; irrespective of the party in power.” [The Anarchist Collectives, p. 40] Without creating a means to organise the “social power” of the working class, the CNT was defenceless against these parties once the state had re-organised itself.

To justify their collaboration, the leaders of the C.N.T.F.A.I argued that not collaborating would have lead to a civil war within the civil war, so allowing Franco easy victory. In practice, while paying lip service to the revolution, the Communists and republicans attacked the collectives, murdered anarchists, cut supplies to collectivised industries (even war industries) and disbanded the anarchist militias after refusing to give them weapons and ammunition (preferring to arm the Civil Guard in the rearguard in order to crush the C.N.T. and so the revolution). By collaborating,

a civil war was not avoided. One occurred anyway, with the working class as its victims, as soon as the state felt strong enough.

Garcia Oliver (the first ever, and hopefully last, “anarchist” minister of justice) stated in 1937 that collaboration was necessary and that the C.N.T. had “*renounc[ed] revolutionary totalitarianism, which would lead to the strangulation of the revolution by anarchist and Confederal [C.N.T.] dictatorship. We had confidence in the word and in the person of a Catalan democrat*” Companys (who had in the past jailed anarchists). Which means that only by working with the state, politicians and capitalists can an anarchist revolution be truly libertarian! Furthermore, in the words of Vernon Richards:

*“This argument contains ... two fundamental mistakes, which many of the leaders of the CNT-FAI have since recognised, but for which there can be no excuse, since they were not mistakes of judgement but the deliberate abandonment of the principles of the CNT. Firstly, that an armed struggle against fascism or any other form of reaction could be waged more successfully within the framework of the State and subordinating all else, including the transformation of the economic and social structure of the country, to winning the war. Secondly, that it was essential, and possible, to collaborate with political parties — that is politicians — honestly and sincerely, and at a time when power was in the hands of the two workers organisations...”*

*“All the initiative ... was in the hands of the workers. The politicians were like generals without armies floundering in a desert of futility. Collaboration with them could not, by any stretch of the imagination, strengthen resistance to Franco. On the contrary, it was clear that collaboration with political parties meant the recreation of governmental institutions and the transferring of initiative from the armed workers to a central body with executive powers. By removing the initiative from the workers, the responsibility for the conduct of the struggle and its objectives were also transferred to a governing hierarchy, and this could not have other than an adverse effect on the morale of the revolutionary fighters.” [Lessons of the Spanish Revolution, p. 42]*

The dilemma of “*anarchist dictatorship*” or “*collaboration*” raised in 1937 was fundamentally wrong. It was never a case of banning parties, and other organisations under an anarchist system, far from it. Full rights of free speech, organisation and so on should have existed for all but the parties would only have as much influence as they exerted in union, workplace, community and militia assemblies, as should be the case! “*Collaboration*” yes, but within the rank and file and within organisations organised in an anarchist manner. Anarchism does not respect the “*freedom*” to be a boss or politician.

In his history of the F.A.I., Juan Gomaz Casas (an active F.A.I. member in 1936) makes this clear:

*“How else could libertarian communism be brought about? It would always signify dissolution of the old parties dedicated to the idea of power, or at least make it impossible for them to pursue their politics aimed at seizure of power. There will always be pockets of opposition to new experiences and therefore resistance to joining ‘the spontaneity of the unanimous masses.’ In addition, the masses would have complete freedom of expression in the unions and in the economic organisations of the revolution as well as*

*their political organisations in the district and communities.*” [Anarchist Organisation: the History of the F.A.I., p. 188f]

Instead of this “*collaboration*” from the bottom up, by means of a federation of workers’ associations, community assemblies and militia columns as argued for by anarchists from Bakunin onwards, the C.N.T. and F.A.I. committees favoured “*collaboration*” from the top down. The leaders ignored the state and co-operated with other trade unions officials as well as political parties in the **Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias**. In other words, they ignored their political ideas in favour of a united front against what they considered the greater evil, namely fascism. This inevitably led the way to counter-revolution, the destruction of the militias and collectives, as there was no means by which these groups could co-ordinate their activities independently of the state.

In particular, the continued existence of the state ensured that economic confederalism between collectives (i.e. extending the revolution under the direction of the syndicates) could not develop naturally nor be developed far enough in all places. Due to the political compromises of the C.N.T. the tendencies to co-ordination and mutual aid could not develop freely (see next section).

It is clear that the defeat in Spain was due to a failure not of anarchist theory and tactics but a failure of anarchists to **apply** their theory and tactics. Instead of destroying the state, the C.N.T.-F.A.I. ignored it. For a revolution to be successful it needs to create organisations which can effectively replace the state and the market; that is, to create a widespread libertarian organisation for social and economic decision-making through which working class people can start to set their own agendas. Only by going this route can the state and capitalism be effectively smashed.

In building the new world we must destroy the old one. Revolutions are authoritarian by their very nature, but only in respect to structures and social relations which promote injustice, hierarchy and inequality. It is not “*authoritarian*” to destroy authority and not tyrannical to dethrone tyrants! Revolutions, above all else, must be libertarian in respect to the oppressed. That is, they must develop structures that involve the great majority of the population, who have previously been excluded from decision-making about social and economic issues. As such, a revolution is the most **libertarian** thing ever.

As the **Friends of Durruti** argued a “*revolution requires the absolute domination of the workers’ organisations.*” [“*The Friends of Durruti accuse*”, from **Class War on the Home Front**, p. 34] Only this, the creation of viable anarchist social organisations, can ensure that the state and capitalism can be destroyed and replaced with a just system based on liberty, equality and solidarity. Just as Bakunin, Kropotkin and a host of other anarchist thinkers had argued decades previously.

Thus the most important lesson gained from the Spanish Revolution is simply the correctness of anarchist theory on the need to organise the “*social power*” of the working class by a free federation of workers associations to destroy the state. Without this, no revolution can be lasting. As Gomez Casas correctly argues, “*if instead of condemning that experience [of collaboration], the movement continues to look for excuses for it, the same course will be repeated in the future ... exceptional circumstances will again put ... anarchism on [its] knees before the State.*” [Op. Cit., p. 251]

The second important lesson is on the nature of anti-fascism. The C.N.T. leadership, along with many (if not most) of the rank-and-file, were totally blinded by the question of anti-fascist unity, leading them to support a “*democratic*” state against a “*fascist*” one. While the basis of

a new world was being created around them by the working class, inspiring the fight against fascism, the C.N.T. leaders collaborated with the system that spawns fascism. Indeed, while the anti-fascist feelings of the CNT leadership were sincere, the same cannot be said of their “*allies*” (who seemed happier attacking the gains of the semi-revolution than fighting fascism). As the Friends of Durruti make clear, “*Democracy defeated the Spanish people, not Fascism.*” [Class War on the Home Front, p. 30]

To be opposed to fascism is not enough, you also have to be anti-capitalist. As Durruti stressed, “[*n*]o government in the world fights fascism to the death. When the bourgeoisie sees power slipping from its grasp, it has recourse to fascism to maintain itself.” [quoted Vernon Richards, *Op. Cit.*, p. 193f]

In Spain, anti-fascism destroyed the revolution, not fascism. As the Scottish Anarchist Ethal McDonald argued at the time, “*Fascism is not something new, some new force of evil opposed to society, but is only the old enemy, Capitalism, under a new and fearful sounding name ... Anti-Fascism is the new slogan by which the working class is being betrayed.*” [Workers Free Press, Oct 1937]

Thirdly, the argument of the CNT that Libertarian Communism can wait until after the war was a false one. Fascism can only be defeated by ending the system that spawned it (i.e. capitalism). In addition, in terms of morale and inspiration, the struggle against fascism could only be effective if it was also a struggle for something better – namely a free society. To fight fascism for a capitalist democracy which had repressed the working class would hardly inspire those at the front. Similarly, the only hope for workers’ self-management was to push the revolution as far as possible, i.e. to introduce libertarian communism while fighting fascism. The idea of waiting for libertarian communism ultimately meant sacrificing it for the war effort.

Fourthly, the role of anarchists in a social revolution is to always encourage organisation “*from below*” (to use one of Bakunin’s favourite expressions), revolutionary organisations which can effectively smash the state. Bakunin himself argued (as noted above) in favour of workers’ councils, complemented by community assemblies (the federation of the barricades) and a self-managed militia. This model is still applicable today and was successfully applied in Aragon by the CNT.

Therefore, the political lessons gained from the experience of the C.N.T. come as no surprise. They, in general, confirm anarchist theory. As Bakunin argued, no revolution is possible unless the state is smashed, capital expropriated and a free federation of workers’ associations created as the framework of libertarian socialism. Rather than refuting anarchism, the experience of the Spanish Revolution confirms it.

### **I.8.14 What economic lessons were learned from the revolution?**

The most important lesson from the revolution is the fact that ordinary people took over the management of industry and did an amazing job of keeping (and improving!) production in the face of the direst circumstances. Not only did workers create a war industry from almost nothing in Catalonia, they also improved working conditions and innovated with new techniques and processes. The Spanish Revolution shows that self-management is possible and that the constructive powers of ordinary people inspired by an ideal can transform society.

From the point of view of individual freedom, it’s clear that self-management allowed previously marginalised people to take an active part in the decisions that affected them. Egalitarian

organisations provided the framework for a massive increase in participation and individual self-government, which expressed itself in the extensive innovations carried out by the Collectives. The Collectives indicate, in Stirner's words, that "[o]nly in the union can you assert yourself as unique, because the union does not possess you, but you possess it or make it of use to you." [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 312] A fact Emma Goldman confirmed from her visits to collectives and discussions with their members:

*"I was especially impressed with the replies to my questions as to what actually had the workers gained by the collectivisation ... the answer always was, first, greater freedom. And only secondly, more wages and less time of work. In two years in Russia [1920–21] I never heard any workers express this idea of greater freedom."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 62]

As predicted in anarchist theory, and borne out by actual experience, there exists large untapped reserves of energy and initiative in the ordinary person which self-management can call forth. The collectives proved Kropotkin's argument that co-operative work is more productive and that if the economists wish to prove "*their thesis in favour of **private property** against all other forms of **possession**, should not the economists demonstrate that under the form of communal property land never produces such rich harvests as when the possession is private. But this they could not prove; in fact, it is the contrary that has been observed.*" [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 146]

Therefore, five important lessons from the actual experience of a libertarian socialist economy can be derived:

Firstly, that an anarchist society cannot be created overnight, but is a product of many different influences as well as the objective conditions. In this the anarchist collectives confirmed the ideas of anarchist thinkers like Bakunin and Kropotkin (see section I.2).

The lesson from every revolution is that the mistakes made in the process of liberation by people themselves are always minor compared to the results of creating institutions for people. The Spanish Revolution is a clear example of this, with the "*collectivisation decree*" causing more harm than good. Luckily, the Spanish anarchists recognised the importance of having the freedom to make mistakes, as can be seen by the many different forms of collectives and federations tried.

The actual process in Spain towards industrial co-ordination and so socialisation was dependent on the wishes of the workers involved — as would be expected in a true social revolution. As Bakunin argued, the "*revolution should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people.*" [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 141] The problems faced by a social revolution will be solved in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. For this to happen it requires working class people to manage their own affairs directly — and this implies anarchism, not centralisation or state control/ownership. The experience of the collectives in Spain supports this basic idea of anarchism.

Secondly, that self-management allowed a massive increase in innovation and new ideas.

The Spanish Revolution is clear proof of the anarchist case against hierarchy and validates Isaac Puente words that in "*a free collective each benefits from accumulated knowledge and specialised experiences of all, and vice versa. There is a reciprocal relationship wherein information is in continuous circulation.*" [cited in **The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 32]

Thirdly, the importance of decentralisation of management.

The woodworkers' union experience indicates that when an industry becomes centralised, the administration of industry becomes constantly merged in fewer hands which leads to ordinary

workers being marginalised. This can happen even in democratically run industries and soon result in apathy developing within it. This was predicted by Kropotkin and other anarchist theorists (and by many F.A.I. members in Spain at the time). While undoubtedly better than capitalist hierarchy, such democratically run industries are only close approximations to anarchist ideas of self-management. Importantly, however, the collectivisation experiments also indicate that co-operation need not imply centralisation (as can be seen from the Badelona collectives).

Fourthly, the importance of building links of solidarity between workplaces as soon as possible.

While the importance of starting production after the fascist uprising made attempts at co-ordination seem of secondary importance to the collectives, the competition that initially occurred between workplaces helped the state to undermine self-management. Because there was no People's Bank or other communistic body to co-ordinate credit and production, state control of credit and the gold reserves made it easier for the Republican state (through its monopoly of credit) to undermine the revolution and control the collectives and (effectively) nationalise them in time (Durruti and a few others planned to seize the gold reserves but were advised not to by De Santillan).

This attack on the revolution started when the Catalan State issued a decree legalising (and so controlling) the collectives in October 1936 (the famous "*Collectivisation Decree*"). The counter-revolution also withheld funds for collectivised industries, even war industries, until they agreed to come under state control. The industrial organisation created by this decree was a compromise between anarchist ideas and those of other parties (particularly the communists) and in the words of Gaston Leval, "*the decree had the baneful effect of preventing the workers' syndicates from extending their gains. It set back the revolution in industry.*" [**The Anarchist Collectives**, p. 54]

And lastly, that an economic revolution can only succeed if the existing state is destroyed. As Kropotkin argued, "*a new form of economic organisation will necessarily require a new form of political structure*" – capitalism needs the state, socialism needs anarchy. [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 181] Without the new political structure, the new economic organisation cannot develop to its full potential.

Due to the failure to consolidate the revolution **politically**, it was lost **economically**. The decree "*legalising collectivisation*" "*distorted everything right from the start*" [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 227] and helped undermine the revolution by ensuring that the mutualism of the collectives did not develop freely into libertarian communism ("*The collectives lost the economic freedom they had won at the beginning*") due to the decree, as one participant put it. [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 230]).

As Fraser notes, it "*was doubtful that the C.N.T. had seriously envisaged collectivisation of industry...before this time.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 212] C.N.T. policy was opposed to the collectivisation decree. As an eyewitness pointed out, the C.N.T.'s "*policy was thus not the same as that pursued by the decree.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 213] Indeed, leading anarchists like Abad de Santillan opposed it and urged people to ignore it:

*"I was an enemy of the decree because I considered it premature ... when I became councillor, I had no intention of taking into account or carrying out the decree: I intended to allow our great people to carry on the task as they best saw fit, according to their own inspiration."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 212]

However, with the revolution lost politically, the C.N.T. was soon forced to compromise and support the decree (the C.N.T. did propose more libertarian forms of co-ordination between

workplaces but these were undermined by the state). A lack of effective mutual aid organisations allowed the state to gain power over the collectives and so undermine and destroy self-management. Working class control over the economy (important as it is) does not automatically destroy the state. In other words, the economic aspects of the revolution cannot be considered in isolation from its political ones.

However, these points do not diminish the successes of the Spanish revolution. As Gaston Leval argued, *“in spite of these shortcomings [caused lack of complete socialisation] ... the important fact is that the factories went on working, the workshops and works produced without the owners, capitalists, shareholders and without high management executives.”* [**Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 228]

Beyond doubt, these months of economic liberty in Spain show not only that libertarian socialism **works** and that working class people can manage and run society ourselves but that it can improve the quality of life and increase freedom. Given the time and breathing space, the experiment would undoubtedly have ironed out its problems. Even in the very difficult environment of a civil war (and with resistance of almost all other parties and unions) the workers and peasants of Spain showed that a better society is possible. They gave a concrete example of what was previously just a vision, a world which was more humane, more free, more equitable and more civilised than that run by capitalists, managers, politicians and bureaucrats.



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