

ANY TIME NOW

FOR SOCIAL ANARCHISM

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Contents

A Libertarian Student Movement, p 1
Basic Principles of Scan, p. 1
Robert Anton Wilson, p. 2
Oaxacan (CODEP) Statement, p. 2
Authority, Conformity, Mental Illness, p. 3
Reviews, p. 4
The British Distributionists, p 6.

A LIBERTARIAN STUDENT MOVEMENT

Students in Chile, Quebec and the USA are organizing anarchist or libertarian socialist federations.

* In Chile, the Frente de Estudiantes Libertarios (FEL) has groups in five major cities. As well as active in the recent student general strike, they have produced some remarkable wall art (see their website, <http://www.felchile.org/> check out "fotos") They also do support work for the Oaxacan struggle. The student strike and the formation of FEL tend to indicate that the social struggle is heating up again in Chile.

* SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) re-formed in January of this year and now has about 200 chapters, making it the largest student radical movement in the US. While not ideologically anarchist, SDS rejects top-down methods and statist politics, favoring student syndicalism. Many of its members are openly anarchists and libertarian socialists. A non-student group called MDS has also been formed . See:<http://www.studentsforademocraticociety.org/>

*SCAN (the Student Community Anarchist Network) grew out of the 2005 Quebec Student Strike and the collapse of CLAC. (1) It has groups or members in CEGEP's (Community colleges) de Maisonneuve, Sherbrooke, Gérald-Godin, St-Laurent, Vieux Montréal, École des métiers de la construction de Montréal, as well as the three universities UQAM, McGill and Université de Montréal. For more information see SCAN's web site, <http://rame.uni.cc> email, rame@resist.ca

1. The "Anti-Capitalist Convergence" Group

FROM THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF SCAN

A society functioning under the principles of direct democracy would be made up of different communities, on a smaller, grassroots scale, where the means of production would be collectivized . These communities would be centered around spaces where people live and work; these would have assemblies which would then meet at the economic councils of their community in order to coordinate the positions taken by the different local assemblies. In a similar manner, the neighborhood assemblies could then designate delegates to the local political council, which would then coordinate public affairs. Each of the councils would then coordinate at a regional, national, and international level, while taking care to have clear mandates on the part of the local assemblies before making any important decisions.

However, people would not simply be limited to voting on positions and delegates at general assemblies. Since only certain specific responsibilities would be transferred to the delegates, it would still come back to everyone being directly involved in determining their lives and cooperating to make collective decisions come to fruition.

This type of political perspective is not utopian - direct democracy has been applied during several notable moments in the history of peoples' struggles around the world. For example, the Paris Commune, the Makhnovist movement in Ukraine, the Spanish civil wars, and, more recently, the community councils of the Zapatistas, the neighborhood assemblies in Argentina , and many other movements spawning different times and places around the world. [I would also add Oaxaca's APPO assemblies, LG]

When we organize ourselves horizontally in our struggles, in general assemblies with revocable mandates, we are experimenting with another way of making decisions. We then have a chance to see what is possible and much more egalitarian than the current pseudo-democratic masquerade, which is built on the renoucement of our individual and collective power to the benefit of a limited number of so-called "political professionals" and where we can "choose" between parties which all essentially have the same goal of being at the apex of power in a fundamentally un-democratic

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system based on the enrichment of a small owning minority at the detriment of the rest of the world.

If we become conscious of our power, we could, through struggle, radically change society, in order to have the only democracy worthy of its name: where it is people who have power and whom organize our well-being rather than our exploitation. We have the capacity to organize our communities ourselves in order to determine our own needs without parasites that enrich themselves by preying on our work. Now is the time to organize, in the spaces where we live and work, in order to reclaim power over our own lives.

ROBERT ANTON WILSON

Robert Anton Wilson, anarchist philosopher, humorist and essayist is no longer with us as of January 11. He will be deeply missed by freedom-lovers everywhere. Wilson probably did more to popularize anarchism in the English-speaking world than anyone. His humorous novels, the most famous of which is the Illuminatus Trilogy, co-authored with the late Bob Shea, as well as a series of other novels like the Cosmic Trigger series, were read by hundreds of thousands of people, few of whom would have previous contact with anarchist ideas. But he did not stop with anarchism as a political or social ideal, but created his own distinct anarchist philosophy based upon his study of Semantics, psychology and the functioning of the human brain. He did this at a time when most anarchists remained trapped within 19th Century philosophies and a minority rejected scientific rationalism altogether. Wilson avoided both New Age irrationalism and the vulgar rationalism of the pseudo-skeptic. In his anti-dogmatic and therefore genuinely scientific viewpoint, almost anything was possible. But possible to not mean actual. Wilson was open to the Marvelous, to Freedom, but did not dance off the edge of the cliff.

HOW AND WHY WE STRUGGLE (CODEP)

CODEP, <http://codepappo.wordpress.com/codep/> is the Committee of the Defense of the Rights of the People based in Oaxaca. It is part of the popular assembly movement (APPO) and appears to be Magonista (anarchist) in thinking. At least Ricardo Flores Magon (1) is on their banner and the following statement seems very Magonist in content. They are also linked with a nation wide grouping, the National Popular Power Organization which appears to be made up of independent trade unions and anti-corporate globalism groups. Translation below by Larry Gambone

We are associated with the line of democratic organizations which do not reject any form of struggle, where the organized and conscientious mobilization of the working people can obtain the solution to our immediate demands. (1) We want the transformation of this regime of misery and oppression, to one where equality, justice, democracy and freedom are really practiced. For us the alliance with other organizations of the working people is fundamental and for this reason we struggle for the greatest unity of the democratic forces so as to push forward social transformation.

Our struggle was incited from the beginning by the injustices and atrocities we suffered at the hands of the political bosses and by the impoverishing policies of the government. We struggle for justice, democracy, the equality of opportunity and conditions of development, freedom and brotherhood between human beings, men and women. These values take body and form in the construction of popular power and the autonomy that is the exercise of self-management by the oppressed, operating in the economic, political, social, and cultural - self-determined to end inequality and social injustice. The base of popular power is the self-organization of the towns, creating a network of economic and social relations opposed to those of the present authoritarian regime, becoming thus, within the capitalist society, a germ of a new humanized society. To the extent to which people's power is strengthened, the power of the oppressors is worn away.

We aspire that these ideas will take over as much as possible in the economic, political, social and cultural activities of the territories where our organizational work is developing, in this long and permanent struggle against the political bosses and their government. As previously mentioned, we have tried to make in reality such impelling productive projects as markets, ecological recovery and restoration of lands, traditional medicine, resuscitation of culture, credit unions, the defense and promotion of human rights and the rights of Native Peoples, recovery of traditional forms of government (2) and an impulse toward a new system of education.

1. Magon is the major figure of Mexican anarchism and an important actor in the Mexican Revolution of 1910
2. CODEP has been involved in non-violent mass movements. By "reject[ing] any form of struggle" they do not mean "anything goes" or terrorism for example.
2. These are of the local village council form and thus highly democratic.

AUTHORITY, CONFORMITY AND MENTAL ILLNESS by John Griffin

Somewhere among all that megalomania called "the pyramids", there must be some hieroglyphic graffiti which translates as WE MUST BE MAD!" My suspicion is that such feelings have not been confined to the ancient Egyptians, but have been expressed throughout history – indeed, during the nuclear standoff between the US and the USSR, "MAD" the acronym for Mutually Assured Destruction was in common use. That supposedly sane statesmen had made ending human civilization a key part of their strategy, lending force to the notion that the world must be run by lunatics, or more to the point for we anarchists authoritarian lunatics. Pushing this line of thinking a little further, we might wonder if authority, the supposed bringer of "order" is itself a symptom of mental illness.

Freud And Fromm

The first to attempt an analysis of mass socially induced neurosis was Sigmund Freud and his work which became known as psychoanalysis, remains influential. Appalled by the carnage of the First World War, Freud concluded that humans must have

destructive tendencies which are instinctual; these he said are balanced by positive instincts which have a sexual basis. Both sets of drives he thought must be repressed through social pressures for "civilization" to be possible, but at the cost of bringing about psychological disorders.

Freud was no revolutionary, but his work attracted the attention of radicals like Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) and Erich Fromm (1900-1980) who variously developed psychoanalysis within Marxism and libertarian perspectives. There was a polemic between Fromm and Reich as to how far Freud's insights could be used to explain capitalist exploitation, and this essay continues to debate the uneasy meshing of sociological and psychological viewpoints.

Reich placed heavy emphasis on sexual repression exerted through the patriarchal family being at the root of working class submissiveness. Sexual repression is clearly going to be damaging, but the much freer attitude to sex nowadays has not brought about the demise of capitalism noticeably nearer and mental illness we still have in plenty. Reich's contribution will always be valued, but some of Fromm's work is more relevant to our considerations here:

Equating mental illness with authoritarianism carries with it the implication that liberty is symptomatic of well-being, and in *The Sane Society*, 1956, Fromm calls this "normative humanism." The failure of many "to attain freedom, spontaneity, a genuine expression of self, and instead live life like "automatons", he defines as "the pathology of normalcy." He thinks that distractions like TV, sports etc., ensure that the repressed continue to function without becoming sufficiently ill to warrant attention by a clinician.

Marcuse thought Fromm "too sociological, but he takes a more clinical view of sadistic and masochistic traits within, rather than of, society – an important distinction I want to emphasize - in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 1973, which includes individual pathologies of Hitler, Himmler and Stalin. When the deranged have control of totalitarian societies, their views are likely to become normative, thus embedding pathologies into the socialization process.

I am of course, broadly in sympathy with Fromm, but I am unable to accept his concept of normative humanism, when humanism being currently a minority viewpoint, is clearly not normative, however much Fromm wishes it to be! Furthermore, a pathology of normalcy implies that those who are free – or think they are – are the bearers of some authentic libertarian form of sanity. And then Fromm himself says, "it is the fully sane person who feels isolated in the insane society – and he may suffer so much from the incapacity to communicate that it is he who may become psychotic."

Fromm is getting close here to saying that we are indeed all mad, but his comments on marginalization are important. Some London comrades debated this at length and called its depressing effects "the anarchist burden." Fortunately, having a well thought out deeply held system of belief does help to integrate the character structure, and makes the individual more able to resist the most extreme social pressures. It's a point made by the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, who was

for a time interned by the Nazis in the Dachau concentration camp. (See *Surviving The Holocaust*)

Pressures To Conform

Whenever the question of "madness" arises, the underlying problem is always that of trying to pin down ex

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exactly what we mean by it; We have the same problem

getting to grips with the meaning of "normality." Both concepts have been prone to differing interpretations throughout history.

People come to their shifting views of normality and madness just like everything else, through reading, the media and discussions with others; this is socialization: the process by which generally accepted patterns of belief and behavior become internalized by most individuals.

However vague it may seem, mainstream society exerts some truly awesome powers to ensure conformity. These were demonstrated by Emile Durkheim in his classic 1897 sociological study of suicide, part of which concerns the Hindu custom of suttee, where the bereaved wife throws herself upon her dead husband's funeral pyre. In those times, suttee constituted normal behavior, but attempting suicide, the most extreme form of self-harming, is viewed by contemporary Indian society as an indicator of severe mental illness. There was shock recently when it became known that suttee was being practiced in an isolated community.

We humans are great imitators. Usually it works to our benefit; for example, we all learn to speak a language through imitating our parents. We also have the power of independent thought and action, but authoritarian cultures try to ensure that it is exercised within prescribed limits. Unlike Freud, I don't think the horrors of the First World War came about because of an instinct toward death and destruction, rather it occurred through a trusting obedience to the politicians and generals, along with the "herd mentality" which we can be so frighteningly prone to. The tendency to accept dominant social attitudes as received from the media, or merely imitating others, lies at the root of most if not all acts of mass barbarism.

People have free will, but it's often not enough. Only when it's too late for common sense to prevail, comes that sheepishness which finds people wondering how they could ever be so stupid. German guilt and shame for unleashing two world wars plus the Holocaust within 31 years is a case in point. Imagine all these family photographs of smiling young men kept hidden away

because their clothes are decorated with eagles and swastikas – the latter symbol is illegal in Germany even now.

I think all living things strive toward life, and that the destructive side of human behavior is explicable within the context of *individual* clinical mental illness and authoritarianism, within the overarching process of socialization. “Sanity” is only likely to prevail when a lot more people find the strength to exercise personal responsibility for what happens.

To make the case that authoritarianism itself is a form of mental illness requires us to demonstrate the presence of sadism and masochism on the mass scale. Logic then casts we anarchists in the role of analyst/therapists, each with an astronomical case load! Ludicrous, and yet there is clearly some connection, since all hierarchies involve some degree of domination and submission.

What we *can* say, is that authoritarian institutions, especially those run by the state, do provide plenty of openings for those with pathological tendencies: the armed forces, prisons, the police, hospitals and retirement “homes” all continue to provide their horror stories, despite and indeed because of, the those of secrecy which usually goes with them. The worst possible scenario was provided by the old USSR which used psychiatric hospitals to intern sane opponents of the regime, until they had been drugged/interrogated/beaten into dealing with their “schizophrenia.” There was of course, a good chance of victims being eventually “discharged” in a deranged condition.

As I See It

Starting out on quite a different tack, I think it most important to consider the dramatic changes to individual life-styles which have followed the industrial revolution. That may seem a long time ago, but it looks to be almost recent when compared to the time when most humans were hunter-gatherers, the longest period of our history.

In the developed countries, it is becoming difficult to find people working to produce food, or using hand tools. People use cooking utensils, or tools for home decoration, but it becoming the norm to work via a computer screen, and to experience much of life elsewhere through a TV screen, all of which is undoing direct contact with our planet and with each other. There is massive alienation here; has our species in some Darwinian way adapted to these changes? How many of our internal requirements for mental health are rooted in the practices of our pre-industrial past? I am not a Primitivist, but feel strongly attracted to more basic technologies which involve far more hand tools in sociable work environments. Note that joining clubs and pursuing hobbies such as gardening, are often recommended as “therapy” for the depressed.

It is ironic that our inherent, co-operative, sociable, pro-life characteristics, which lead us to conform, are driving us towards unhealthy, anti-social and even dangerous life-styles: Most prefer not to appear as “troublemakers”, we prefer to follow the consensus position, the most expedient, even to the point, as Durkheim showed, of taking one's life through burning.

In order to get along in the mainstream of society,

most people routinely accept grotesque inequality; they accept being largely ignored in decision-making, and are excluded from contributing towards the social product through unemployment, all of which threatens the individual's sense of worth, takes away control of his/her life and undermines the sense of well-being and security which comes from being part of an active community. Just around the corner from the resulting insecurity, separation and alienation lies the clinical conditions of anxiety, depression, paranoia and schizophrenia, all of which are effecting a substantial and growing minority as global competition becomes sharper. In response, the state and the capitalists are content to sell us ever more drugs and therapy, and again most people are acquiescent.

It is easy for anarchists to portray this mess as “madness” - it makes good propaganda - but in my view it is inappropriate to contend that authoritarianism is a form of mental illness, when the vast majority who accept it, through fear or by custom, are clearly not psychotic.

Libertarians anticipating radical social change, should be pleased and relieved that most people ride out the most appalling pressures on their lives, retaining their health and sociability most of the time. A far more sociable libertarian society which assured individuals control over their lives would surely reduce the incidence of mental illness, but is unlikely to eliminate it altogether. The process of socialization would of course continue to operate, but would then serve to foster individual freedom and social responsibility. It may sound odd to say that libertarians would conform to being free, but that is what it amounts to.

REVIEWS

THE WINDIGR by Jim Erkiletian. The Windigr is a wild tale that rolls from the frozen Yukon to the deserts of Mexico and from Japan to East Africa. A host of figures from history pop in and out along the way, Sitting Bull, Karl Marx, Big Bill Heywood, Joe Hill and Charles Darwin, to mention but a few. The storyteller is Spacecase O'Toole, a Metis gambler, prospector, con man and Trickster-figure to his grandson Yeuzor O'Toole. Reminding you all at once of the frontier Tall Tale, Ojibwa stories of Nanabush the Trickster or a Robert Anton Wilson novel, the young O'Toole, and the reader are initiated into the Native American world view, anarchism, the hobo life and radical environmentalism. Strong, independent women form a counterpoint to the gunslinging, prospecting, banjo-picking men, women like Yeuzor's Mexican-Apache grandmother, Lorelei or his alternate grandmother, the bullwhip-toting, hard riding Molly. This is a novel I couldn't put down and read in two sittings with plenty of laughs along the way. The author, “Banjo Jim” Erkiletian, musician, anarchist and environmental activist spent many years in the Yukon living in a prospector's cabin and a teepee. 282 pages, \$19.95 C From Dugout Design, 368 Haliburton St. Nanaimo BC V9R 4W2

authoritarian institutions, especially those run by the state, do provide plenty of openings for those with pathological tendencies

UNREPENTANT. This is a 105 minute DVD about the genocide practiced by the churches and Canadian government against the First Nations People. This DVD is a veritable kick in the groin. The many interviews with former "students" tell of the rapes, murders and beatings that they witnessed or suffered. The attempts by the church and state to cover up these horrors are also explored at length, as well as the threats and persecution endured by the whistle-blowers. It is a powerful tool to expose the genocidal racism that lies behind the liberal smiley-face facade of Canadian society. \$20 CDN from www.hiddenfromhistory.org

MONEY AS DEBT. The best explanation of the banking scam I have ever seen has just been produced as a DVD. (1) It is called "Money As Debt." and is in the form of an animated cartoon. Noted BC folk musician Bob Bossin does the voice over. Most people think that when a bank loans you money they take it from the bank deposits. Not so. Money As Debt shows how the banks create money out of nothing and then charge us interest for it. The DVD also shows how government debt is created and how the growing pile of personal and governmental debt is unsustainable, both financially and ecologically. You can purchase Money As Debt for \$26.95 CAD from <http://www.moneyasdebt.net/>

CONSENSUS by Peter Gelderloos. This is a very timely and handy book indeed. Includes chapters on the consensus process itself, techniques on how to make consensus easier, how to structure a meeting, awareness of group dynamics and how to teach consensus. Includes samples of dialogues with both workable and unworkable consensus processes. This book clears up a lot of misconceptions about consensus procedures by eliminating the errors that so many of us have fallen into. For the longest time, I thought that consensus was very difficult to achieve except in a small group that knew each other well. I discovered that previous attempts at consensus were full of mistakes that could be fairly easily corrected by the application of the techniques in this book. 120 pages, \$10.95 US From See Sharp Press, Box 1731 Tucson AZ 85702-1731 www.seesharppress.com

TOTAL LIBERTY Winter 2006 In "The Strange Case of Kropotkin's Chair..." Christopher Draper explores the state of Britain's labour history museums and the various forms of anarchist iconography (including a Brighton city bus named after Peter Kropotkin!) Steve Cullen examines three different examples of free association overlooked in daily life, Nigel Meek goes after the chain stores, Larry Gambone outlines the world-wide rebirth of anarchism and Richard Hebden asks "Can There Be Such A Thing As A Christian Anarchist?" Joe Peacott spills the beans on Alaska in "The Last Frontier". Book reviews and letters, 16 pages 1L (a bargain!) from 47 High St. Belper, Derby, DE56 1GF UK

THE BOILING POINT #1 Zine of SCAN (see page 1) Known as RAME in French. Includes a brief anarchist history of education, Basic Principles of SCAN /RAME, Student Resistance in France, Greece and Chile and much more, 8 pages donation from <http://rame.uni.cc> email, rame@resist.ca SPUNK – beautifully produced! Donation, Box 55336 Hayward CA 94545 USA **CUNNINGHAM AMENDMENT**, for "revolutionary acts of joy" L1 1005 Huddersfield Rd. Bradford BD12 8LP UK **PRAIRIE FIRE** – good info – donation – IWW Madison Branch, Box 2442 Madison WI 53701 USA **THE MATCH!** - the best anarchist zine! \$3.00 US Box 3012 Tucson AZ 85702 USA **REBEL STEW** – fine new anarchist zine, donation, Box 2351 Falls Church, VI 22042 **Hobnail Review** no. 5 - Anti-authoritarian and libertarian-left perspective on information pertaining to small press and alternative publishing. Send a donation to Box 208, 235 Earls Court Rd., London SW5 9FE U.K. **A Universal Declaration of Interdependence** - Send a donation to: Publishers Melville Johnston, 22 West End Parade, Pwllheli, Wales LL53 5PN Britain **Inny świat #22** The Inny świat (Different World) publishing house aims at presenting anarchist propaganda as well as history of freedom movement and propagating its various streams. <http://innyswiat.most.org.pl/> **Media Junky #3** - Reviews of alternative press, zines and DIY media. Good to see what is out there. "For a copy send \$1, stamps, or a nice letter. Jason Rodgers. PO Box 138, Wilton NH 03086 **Cracks In The Concrete #4** - This includes a copy of Luke's folk-punk CD Abolition of Church and State. This zine always has some good discussion of anarchist thought. Send a donation for a copy to: Luke Romano, 234 Jamestown Blvd., Hammonton, NJ 08037 **Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library # 46-47** - A good source of anarchist history especially the Spanish Civil War and a source of hard to find anarchist books and pamphlets. £3-UK, £6-Overseas – Kate Sharpley Library, 8M Hurricane, London WC1N 3XX England **PERSPECTIVES** On Anarchist Theory – Fall 2006. This issue is devoted to borders and immigration from an anarchist perspective. Includes 6 pages of reviews of new anarchist books. 110 pages, \$12 per year, IAS Box 1556 Washington DC 20003 **UPPING THE ANTI #3**, Discusses Latin America, the Zapatistas, Anti-imperialism today, a round table on the Six Nations land reclamation at Caledonia Ontario, book reviews and much more, 186 pages, \$12 from Box 10571, 998 Bloor St. W. Toronto ON M5W 4H9 **ANCHORAGE ANARCHY #9** "Lesser Evil?" examines the tweedledum and tweedledumber of US politics, "An Unholy Alliance shows how the state promotes religion. "Alaska Notes" exposes the latest authoritarian follies in this so-called "libertarian frontier" state. "The Violent Hypocrites" was written by Joe Labadie after WW1. One good quote, "Rulership is inevitably anti-social". Donation from Box 230332 Anchorage AK 99523-0332 USA **STREET NEWS** Victoria's monthly paper sold by street vendors. Much reporting on poverty and homelessness. Frequent contributions by local anarchists. Donation 1027 Pandora Ave. Coast Salish Territory, Victoria BC, V8V 3P6

RED AND BLACK REVOLUTION, #11, magazine of the Workers Solidarity Movement. This issue; A critique of insurrectionism, "Privatization, a rip-off but is nationalization the answer?", an anarchist view of Ireland's Easter Rising of 1916, and a "Focus on Precarity", Also, "Women Are From Earth (and so are men" - a critique of pop gender sociology and a discussion of the Independent Workers Union, a new radical union formed in Ireland. L2 From Box 1528, Dublin 8, Ireland, or <http://www.wsm.ie>

THE BRITISH DISTRIBUTIONISTS review by Kevin A. Carson

Race Matthews. *Jobs of Our Own: Building a Stakeholder Society--Alternatives to the Market & the State* (Australia and UK, 1999).

Matthews starts with the nineteenth century origins of distributism: in the Catholic social teaching of Leo XIII's *De Rerum Novarum* (heavily influenced by the proto-distributist cardinal, Henry Manning, who in turn translated it into English and added his own commentary), and the wider tradition of Christian socialism; and in what Matthews calls the "communitarian and associative" strand of the greater socialist movement.

The distributist vision of a social order based on widespread, small-scale ownership of property, and of an economy where the means of production were mainly owned by workers, dovetailed closely with the principle of "subsidiarity" in Catholic social teaching: that social functions should be carried out at the smallest scale and the most local level of control possible.

Distributism clearly also had strong roots in the socialist revival of the 1880s, but was alienated from an increasingly statist and collectivist socialist movement. In the terminology of Chesterton and Belloc, distributists saw themselves in opposition to both capitalism and socialism. But I get the sense, from reading Matthews, that their position was less a repudiation of socialism as such than a recognition that the state socialists had permanently stolen the term for themselves in the public mind.

Rather than a breach with socialism, it would perhaps be more accurate to say they abandoned the term to their enemies and adopted the name "distributism" for what "socialism" used to mean. One contributor to the *Distributist Weekly*, W.R. Titterton, commented that distributism would have fit nicely with the kind of socialism that prevailed in England back when William Morris was alive (and, I suspect, would have fit in better yet with the earlier socialism of Proudhon and the Owenites). "It was a fine time that, and the vision which possessed us might at last have captured England, too. If we had not met Sidney Webb!"

The Fabians, like other collectivists who have tried to marginalize cooperativism within the socialist movement, dismissed distributism as a "petty bourgeois" or "pre-industrial" movement relevant only to "artisan labor," and inapplicable to large-scale industrial organization. Cecil Chesterton, whose premature death dealt distributism a serious blow, treated such arguments with the contempt they deserved. "If Mr Shaw means... that it cannot distribute the ownership of the works, it might be as well to inquire first

whether the ownership is distributed already.... I must confess that I shall be surprised to learn that Armstrong's works are today the property of a single man named Armstrong.... I do not see why it should be harder to distribute it among Armstrong's men than among a motley crowd of country clergymen, retired Generals, Cabinet ministers and maiden ladies such as provide the bulk of the share-list in most industrial concerns." Of the major intellectual figures of British distributism, Cecil was the most aware of the central importance of producer organization.

The distributist movement of G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, unfortunately, was long on theory and short on action. It made little or no attempt at common cause, for example, with the Rochdale cooperative movement. Although distributist intellectuals were strongly in favor of cooperatives in principle, they seemed to have little awareness that the wheel had already been invented! Despite impulses toward practical organization in the provincial chapters of the Distributist League, and Fr. Vincent McNabb's support of agrarian colonies on vacant land, such efforts were inhibited by the leadership vacuum in London (whose main concern, apparently, was apparently intellectual debate, soapbox oratory, drinking songs, and public house bonhomie).

Antigonish

The first large-scale attempt to put distributism into practice was the Antigonish movement of Frs. Jimmy Tompkins and Moses Coady, among the Acadian French population of Nova Scotia. Tompkins and Coady acted through adult study circles, strongly geared toward spurring practical action. One of the first outgrowths of their educational work was a decision by lobstermen to build their own cooperative canning factory. This quickly led to cooperative marketing ventures, buying clubs for fishing supplies, and cooperative outlets for household woven goods. The movement continued to spread like wildfire throughout the Maritimes, with over two thousand study clubs by the late '30s with almost 20,000 members, and 342 credit unions and 162 other cooperatives. By keeping for themselves what formerly went to middlemen, the working people of the Antagonish movement achieved significant increases in their standard of living.

Through it all, Coady and Tompkins were motivated by the "Big Picture" of a cooperative counter-economy on a comprehensive scale: cooperative retailers, buying from cooperative wholesalers, supplied by cooperative factories owned by the movement, and financed by cooperative credit.

In practice, though, the main emphasis was on consumption and credit rather than production. The fundamental weakness of Antigonish, Matthew argues, was that it relied mainly on consumer cooperation, on the Rochdale model. Consumer cooperation, by itself, is vulnerable to what Matthews calls the "Rochdale cul-de-sac," in which cooperatives have "gravitated from the hands of their members to those of bureaucracies," and adopted a business culture almost indistinguishable from that of capitalist firms. Worse yet, cooperatives are sometimes subject to hostile takeovers and demutualization.

Mondragon

Consumer and borrower cooperation, Matthew argues, are not a sufficient basis for a stable alternative economy. Only work and property are central enough to human life to be the basis of a cooperative social order. Only stakeholding and direct democracy in the workplace, on a daily basis, can overcome the pressures of the larger capitalist society. Mondragon is built on the principle of cooperative ownership and control of production rather than consumption.

One achievement of the Mondragon experiment, for Matthews, is its overcoming of the "agency dilemma." Self-interest and the difficulty of monitoring compliance lead to conflicts between principal and agent. In the typical capitalist corporation, this is reflected in conflicts of interest between owners and managers, and between managers and an increasingly disgruntled workforce. The cooperative solution is the identity of labor and ownership, of principal and agent.

Fr. Jose Arizmendiarieta in the Basque region, like Coady and Tompkins in Nova Scotia, started his cooperative project from a base of adult education. A cooperative technical college, or "apprentices' school," started in the 1940s, combined a trade school education with lessons in cooperative economics. The first cooperative enterprise created by graduates of the apprentices' school was the Ulgor stove factory in 1956. A foundry and a machine tools plant quickly followed by the late '50s, and the group opened a consumer cooperative. Between them, these three in turn opened the Caja Laboral credit union, which eventually grew to become the cooperative banking arm of the full-grown Mondragon system. In the ensuing decades, Mondragon grew to employ tens of thousands of workers, to become the biggest producer of large appliances and biggest exporter of machine tools, and to include (in addition to its more than a hundred producer cooperatives) the 248 hyper- and supermarkets of Spain's third largest Eroski retail chain. Among its producer co-ops are a number of farmer cooperatives supplying the retailers. The apprentices' school itself has grown into the educational administration for the Mondragon system, with a separate producers' co-op for the students in which they practice technical skills and earn money to support themselves. Mondragon also has a separate R&D division.

Matthews reports the Mondragon system's enterprises demonstrate superior morale and productivity. The stakeholder system, by ultimately vesting both control and reward in the work force, goes a long way toward reducing the "agency problem."

But the agency problem hasn't disappeared. One problem I see with the Mondragon approach is its excessively top-down structure. In each member cooperative, the firm's top management is elected by the workforce of the enterprise as a whole. That senior management runs the entire enterprise largely from the top down, with workers taking orders from middle management and shop foremen in much the same way as in a conventional capitalist enterprise. In fairness, the management's power is tempered by forces other than their ultimate responsibility to the worker-shareholders. For example, the elected Governing Council

(something like a board of directors) is advised by the Social Council and bargains collectively with it, to make sure the interests of the shop floor are taken into account. The Social Council, thus, is sort of a combination labor union and European-style works council. But workers have little, if any, more say on how production is carried out on a daily basis, in their own departments, than workers in a capitalist corporation.

Jaroslav Vanek, in his work on self-management, found that in plants with more than a few hundred workers, the differences between self-managed and traditional enterprises became a matter more of style than substance. In large plants, worker control over top management became largely nominal, and morale began to decline.

Matthews, similarly, reports a perceived powerlessness among many workers in the Mondragon system. Some workers claim to sense a clear distinction between "above" and "below," and to place more importance on practical control over the organization of work on the shop floor than on their formally democratic control over the Governing Council.

In addition, the control of the enterprise's workers over management is further attenuated, from the other direction, by the power the Mondragon system as a whole exercises over federated enterprises. Enterprises, in addition to managing their capital reserves through the Financial Group (formerly Caja), are required to deposit their surplus cash and liquid assets (including pension and social insurance funds) with it; by this means, the Financial Group plans and coordinates for the system as a whole, much

as state ministries used credit as a central planning lever over the worker-managed Yugoslav factories.

Worse yet, the Mondragon system shows signs of the same kind of contamination from the capitalist economy that has resulted in demutualization of smaller enterprises. The Financial Group has begun to diversify its investments to non-cooperative enterprises outside the Mondragon system, while member enterprises are expected to meet 30% of their funding needs from outside creditors. Some member enterprises attempt to build market share through "strategic alliances" with capitalist enterprises in the same industry. And perhaps worst of all, some Mondragon enterprises employ increasing numbers of contract workers. Matthews suggests that Mondragon should instead take a step further in the spirit of Arizmendiarieta, by experimenting with self-managed work groups.

Despite the fact that Mondragon has gone too far in centralism and top-down control, I think Matthews is right in viewing it as a powerful example for the world cooperative movement. Consumers' and producers' cooperatives, mutual charities, credit unions, LETS systems, and the like, should be establishing and consolidating ties between themselves in order to build a cohesive, interrelated counter-economy. Matthews recommends that "the Mondragon idea... be adopted and talked up by peak bodies within the wider mutualist movement such as the International Co-operative Alliance and the World Council of

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Credit Unions, and supported at the grass-roots level from resources such as those of mutual assurance societies, permanent building societies, friendly societies, credit unions and cooperatives of other kinds. What this requires in the first instance is an acceptance by mutualist bodies that they... should see themselves as pools of community capital which can be re-tasked in the face of new needs on the part of those for whose interests they are trustees. For example, the Desjardins credit unions might] begin to give preference in their allocation of development capital to co-operatives which could count on being advantaged like those in Mondragon by a relative freedom from the agency dilemma."

The cooperative/alternative economy controls vast resources in absolute terms: a large minority, but still only a minority, of the overall economy. So long as it attempts to compete by the same conventional methods as capitalist enterprises in the larger economy, its individual members will find themselves drowning in a hostile sea, and increasingly taking on the characteristics of their capitalist competitors. But if the cooperative economy leverages the resources already at its disposal to promote an alternative structure, and to reduce the dependence of its individual enterprises on the capitalist system, we may instead find a new counter-economy growing within the bowels of the old capitalist one and supplanting it.

One point on which I disagree with Matthews is his misuse of the term "free market." For example: distributism, he says, "is wary of statism, but insists that free market solutions are only reproducing the key social problem of poverty." Elsewhere, he writes of distributism, cooperation, and stakeholder society as "alternatives to the market and the state." One wonders where Matthews ever saw this "free market" in operation. Accepting the neoliberal class enemy's misappropriation of the term "free market," to describe its corporate mercantilism, is a great mistake. Genuine free markets, in which producers freely exchange the product of their labor without subsidy or privilege from the state, are the enemy of capitalism. "Free market capitalism" is an oxymoron; the best way to achieve true socialism is through a truly free market, without state-enforced privileges for the owners of land and capital.

At the time of his writing, 1999, Matthews still placed some misguided hope in Tony Blair and New Labour--rather understandable, if regrettable, given Blair's roots in the Christian socialist movement and his free and easy use of terms like "third way" and "stakeholder society." But Matthews was already experiencing considerable disappointment with Nulab's actual performance in power. There was, he said, a danger that Labour would lose touch with the mutualist and co-operative movements, despite the Co-operative Party's representation in Labour. Labour's lack of concern

over the demutualization of building societies and mutual assurance societies was a sign of things to come. In practice, New Labour has become the British equivalent of the New Democrats [US Democratic Party, eds] --a thin veneer of touchy-feely soccer mom rhetoric about "our children" and "our working families," overlying an essentially neoliberal economic vision. About the only remaining vestige of Blair's Christian socialism is the ASBOs and "good citizenship contracts" promulgated by his army of nannies and moral scolds. No thanks!

Matthews does not sidestep some of the more controversial aspects of distributist history. Although

Matthews acknowledges that distributism is heavily rooted in Catholic social teaching, he is not a Catholic himself, and considers distributism's decentralist principles to be applicable on a purely secular basis. He quotes the common sense observation of Coady and Tompkins that there's no Catholic way or Protestant way to operate a credit union. My sense that he is correct has only been heightened by having been directed to the Shia economic teaching of Ayatullahs Baqir Sadr and Mahmood Taleqani, somewhat resembling a cross between Proudhon, Chesterton and Henry George. Matthews also doesn't shy away from condemning the disgraceful anti-semitism, at times bordering on insanity, of Hilaire Belloc and the Chestertons.

Distributism is a wonderful weapon to add to our intellectual arsenal, for those of us wanting to reclaim the socialist movement for the "petty bourgeois" mutualism of Proudhon or the "infantile disorder" of workers' control.

BLOGS AND WEB SITES

Porcupine Blog,

<http://porkupineblog.blogspot.com/>

Mutualism Blog,

<http://mutualist.blogspot.com/>

Le Revue Gauche,

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