Post-Affluence Anarchy: A Dialogue

Murray Bookchin and Jeremy Brecher

1973

charge him with advocating an uprising on the Lower East Side; on the contrary I indicated that he differentiates himself from the anti-technologists, and specifically praised him for recognizing that no revolution is possible in the U.S. without the participation of the working class. Far from denying that people change themselves and their relationships as they change their society — I assume this is what Murray means by the "new self" — I wrote a book recently with this as the central theme. Far from believing that there has been little change in worker's consciousness since the 1860s, I am currently working on a book whose aim is to show how worker's attitudes are changing and why. The only function I can see for the charicature Murray has drawn of me is to reinforce his contention that my questions need not be taken seriously. Such ad hominem argument is again good debating tactics, but not too helpful in getting out of this sink we live in into some kind of decent society.

Contents

amount of material I have amassed on ecotechnologies alone … would boggle Jeremy's rather limited imagination." I am ready to have my imagination boggled, but I hope the new marvels are somewhat more convincing than the last batch.

Murray seems to make a basic change in his approach when he states that he doesn't believe that the "middle classes" are "more oppressed than the workers." In *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, in contrast, he states that capitalism "tends to degrade them more abjectly than any other stratum in society." I hope he will clarify his view, and whether he has changed it, at some future point.

As for the matter of "Geist," the question is not whether one believes in it, but where it comes from. Pannekoek's conception of the "spiritual" transformation of the working class is rooted very explicitly in the social relations of workers to each other and to capital. (Indeed, I am surprised to see Murray's advice to learn from Pannekoek on this point, since I have always considered him if anything too mechanical in his view of how economic conditions produce working class "Geist.") It is just the lack of this kind of grounding in the actual conditions of life that I argued Murray's theory lacks. Instead of trying to deal with this criticism, however, Murray simply calls the criticism "Marxist" and therefore bad.

Throughout Murray's piece I had the odd sensation that he was really attacking someone else, not me. I am not now, nor have I ever been, an orthodox, neo-, Lukacian, or Gramscian Marxist. Far from having stood aloof from the radical movement and culture of the 1960s in some presumed Marxist scorn, I have been an active participant in most of its phases; it constituted my basic political experience. But just as Murray thinks we must "transcend" Marxism in the sense of incorporating the best of it and going further (a thought with which I wholeheartedly agree), so I think we have to transcend that movement in just the same way. My review was in part an attempt to start that process. I do not describe Murray as a crypto-naturalist or

1. Murray says I distort his position by portraying him as a believer in independent communities, whereas he specifically argues for regional integration. But this is exactly the contradiction I was trying to bring out in my review. On the one hand, Murray opposes all but "face-to-face" groups as "mediated." (This is the basis of his critique of workers' councils.) On the other hand, he says he does not believe in autarchic communities, but in regional integration. Whenever he feels accused of believing in one side of this contradiction, he points to his statements in favor of the other. But by his own definition the two are mutually exclusive: you cannot have large-scale cooperation without "mediated" relations. I had hoped Murray would clear up this central ambiguity of his approach in replying to my review; I still hope he will do so elsewhere.

2. Murray says I make him appear to advocate a society in which a fully automatic technology would turn out all needed products and people would simply collect them. Murray points out that in fact he considers such a state of affairs something to be avoided. Readers of my review will recall, however, that I never said he advocated such a thing; indeed, that was not even the issue. The issue was his belief that this is one of the social options made possible by the development of technology. If Murray doesn't believe it is possible, why does he make such a point of warning against it? This is what Murray calls carrying the art of "selective quotation" to the point that it verges on "lying in one's teeth."

I made what I thought were some rather commonsense criticisms of Murray's expectations for technology. I thought in his reply he might try to correct me, drawing on his considerable knowledge. Instead he promises still further marvels: "The

A Post-Affluence Critique by Jeremy Brecher

Post-Scarcity Anarchism by Murray Bookchin (Ramparts Press, 1971)

I

Throughout the 1960's, the themes of a return to nature, hostility to synthetics, anti-"consumerism," dissolution of sexual restrictions and roles, community and tribalism, internal exploration through drugs and other means, all became widespread among college and dropout youth, and were echoed by many young professionals — all underpinned by a discontent with the established roles assigned them by present-day society. Their experimentation was made possible by their relative affluence and economic security. This put them in direct contrast with the generation which had been scarred by the economic rigors of the Great Depression, and to those of their contemporaries for whom labor was a prerequisite to survival.

By the end of the 1960s, the discontent remained, but much of the opportunity for experimentation had vanished. Students began to knuckle down for grades and eschewed political activity that might get them thrown out of school; dropouts, no longer able to live off the scraps of a booming economy, were forced to look for work and face the problems of any other workers. The romantic exuberance and sense of possibility that marked the 1960s became a matter of history.

Murray Bookchin's essays, published in *Anarchos* magazine from 1965 to 1970 and collected here, form one of the best products of that history. A careful look at them will reveal much about both the limits of radical thought in that period, and about those of its contributions which will still be useful in the grimmer times ahead.

Bookchin's central argument runs as follows. The last three decades, and especially the late 1950s, mark a technological turning point that negates all values and social programs of previous history, by making possible an era at once materially abundant and virtually free from toil. Young people, realizing this, have begun to adopt a whole new lifestyle, eliminating all the repressive attitudes and hierarchical institutions previously necessitated by scarcity and the need to work. A new vision of what society could be like is making the toil and renunciation of present-day society increasingly intolerable to people of every class, especially the young. Riots, crime, and other forms of rebellion by the declasses who intuitively reject the values, forms, aspirations, and institutions of the established order become chronic. Simultaneously, the destruction of the natural environment by a hierarchical society threatens to destroy the entire "biotic pyramid" on which human life depends.

Bookchin looks to a massive popular revolution, somewhat like an extended version of the French upheaval of May, 1968, to emerge from these contradictions. Neighborhood assemblies, stimulated by dropout youth, would thereupon take over direction of society on a decentralized basis. People would leave the cities and factories to found autonomous, face-to-face communities in the countryside, which would become the new unit of society. They would be carefully adapted to the local ecology, and would utilize new, small-scale automated technology to provide for the needs of the community while eliminating toil. Human beings in the process would not only become free, but would become rounded members of a rounded society, fulfilling their desires in all realms of life.

Jeremy Brecher Responds

We all face the same problem of getting from the kind of society we have to the kind of society we want. I had hoped that Murray would try to answer some of the questions I raised about his approach to this problem. Instead, he seems to have applied the principle that the best defense is a good offense. He makes little attempt to answer the criticisms of his book, and instead attacks the presumed positions of the reviewer, of his presumed tradition, or even of the "Marxist sects" to which he is presumed to belong. This may be a good debating tactic, but I wish Murray's reply did more to clarify the issues I tried to raise.

Murray states that the "real issue between Jeremy and myself" is whether Marxism is sufficient, or whether it must be transcended, and "for the rest, my dispute with Jeremy's review boils down to a host of logistical and administrative problems." Murray thus neatly ignores all the concrete problems of social organization (not "administration") which were the core of my critique. His unwillingness to deal with these issues is indicated by his constant use of such phrases as "I will not get into this kind of nonsense," [etc.]. This is how to duck questions instead of answering them.

I am sorry Murray feels I have distorted his position; I took considerable pains to present it accurately. I agree with him that readers should look at his book and judge themselves whether I have done so. The only two specific distortions he charges me with hardly support the charge, however:

happen to be the most democratic way of "administering" the what-is. He raises virtually every mediocre argument that one could expect from a street heckler or a bourgeois sociologist — and the two are merely the opposite sides of the same "commonsensical" coin. Who will clean up the garbage? Who will do the dirty work? Won't "self-sufficient communities" behave like parochial small towns in Indiana? Won't people be greedy? How will the majority be prevented from oppressing the minority. Won't Peoria try to oppress Oshkosh by withholding materials from it — or whatever ad nauseum? It matters little that Jeremy raises all of these questions as such, but this is the way he thinks.

I find this mentality all the more disquieting when it appears in a comrade and a friend who is likely to invoke the name of Anton Pannekoek as a teacher. It is only recently in an article by Russell Jacoby (see *Telos* No. 10, Winter 1971) that I learned how earnestly Pannekoek had occupied himself as far back as 1912 with the *geistige* nature of the proletariat and its organizations — how he attempted to uproot bourgeois subjectivity not only from the socialist movement but from the working class as a whole. As one who feels closer to the Council Communists than any other organized group in the Marxist movement, I would even more earnestly ask them to explore the emergence of the *geistige* issue as it appears today — to advance the work which Pannekoek began into their own era, not to denature it with an economistic sensibility. We have had enough of this sensibility in the dismal seventy years that have poisoned European socialism and led to so many tragic defeats. The work Geist (Spirit) is a good one. As a comrade and friend, I would hope that it is taken seriously by the *Root and Branch* people with due respect to the memory of Pannekoek as well as to the issues he raised.

Bookchin's argument superimposes a revolutionary dialectic on a number of themes that were "in the air" during the 1960s. These ideas were reflected in many of the bestsellers of the period. The idea that we live for the first time in a society where the problem of material scarcity has been largely overcome was popularized in J.K. Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*. The idea that in response, youth have developed a new lifestyle that is completely transforming society received wide circulation in Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*. The threat of ecological disaster has been increasingly borne in upon public consciousness since the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Post-Scarcity Anarchism is an attempt to integrate this matrix of ideas into the tradition of left-wing anarchism.

There is much in this book that is valid, useful, and important. Bookchin argues persuasively that the various socialist and communist parties have become a major prop to hierarchical society, and that internally they promote both an institutional and a character structure that reproduces the worst aspects of the society they claim to oppose. He shows how limited the vision of radicals has generally been, and how they have failed to provide a real alternative to the present oppression of life. Equally important, he makes many proposals which at least will stimulate much discussion on the real possibilities of eliminating toil, domination, hierarchy, authority, and repression. This review is intended as a contribution to that discussion. It will focus on two of Bookchin's arguments: that an alternative society must be based on independent, face-to-face communities, and that we can no longer think about revolution in terms of the working class.

II

One of Bookchin's most important objectives in this book is to introduce an ecological dimension into social theory. He

does this in "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought," an essay published in *Anarchos* before any other in this volume. Since it also gives one of his main arguments for a society of decentralized communities, it will serve as a useful starting point for our discussion of the latter.

Human development has often been seen as a steady increase of humanity's power to dominate nature. Yet this power is self-defeating if it destroys the very aspects of nature on which human life depends. Indeed, the idea of power over nature is inherently illusory, for no matter what we do, nature follows its own laws. Human progress actually lies in ever more perfect cooperation with nature, integrating its laws with our own purposes. To the extent that we ignore this — and Bookchin shows that extent to be very great — nature revenges itself upon us. If humanity is to survive, it must reverse direction and foster rather than destroy the natural systems on which it depends.

Bookchin argues that the way to do so is to eliminate cities, factories, and economic specialization and centralization, and replace them with "ecological communities," based on the natural resources of the locality concerned. Husbandry and intensive garden-style agriculture carefully adopted to the soils and contours of the last would replace the vast factory farms of today. Small factories which did not disturb the environment would provide for local needs without vast national industries. In all this Bookchin reflects the hostility toward large-scale production and desire to get "back to nature" which marked the youth culture of the 1960s.

Many of Bookchin's concrete proposals for improving humanity's balance with nature have merit, but he misses one basic aspect of the problem. He sensibly proposes that our objective be to "manage" (as contrasted with dominating) the biosphere. But this simply cannot be done by separate, isolated communities. One of the key principles of ecology — indeed of all biology — is that all biological systems have multiple lev-

a Commune-type "state" between 1871–75, and when he conceived it possible, a socialist republic led by a workers' party and based on a nationalized economy.

But all of this is secondary to what concerns me even more deeply — the mentality that permeates Jeremy's review. Marx, owing to his attempt to produce a "scientific" socialism, at once devalued and denatured the libertarian and imaginative elements of early European socialism. Martin Buber discusses this regressive development with considerable insight and sensitivity in his *Paths in Utopia*. But at least Marx and Engels retained the high tradition of Hegelian thought and the French utopists in their vision of communism. One can still find in Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, for all its shortcomings, the concept of the rounded individual in a rounded society, based on decentralized communities and on a transcendence of the contradiction between town and country, mental and physical work, and humanity and nature. Engels does not accept urban life, the national division of labor, and the industrial structure as it is. He radically challenges the entire ensemble — not, like Jeremy, offers cutsy modifications that will "improve" things once workers' councils take over. Engels retains the love of the polis-type society that so profoundly influenced Hegel and German classical philosophy. One senses in *Anti-Dühring* the influence of the best in Hellenism and Fourierism, the desire for a new sensibility and for new *geistige* relations between human beings.

In the years following the death of Marx and Engels, we have seen the emergence of a new type of "Marxist": one whose outlook is operational rather than speculative, sociological (and "socialist") rather than communist, structural rather than dialectical, intellectually colorless rather than imaginative. I'm sorry to say that the thinking of this type of "Marxist" is typified by Jeremy's review. Perhaps the kindest name I can give it is "assembly-line socialism." Jeremy, to tell the truth, writes like a social engineer. He is basically concerned not with self-management but with "management," and workers councils

vested in real life, I find it rather amusing that this view is being ripped off (without acknowledgement, of course) by many Marxists as evidence of an "upsurge" by "new" working class "types." I would be quite disturbed, however, to find that this viewpoint is used to re-establish the archaic cult of *ouvrierisme* and to vitiate the impact of the counterculture as a social force. There are signs that this is occurring. Let me make it clear, however, that I am not leveling this accusation against Jeremy; in fact, I wish I could. For Jeremy there seems to be no problem about the proletariat's psyche inasmuch as the issue hardly exists for him. Apparently, little has changed among workers since the 1860s, when Marx wrote *Capital* — merely that they have become more or less "class conscious" during different periods of history.

As to Marx's writings on the Paris Commune as evidence of his attitude toward a "proletarian dictatorship," the less said, the better. It is a notorious fact that Marx's *Civil War in France*, from which Marxists cull the most libertarian conceptions of the "proletarian dictatorship," was a "theoretical lapse" (shall we say an "anarchist deviation"?) which he "rectified" with very snide remarks about the Commune and the Communards in the last years of his life. (For a comprehensive discussion of this "theoretical lapse," see Ron Suny's *The Baku Commune*, which I think was published by Princeton University Press a year or two ago.) Marx's comments on the state in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* are much too spotty to be taken as definitive statements of his views. For reasons I explain in "Listen, Marxist!" Marx was essentially a centralist and more often than not modeled his views of a post-revolutionary period on the Jacobin dictatorship — that is, in moments when he did not concede that socialism in England and America (Engels later added France and might just as well have added Germany) could be introduced by parliamentary means. The truth is that Marx's views were guided by the "opportunity" at hand: preferably a Jacobin-type dictatorship in his more revolutionary moments,

els of organization. For example, the organisms of a particular micro-environment are directly dependent on each other for food supply and regulation of population size. But at an entirely different level, all organisms are dependent on the transformation of carbon dioxide into oxygen by the entire plant population of the earth, and the revers transformation of oxygen into carbon dioxide by the animals. The maintenance of a viable biosphere depends not only on a balanced local ecology, but on a total balance among the various elements of nature, including humanity as a whole. If, as Bookchin argues, we are to "manage" the biosphere, this cannot be done merely on the basis of separate, independent communities. Indeed, it requires coordination on a worldwide scale.

There is little reason to think that such communities would refrain from activities whose baneful ecological consequences would fall on others rather than themselves. What would prevent the continuation of the present situation, described by the Tom Leher song, in which

> The breakfast garbage
> They dump in Troy
> You'll drink with lunch
> In Perth Amboy.

For in reality, no community can be an island, entire unto itself. There is no escaping from the consequences of other's actions. Indeed, this interdependence is the central lesson of ecology: Bookchin stresses it at some points, but ignores it where it contradicts his program. His proposals would reestablish the present situation, in which special groups can take actions which affect us, but over which we have no control.

This power of separate groups would also permeate economic relations. The natural resources of different areas are very uneven, so that the inevitable result of Bookchin's proposals would be a new stratification of rich and poor communities.

This in turn would generate a new struggle among communities for a claim on resources or the social product. Bookchin relies on the improved morality of an anarchist society to prevent the resurgence of inequality. "Free men will not be greedy," he writes, "one liberated community will not try to dominate another because it has a potential monopoly of copper, computer experts will not try to enslave grease monkeys." It seems a slender reed on which to base a free and equal society, especially since a large proportion of communities would lack absolutely essential resources and would be forced into either severe privation or plunder were the others less generous than Bookchin hopes. Interestingly, it is precisely the differences between resources and development in various regions which has led to the resurgence of conflict among the disparate nationalities of the "decentralized" economy of Yugoslavia.

Leaving aside such possible side effects, the question remains whether a society of independent communities is feasible at an acceptable standard of living. Any society must organize natural resources, labor, and technology so as to provide for its continuing life — otherwise it ceases to exist. We have already pointed out some of the difficulties such a society would have with resources. We will next turn to the organization of labor, then to the problem of technology.

One critical problem with Bookchin's proposal lies in the interdependence of the production process. To make any product, it is necessary to have dozens or in many cases thousands of items that are the product of a previous production process. Indeed, Bookchin recognizes that, for example, behind "a single yard of high quality electrical wiring lies a copper mine, the machinery needed to operate it, a plant for producing insulating material, a copper smelting and shaping complex, a transportation system for distributing the wiring — and behind each of these complexes other mines, plants, machine shops and so forth." But hundreds of the objects which make up a civilized standard of life are created through processes just as complex

(surely Jeremy must know something about the ecosystem concept in ecology which stresses the need for a recognition of local uniqueness), nor will I deal with his silly analogy for the fascinating projections Jacob Rosin presents for molecular industrial chemistry. In my opinion, Jeremy just doesn't know what he is talking about. His observations on classical Athens and the word "citizen" are also silly. I would have hoped that Jeremy understood the whole thrust of my argument: namely, that Athens must be understood not merely in terms of its social limitations (limitations which I would hope we all understood) but as a polis whose attainments were all the more remarkable inspite of its limitations. Jeremy's attempt to link my attitude toward the working class with that of the "end of ideology" people and Tom Hayden is as crude as the Lower East Side "revolutionary" scenario he seems to impute to me. As a person who has spent ten years in heavy industry as a shop steward and union activist, I don't need a sermon about my "moral contempt" for the proletariat. Having acquired my knowledge of the proletariat from shops rather than university libraries, I know workers to be neither inferior nor superior to any other dominated section of the population. In addressing myself to the dubious "privileges" of the middle classes, I was not trying to say that they were more oppressed than workers but that both classes were now being oppressed in new ways and in a new social context.

Another point is worth clarifying. My pamphlet "Listen, Marxist!" (of which some 40,000 copies have been published in separate printings and in anthologies) was the first sixties work that, to my knowledge, posed and predicted the changes that would occur in young workers' attitudes toward the work ethic and hierarchy. I did not suck this viewpoint from my thumb. It came from a personal knowledge of traditional working class attitudes toward work and hierarchy, and from a knowledge of the impact that the counterculture was having on present-day working class youth. Now that this prediction is being har-

archism who consults pp. 133–35 will find that "Bookchin," in fact, regards such a notion — so popular in many circles when the essay was written — is exactly what must be avoided, quite aside from whether it is possible or not, if the "fracture separating man from machine" is to be healed. "Bookchin" is arguing against the very mentality that yields this sort of "science fiction." Indeed, in the ensuing page "Bookchin" proceeds to argue as forcefully as he can that a balanced relationship must be established between work and the machine, and the machine must be assimilated to artistic craftsmanship.

Frankly, what am I to make of this kind of "misreading"? I don't want to think that Jeremy is a liar or a distorter — merely, that he reads what he wants to believe. This mode of "reading," in effect, is a mode of thinking. Were I to critically examine Jeremy's review line by line, I could demonstrate that far from overstating the possibilities at hand — technologically, culturally, and socially — I have understated them. The amount of material I have amassed on ecotechnologies alone since "Toward a Liberatory Technology" was written would boggle Jeremy's rather limited imagination. The fact is that Jeremy is singularly conservative — and this conservatism permeates his entire review. He takes things as they are — from the relations of Troy and Perth Amboy to the national division of labor — and merely adds a different structure ("workers councils") to the established order of things. He sees no significant change in the self that is to achieve this different structure of self-management nor does he see any changes that people will make in their needs as they change themselves and society. Jeremy, in short, reasons like a bourgeois sociologist who has bought communism as a good ideological product but never assimilated it dialectically or permitted it to change his outlook toward life.

One could go on indefinitely unraveling the skein of hodgepodge criticism that Jeremy inflicts on *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*. I will not enter into Jeremy's attempt to dissolve ecological microenvironments into "worldwide" macroenvironments

and in many cases far more so — after all, copper wire is a relatively simple product. The immense range of products needed for life cannot possibly be provided by Bookchin's face-to-face communities unless he is willing to replace toilets with privies, pianos with tom-toms, refrigeration with putrefaction, and surgical equipment with suffering and death. Further, such small communities would eliminate one of the greatest tools for reducing toil, since as Bookchin himself recognizes, "one of the most effective means of increasing output" is "the extending and sophisticating division of labor."

Of course, Bookchin argues that it is this very division which has made work so dehumanizing. His opposition to "workers councils" coordinating production over a wide area comes largely from his fear that they would perpetuate this condition. This I think is based on a misapprehension. There is little to criticize in Bookchin's desire that individuals have an opportunity to engage in a wide range of activities, including manufacturing, agriculture, and management — in contrast to the mutilating specialization of labor today. But this does not require that the enormous range of productive functions that are exercised today must be abolished. That specialization can continue and even be extended, while the actual activity of the individual producers themselves becomes more and more varied. Indeed, Bookchin's proposal would eliminate much of the diversity he claims as his objective, since every community would be forced to concentrate its limited resources on producing the same basic necessities by a uniformly simple division of labor. The variety of modern life, its range of alternatives, is made possible by the greatly differentiated activities that make it up.

The real road to abolishing the mutilating aspects of the division of labor lies in a different direction. First, it requires a rational application of the division of labor to lower the necessary labor time of each individual as much as possible, so that life can become predominantly time that is free for activities conducted for their own sake, not out of need. Bookchin of course

agrees with this in principle, but his program would make it impossible in practice because he ignores the economic realities on which such freedom must be based. Second, it requires complete reorganization of the work process and division of labor within the production units, so that the producers participate in and direct a complete process, rather than mindlessly carrying out one repeated task. Third, it requires an end to the identification of the individual with a single role in production, through the opportunity to engage in a variety of activities during any period, and to change areas of work in the course of a lifetime. These are exactly the kinds of possibilities opened up by workers self-management of production.

Such a pattern, incidentally, would greatly perfect the division of labor, at the same time that it suppressed that horror of all modern societies, capitalist or socialist, the labor market. No doubt there would be universal responsibility to put in a certain minimum number of hours of work. (Whether this would be enforced by law or merely by a universal understanding of its necessity will certainly be an important question.) Each productive unit would prepare a roster of its additional labor needs, and those looking for new work could essentially take their choice among the alternatives available. With the individual no longer molded to fit the job, not only would his own freedom increase, but the flexibility of the entire system.

Bookchin devotes an extended chapter to the technological developments he asserts make his small communities viable. Its tone is eminently practical, but its contents are in the tradition of science fiction — taking genuine scientific advances and projecting them far beyond what actually exists. For example, one of the main problems with separate communities as we have seen is that natural resources are not found evenly distributed throughout the earth, but rather in concentrated deposits. Bookchin proposes to solve this by extracting the traces of uranium, magnesium, zinc, copper, sulphur, chlorine, and other industrially-needed substances that exist in common

to open it in the dismal history of European socialism, Jeremy and I are simply talking away from each other.

As to the details of Jeremy's review, I'd like to bring into question the polemical methods that seem to guide it. Jeremy is obviously out to establish that, as a "product" of the counterculture, I am a crypto-"naturalist," who would prefer to a lost Golden Age of isolated, self-sufficient autarchical communities. Only from this perspective can I explain the outright distortion in Jeremy's presentation of my views. He unerringly fails to note that when I speak of a "self-sufficient community" in "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought" (p. 80), I precede it with the adjective "relatively." Obviously, I mean more than autarchy when I use the adjective, but Jeremy is out to nail me as an "autarchist." Having committed this distortion, Jeremy proceeds to compound it by viewing my thesis in support of regional integration as something I "concede." You see, it is not that I believe in regional integration, but rather that I "concede" it is necessary. I must, alas, abide with it. Unless the reader goes beyond Jeremy's rather shady account, here, and reads *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, she or he would never know that for several pages of my essay on "Toward a Liberatory Technology" I argue for regional integration and the need to interlink resources between ecocommunities. Jeremy's entire treatment of this area of discussion is tinged by a certain intellectual dishonesty. But Jeremy doesn't know when to stop. Having turned an argument for integration into a mere "concession," he proceeds still further to compound his distortion by inverting my very view of the relationship between work and technology to the point of utter absurdity. "Bookchin," he declares with a grand flourish, "takes his final dive into science fiction when he envisions 'humans of the future' who simply forget about technology and 'stand at the end of cybernated assembly line with baskets to cart the goods home." (p. 133)

Now, this could be called the art of "selective quoting" that verges on lying in one's teeth. The reader of *Post-Scarcity An-*

The real issue between Jeremy and myself is that, in my view, none of these neo-Marxian or orthodox Marxian stages suffices — that we must transcend Marxism itself in Hegel's sense of *aufhebung*. This means that we must incorporate the best of Marx (as we have the best of Hegel and others) — and go further. My *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* makes a stab in this direction. People who are interested in following the same direction would do well to read the book itself without Jeremy's blinders. And I would ask that they read not only *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* but my essay "On Organization and Spontaneity" which appears in the current issue of *Anarchos* and my "Toward a Philosophy of Spirit" in a forthcoming issue of *Telos*.

For the rest, my dispute with Jeremy's review boils down to a host of logistical and administrative problems — incredibly, as though these problems could be discussed merely as matters of "management" without dealing with the changed self that must be hyphenated by the term. Accordingly, Jeremy gets involved in the preposterous problem of who would dump the garbage in Troy that people in Perth Amboy will drink. I would have expected this kind of "problem" from the laissez-faire "anarchists" of the Murray Rothbard school, but hardly from a Council Communist who professes to carry on the Organizationsgeists tradition of Anton Pannekoek.

I will not get into this kind of nonsense. Considering the level of this order of criticism, Jeremy will have to deal in his own mind with whether he has merely assimilated a structure from Pannekoek (i.e. a mechanism called "workers councils" which, if my memory serves me well, Pannekoek never regarded as the permanent form of a communist society) or the problem of geistige relations (which, in my view, represents Pannekoek's noblest contribution to communist theory.) It is the discussion of the latter problem — of communist subjectivity and relations — that I find so notably absent in Jeremy's review. And until this problem is seriously taken up in the full recognition that Pannekoek was one of the earliest Marxists

rock, soil, and sea water. He argues that if they can be detected in the laboratory they may also be extracted for industry. We might argue with equal logic that since they can be produced atom by atom in the laboratory, they can be produced that way for industry.

Bookchin admits that such extraction would take so much energy as to make it impractical with conventional energy sources. He then suggests solar energy as the solution, since solar energy striking the earth is 3,000 times the annual energy consumption of humanity. Yet he holds up for his model as "one of the largest" examples of using solar energy for industry a solar furnace that will only melt 100 lbs. of metal at a time; by way of comparison, even the miniaturized electric pig-iron furnaces he recommends for decentralized communities produce 100 to 250 tons of iron a day, and would require corresponding quantities of power. (His other proposals for energy sources are even more speculative: tidal dams, temperature differentials in bodies of water, and wind power, none of which are presently in use for industrial purposes.) There is no reason to doubt that solar energy can contribute to heating houses and running stoves, but there is equally little reason to believe that it can provide power at the level required even for decentralized industries, let alone for resource extraction processes for which even existing energy sources are insufficient. Bookchin takes his final dive into science fiction when he envisions "humans of the future" who will simply forget about the problems of technology and "stand at the end of a cybernated assembly line with baskets to cart the goods home."

Bookchin asks whether "a future society will be organized around technology or whether technology is now sufficiently malleable so that it can be organized around society." He points out that we can design a machine to do almost anything if we are willing to commit the resources; from this he draws the conclusion that we can develop the technological basis for any kind of society we want. Indeed, this is the key assumption that

underlies his statement that we are on the threshold of a post-scarcity society. But the unfortunate fact is that, even with the full application of recent discoveries, limitations of technology will continue to exist, and will continue to put limits on the alternatives available to human society. Of course, further technological revolutions are not only possible but probable in the future, opening an ever wider set of possibilities. But if we are advocating a social revolution today, we must base our social alternative on possibilities which are real today, or our proposals will be taken as the science fiction they in fact are.

Bookchin's belief that modern technology allows small communities to be self-sufficient is in the end unconvincing. But his discussion of alternative technologies does contribute to an important process. We tend to think of the existing pattern of production (like the existing pattern of society) as a fixed structure, which we may perhaps modify but which we cannot fundamentally alter. One of the most important aspects of human freedom, however, is the power to change that structure, to use technology as we want. Bookchin shows us that we do in fact have that power, and that within limits we can restructure the technical base of society as we choose. The consciousness of this fact is essential to a free and rational society; its development is an important part of the revolutionary process. By ignoring its limits, Bookchin unfortunately makes the very real freedom we have appear a utopian dream.

Bookchin's emphasis on small, face-to-face communities grows in large part out of his desire to use technology to "carry man beyond the realm of freedom into the realm of life and desire." Indeed, one whole dimension of his thought is aimed at constructing a society which will realize such values as community, erotic fulfillment, well-roundedness, etc. Personally, I have my doubts about proposals for social reorganization that go "beyond the realm of freedom" and try to prescribe values for the future. If some people in a free society want to live in communes that is fine with me, but I see no reason to oppose

piness but for pleasure; not merely for "social justice" but for freedom on a multidimensional scale (women's liberation, sexual liberation, children's liberation, control from below in every phase of life, communal living, mutual aid, counterinstitutions to the existing ones, etc., as well as economic and social liberation.) Where Marxism had led its disciples to expect a social upheaval to stem primarily from the struggle of wage labor against capital motivated by the material immiseration of the proletariat, they found themselves face-to-face with a rebellious movement of "petty bourgeois" youth who had tasted of the "American Dream" and rejected it as odious. The truth must be stated: every Marxist group, to my knowledge, alternately castigated this movement, downgraded it with Olympian arrogance, later parasitized and divided it, and now is trying to bury it. First, the movement was condemned as "petty bourgeois hedonosm" or "middle-class escapism." When it began to get serious, it was arrogantly described as a "children's crusade" (to use Marcuse's memorable words). As it grew even more serious, it was characterized as "co-optable." At every point in its complex development, the movement was taken by Marxists for what it was at the given time and either condemned or shrugged off. But as "flower power" gave way to "student power," as "student power" gave way to "control over the streets," and as immense street demonstrations and campus uprisings began to shout "power to the people" and raise clenched fists, our beloved Marxists began to search into the sacred texts — to the "early writings" and "middle writings" of the Holy One — to ferret out a formula that would explain how it all happened. Today we are in the *Grundrisse* stage; yesterday, it was the *1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*; and if I read Jeremy's views accurately, tomorrow it will be the Capital stage.

Well, it's turning into a deathly bore. And with the latest developments in "praxis Marxism," into academic scholasticism — as the current Gramsci and Lukacs craze seems to indicate.

reconstruction and decentralization in the early 1950s in *Contemporary Issues*, long before such "themes" were taken up by Galbraith, Reich, and Carson. The publication of my book, Our Synthetic Environment, which already deals with all the issues raised by "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought" precedes *Silent Spring* by half a year. What seriously concerns me is the fact that the student movement and the counterculture of the sixties fell on the Marxist sects (including the Council Communists) like a ton of bricks and left them completely bewildered. *Root and Branch* has not been around long enough for me to assess the degree to which it shares in the poverty of this attitude. But I feel it shares the economistic bias of most Marxian groups and what I have to say applies at least partly to it as to other Marxian groups.

The Marxists of the early sixties never expected white middle-class suburban kids, "overgorged" by "affluence," to do precisely what they had predicted workers would do owing to "immiseration" and "pauperization." And I'll be damned if they know what to do with it yet, all their re-interpretations of Marx's theory of alienation notwithstanding. Saddled with a perspective that was hot news in 1848, they were "prepared" for a growing unemployed reserve army, for the "relative" pauperization of the proletariat, for a "chronic economic crisis" (as we called it in the thirties), for an increasingly politicized and revolutionary proletariat, all of which was to culminate in a proletarian revolution. This is no mere "vulgarization" of Marxism; it formed the foundations of proletarian socialism, an epochal perspective that cannot be erased with incidental quotations from Marx's "early" or "middle" writings. With the sixties, the Marxists found not factory workers but rather moderately well-to-do "privileged" kids moving into rebellion on a wide cultural, humanistic, and even personalistic front against all aspects of the established system — not merely against class society but hierarchical society; not merely against economic exploitation, but domination in every form; not merely for hap-

someone who wants to be a hermit, who wants to live in a nuclear family, or who likes the anonymity an urban life allows. Similarly, I see every advantage in polymorphous sexuality, but I see no reason to reject the exclusive homo- or heterosexual or celibate. And while I myself enjoy a variety in my activities, I see no reason to discourage an individual from a single-minded pursuit of a particular calling in the name of well-roundedness. Bookchin uses ancient Greece to illustrate his ideas of community and all-round activity.[1] For all his talk about taking our poetry from the future, it seems he partakes of the classic fault of utopianism: projecting as the development of the future the "good" side of the past.

I am particularly bothered by his conception of people as citizens of a community, a concept he draws from ancient Athens and the radical democratic tradition of the 18th and 19th centuries. It is not clear what he means to imply by this, but it disturbs me somewhat, especially if he takes his Athenian precedent seriously; for this "community," which he describes as "so successfully libertarian in character," among its powers "banished undesirable citizens" — or, as we know in the case of Socrates, put them to death. Of course, Bookchin is not advocating this sort of thing, but anyone with personal experience with small communities knows that they can exercise tremendous power over the lives of their members. Indeed, his total community, with its complete control over every aspect of the individual's existence, has a disturbing totalitarian potential, whatever humanistic rhetoric of the rounded individual in the rounded community is wrapped around it. I wish Bookchin would devote as much attention to this potential threat to freedom as he does to those which come from economic coordination.

---

[1] It is a bit unnerving to hear him defend Athens against the charge of being "a slave economy which built its civilization and generous humanistic outlook on the backs of human chattels ..." One might expect a revolutionary to wonder how Athenian democracy looked from the point of view of a slave.

Further, the concept of "citizen" seems to me to be exactly the kind of abstract identity Bookchin is so adamant in attacking when it comes to considering people as workers. I believe that in a free society, people will be neither "workers" nor "citizens," but simply people — people who cooperate in a variety of ways to produce the kind of life they desire to lead. I think a society based on multiple networks for achieving a variety of objectives may well offer a greater protection for freedom than a total community, whose assembly holds total power over all facets of social life. Bookchin's approach at times seems closer to the "popular sovereignty" of democratic theory than to the combination of individual liberty and cooperative activity of the anarchist tradition at its best.

Bookchin is of course right in attacking those who would see the good society solely in terms of a reorganization of what is now considered "the economy." We need new concepts in which "economic planning " is no longer a separate sphere, but rather completely merged with urban planning, environmental planning, residential planning and the like. All of these involve ordering the material world through the organization of our own activity. Bookchin argues that this organization should aim to make peoples' dependence on nature perfectly transparent. I would add other goals that are equally important. One is to make human interdependence evident and understandable, so that people can both grasp social necessities as they arise, and can see their own power to affect social development. Another is to make the physical objects and processes we create — buildings, machines, cities, roads, and whatever — feel subject to our control because in fact they are subject to our control. All three objectives require social coordination on the widest possible scale as well as the freedom and power of individuals and small groups.

In his section on technology, Bookchin pulls back a bit from his image of economically independent communities. "I do not claim that all of man's economic activities can be completely

indifference to almost impatient political action, replace its anti-technological attitude by a serious ecotechnological one, learn skills that would have amazed its middle-class progenitors, increasingly acquire a new sense of responsibility, maturity, and self-respect, and most importantly, raise problems of subjective relationships that far and away overshadow the anemic, economistic "class consciousness" fostered by the Marxian sects with such notable lack of success for over a half century among the proletariat. For once, these dropouts have posed the problems of self-management and self-activity so intrinsic to a communist consciousness not merely as issues of "management" and "activity" but of the new self that could make management and activity existentially and humanly meaningful. I have emphasized repeatedly that the forging of this new self that will be capable of self-management and self-activity occurs very unevenly and cannot be fully actualized under conditions of unfreedom. But to struggle for the development of this new self, and to attempt to raise the subjective issues it must deal with, are vitally important even in advance of the communist revolution we all seek — or else the revolution will never be a communist one. In raising the issues of a new self and in struggling to actualize it, the counterculture stands head and shoulders over the arid sects of the Marxian "left" whose "class consciousness" has never left the factory domain at best or the ballot box at worst. And I deeply resent their denunciatory attitude toward a development that they never anticipated, that they preyed on like vultures to fill the ranks of their demonstrations and cadres, and on whose presumed "grave" they now gleefully dance.

I'm not much concerned with whether *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* is a "product" or a dialectical superimposition "on a number of themes that were 'in the air' during the 1960s" (as Jeremy puts it) or an anticipation of many of the counterculture's essential elements. I would simply remind Jeremy that I was writing on ecology, post-scarcity, and utopian problems of social

This shallow treatment of what is happening today among students and dropouts could easily be culled from *Time* and *Life* articles on the demise of the sixties. I would hate to explode Jeremy's illusions, but the majority of students even in the sixties were always looking for good grades and "eschewed political activity that might get them thrown out of school." As to the radical minority of students who fomented most of the activity on the campuses, the "romantic exuberence and sense of possibility" they created was built on a suicidal, arrogant polarization politics that, in turn, was based on the myth that the "revolution" was a year or two away. That the majority of students did not fall for this political insanity is much to their credit. That many radical students have now returned to school to do some serious thinking about the role of campuses, education, and theory generally after a career of guilting students with the sickening insult that "students are shit" is also creditable. What the seventies have learned from the "radical" politics of the sixties is that the revolution is not around the corner with each trashing of an ROTC building and that some serious theory had better be learned — whether on campuses or off them — to deal with the decades-long development that lies ahead. What should be regarded as a very important aspect of a larger development, one which opens new potentialities for the future, is treated by Jeremy as the demise of a period and development he never understood in the first place.

As to dropout youth, I would remind Jeremy that the counterculture as a whole has been a much more complex development than he cares to think. Having lived it to a large extent, I can remember when it survived during the mid-sixties on a diet of candy bars (literally!) in two small urban enclaves (N.Y.'s Lower Eastside and San Francisco's Haight district), when it shared a rabidly anti-technological outlook, and when it lived in an ambience of apolitical adolescent irresponsibility. Since them, I've seen it spread all over the country, graduate from candy bars to organic foods and farming, turn from political

decentralized." "Depending upon the resources and uniqueness of regions, a rational, humanistic balance could be struck between autarchy, industrial confederation, and a national division of labor." In the end he admits that there will be a "sizable category of material that can only be furnished by a nationwide system of distribution." Such distribution, he concedes, would be possible "without the mediation of centralized bureaucratic institutions." This approach, so different from the main thrust of his book, is clearly the direction we must go in thinking about an alternative society, but he nowhere tries to deal with the problems of economic coordination this would seem to imply.

The key to combining such large- and medium-scale coordination with power at the base lies in distinguishing two distinct, though related issues. One is whether a special group — the state, the planning bureaucracy, the leadership, the party, or even the workers' representatives in workers councils — separate from the rest of us makes social decisions. The other is the size of the unit in which decision-making occurs. Bookchin and decentralists in general talk as if the second determined the first. But we know that small, face-to-face communities are no guarantee against control by a minority. In many parts of the world, small communities are ruled as private fiefdoms; elsewhere they are dominated by a small group of powerful elders, landlords, clan leaders, or the like. Nor is there proof that if any truly democratic organization is possible, it cannot be a large one.

The whole issue of scale of social organization has been obscured by this confusion. The alternatives have been posed as centralized planning by a separate group on the one hand, and independent self-managed local groups on the other. These have been the terms of the traditional debate between state socialists and decentralists.

If we start with the aim of establishing maximum power over our lives, we have to oppose any special group of decision-

makers who are separate from us. But this tells us nothing about what scale of organization will maximize our power and our freedom.

One central aspect of this question is missed by advocates of both central planning and of autonomous communities, namely, that different levels of organization are appropriate to different kinds of problems. Let us take two historical examples which reveal the chaos caused by ignoring this principle. In the speech in which he announced Cuba's failure to reach its sugar production goals, Fidel Castro admitted the chaos that had resulted from the over-centralized control of the Cuban economy. Bricks would be made in one place, but no transportation would be arranged to take them to another site where workers were all ready to build houses and schools. Machines were made, but no tools or spare parts were available to repair them when they broke down. The attempt to manage everything from the center, far from leading to rational coordination, resulted in catastrophic inefficiency and disorder. However, local independence is no guarantee against this fate, as the first American railroads suggest. In the early stages of railroad construction in the U.S., a great many towns raised money and built their own railroads. The result was a totally unworkable system of short stretches of track following labyrinthine courses and almost impossible to coordinate in operation. Some of them did not even connect to anything. Only with the organization of large-scale companies was any kind of usable transportation system developed out of this chaos.

Fortunately, we are not, I believe, really faced with a choice between separate, independent communities on the one hand and central dictatorial authority on the other. For the model of various interacting levels of organization we have discussed above in connection with ecology can be applied to society as well.

A multileveled council system allows the various groups affected by different decisions to participate in making them. The

Listen, Marxist: A Reply by Murray Bookchin

I take Jeremy Brecher to be a decent, intelligent, and honest guy whom I know personally and like very much. Hence when Jeremy comes out with a 37-page (typescript) review of my book, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, that misinterprets important aspects of the book, I must work with the assumption that he wears blinders that restrict his vision and is burdened by prejudgements that make it difficult for him to evaluate its contents. The review is one of those shot-gun blasts that scatters pellets all over the place. To pick out each pellet and examine it carefully would require a work at least five times the size of Jeremy's, which time (and I suspect, space) make prohibitive. So I shall have to content myself with a critical overall evaluation of the review and cite a few examples of Jeremy's misinterpretations.

The review in high Marxist fashion begins with an attempt to locate the "social origins" of my outlook — the youth revolt and the counterculture of the sixties — which for Jeremy is already pretty much of a "dead dog." "By the end of the 1960s," we are told, "the discontent remained, but much of the opportunity for experimentation vanished. Students began to knuckle down for grades and eschewed political activities that might get them thrown out of school; dropouts, no longer able to live off the scraps of a booming economy, were forced to look for work and face the problems of any other workers. The romantic exuberence and sense of possibility that marked the 1960s became a matter of history."

so, and above all in raising questions about alternatives to the present set-up which have too long remained unasked.

level at which each type of decision is made will no doubt be arrived at by taking the existing pattern, modifying it experimentally, and evaluating the results. We can see a few principles, however, which are likely to affect the ultimate pattern. Resources which are not evenly distributed throughout the earth like copper or petroleum will require worldwide distribution and coordination. Products needed in small quantities but requiring complex activities will no doubt be produced on a national or international basis — the world may well need only one plant producing left-handed scalpels. A national transportation system may well have to be planned nationally; but the exact local course of a road is of great importance to any community, and localities could have great power over it within the framework of a national plan. The architecture and location of a building have so much impact locally that decisions about them might rest completely in local hands, even for a plant producing goods on a worldwide scale. The internal design and actual process of a plant or office affect no one so much as those who work there, and there is no reason they should not have complete power over it within the technical limitations of the task to be accomplished. Of course, such a system can never eliminate conflict among the various levels and interests — but that is because it reflects so well all the various interests and needs of people, which at times come into conflict even in a context of abundance. The objective of such a system — and the criterion by which decision-making levels would be allotted — is to establish for ourselves as much control over the conditions of our lives as we can, and therefore as much freedom as possible.

This is the general approach of many of those who advocate a society based on workers councils, and we must digress for a moment to discuss Bookchin's objections to such a system as anything more than a transitional form. We may start with his useful critique of the type of Soviet organization that emerged in Russia in the revolution of 1917. These were bodies of del-

egates elected by groups of workers, peasants, and soldiers, which initially coordinated the revolutionary struggle and, after the October revolution, became the new government. Their national congresses, as Bookchin points out, became increasingly unrepresentative bodies, as local soviets elected regional representatives who in turn elected national representatives. Actual power passed first from an unwieldy national congress of over 1,000 delegates, to an executive committee of 200 to 300, and finally to the Council of People's Commissars — the Bolshevik cabinet — as sessions of the larger groups became more infrequent and pro forma.

Bookchin offers several explanations for this process. First, it was encouraged by the hierarchical structure of the soviets themselves; presumably he is here referring to their indirect elections and the fact that (as in parliamentary democracy) orders flowed down from the top, justified by the representative nature attributed to the regime. Second, the "social roots" of the Soviets were too limited for a "true popular democracy." By this, Bookchin seems to mean that the Russian people were not committed to ruling themselves. He says that the military battalions which went over to the revolution were too unstable, the new Red Army too well controlled by the Bolsheviks, the regular military too politically inert, and the peasant villages too preoccupied with local concerns to keep the soviets alive.

So far his analysis seems acceptable. The problem comes when he tries to explain why the industrial workers, who were left as the main base of the Soviets, were unable to resist the establishment of central Bolshevik authority. Bookchin argues that the basic weakness lay in the nature of the factory itself. The social power of a particular factory is limited since it is dependent for its existence on other factories and sources of raw material. According to Bookchin, this makes it impossible for power to stay at the base. The conclusion is central for all Bookchin's thought: a revolution based on workers organized

ple or white. How much of a bourgeois one becomes depends exclusively upon what one accepts from bourgeois society. If young people reject consumerism, the work ethic, hierarchy, and authority, they are more 'proletarian' than the proletariat ..." This view of social questions as essentially about attitudes or values pervaded the radicalism of the 1960s.[5] Bookchin considers it a great advance, which would allow us to "inter the threadbare elements of socialist ideology together with the archaic past from which they derive." In fact, it is no advance at all, but a retreat to the kind of idealism in which ideas and values are conceived as the motive force of history, with social institutions and attitudes their outward manifestation. It simply ignores the very real differences in life situations different classes face. How much of a bourgeois one is depends not on one's lifestyle but on the extent to which one is in a position to exploit the labor of others or rather must oneself be exploited; a millionaire-hippy is not one whit less bourgeois for all his contempt for work ethic, hierarchy, and authority; nor can workers become bourgeois by putting on costume jewelry modeled on the real stuff of the rich.

It is no surprise that with such an approach, Bookchin revives the utopian socialism of the 19th century, complete with ideal communities founded in the wilderness with the support of well-intentioned people of all classes on the basis of a vision of a perfect society from which all would gain. Bookchin writes of the 19th century that "the realm of necessity was brutally present; it could not be conjured away by mere theory and speculation." The same, unfortunately, remains true today. Bookchin's contribution is in reminding us that we possess the means to conquer that situation, in suggesting ways to do

---

[5] It also curiously parallels Lenin's view that the working class is unable to fight for anything beyond gains within capitalism, unless a revolutionary consciousness is brought to it by the more enlightened middle class revolutionaries, who have rejected middle class society and joined the self-proclaimed bearers of "revolutionary consciousness."

Bookchin to his credit specifically recognizes that no revolution is possible in America without the participation of the working class. But the very way in which he analyzes the polarization of society makes that participation less likely, and ends reenforcement to those who identify the working class as an enemy of the revolution. For instance, I once heard Tom Hayden, perhaps the closest we have to a prototype of 60s radicals, say in private that the revolution would consist of violent struggle by youths, blacks, and other minorities against the rest of society, including the mainstream working class; the latter he thought might possibly come over, but only after violence was used against it. This state of mind and its disasterous implications are caught brilliantly in Marge Percy's recent novel, *Dance the Eagle to Sleep*. In it she projects an uprising of alienated youth which breaks out in Bookchin's beloved Lower East Side and spreads through the country, only to be exterminated by planes and tanks with the support of the majority of the population. The polarization advocated by many 60s radicals, if pushed to the point of revolution, could only have led to such a catastrophe. For as Percy's leader recognized in despair at the end, "He had only thought to get the kids out of the system … Yet you could not win a violent revolution in the center of the empire with rifles against tanks and planes, if the Army would fight against you. You could not win with an isolated minority." The collapse of the radical movement of the 1960s has at least averted such a holocaust. If a successful revolution ever occurs, it will be based on the problems and experiences of the great majority who make up the working class, not of those whose privileged position already allows them to simulate "post-scarcity." The contribution of the latter is at best prophetic.

The underlying problem with Bookchin's approach to class is that he substitutes values for social relationships. Thus he writes, "All who live in bourgeois society have 'bourgeois roots,' be they workers or students, young or old, black peo-

at the point of production "creates the conditions for a centralized, hierarchical political structure."

What Bookchin fails to see is that it is precisely this interdependence which makes workplaces powerful. In the early days of the revolution, factories were taken over by factory committees of the workers, which were moving rapidly toward their own direct coordination of production. (For a full, documented discussion of this process, see Bolsheviks and Workers Control by Maurice Brinton, published by Solidarity and available from Root & Branch.) The railway workers, who represented the essence of the interrelation of production, provide one important example. The day after the Bolshevik seizure of power, the All-Russian Executive Committee of Railwaymen, a union E.H. Carr describes as "a mammoth factory committee exercizing workers' control" in running the railways, announced its opposition to "the seizure of power by any one political party" and threatened a general strike. Its power was sufficient to force the Bolsheviks to reverse themselves and include the Left Social Revolutionaries in the Soviet government. The Bolsheviks thereupon tried to undermine their position by creating a rival organization and giving it the authority to run the railroads, backed by state power. Once the railway workers were thus split, the Bolsheviks decreed "dictatorial powers in matters relating to railway transport." Yet in August 1920, political opposition by the railway workers was still so strong — and so crippling to the economy — that Trotsky was only able to suppress it through martial law and the summary ousting of their leaders. It was precisely to break this rising power of the workers at the workplace that the Bolsheviks moved against the factory committees. They succeeded in crushing them not because of some inherently centralist tendency of industry, but because of total disorganization caused by the war, because the Russian working class represented only a miniscule part of the population, and because a large proportion of workers were willing to accept Bolshevik rule.

Bookchin concedes that in the Spanish revolution, "working-class self-management succeeded." This he attributes to the conscious effort of the anarcho-syndicalist union, the C.N.T., to limit the tendency toward centralization, and the continuous power exercised by local assemblies over their representatives and delegates. The higher bodies of the C.N.T. functioned essentially as coordinating organs, and every individual, he states, felt personally responsible and personally influential in its policies and activities. This highly idealized view of events in Spain contradicts Bookchin's argument that factories imply a national centralization of power.

Indeed, this argument doesn't hold water, unless any national coordination is considered as centralization. But this is just what Bookchin does. He contrasts sharply what he terms "mediated" and "unmediated" forms of social relations. Face-to-face relations are unmediated and good; all others are mediated and bad. Thus for Bookchin, our enemy is not merely any social power we do not control; it is any form of social organization too large to meet face-to-face. Even a system coordinated by delegates who were nothing more than messengers for face-to-face groups would be mediated and therefore bad.

Bookchin concedes that communities cannot be small enough to meet face-to-face and yet large enough to be economically autarchic at a civilized standard of living. Coordination among groups too large to meet face-to-face — mediated relationships in Bookchin's terms — are inevitable unless we return to the primitive standard of living advocated by those anti-technologists Bookchin has elsewhere stigmatized as "paleolithic food-gatherers." The problem is how those at the base can keep the coordination process in their own hands — for unless they do the coordinating themselves, someone else surely will, and thus seize social power. Bookchin leaves the door dangerously open for those who would argue that, since coordination is necessary, a central bureaucracy or state to conduct it is necessary too. Libertarians would do better to focus their at-

scarcity. A development of the productive forces, they wrote, is necessary for a communist society, "because without it want is generalized, and with want the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced." This is hardly the statement of theorists unable to see beyond the realm of scarcity! The fact that for Marx the realm of freedom had yet to be achieved by no means implies that he could not see its possibility; even Bookchin admits that we still are only on the threshold of post-scarcity. Bookchin gives the coup de grace to his own argument when he admits that the revolution in industrial technology of Marx's own time meant "to the revolutionary theorist that for the first time in history he could anchor his dream of a liberatory society in the visible prospect of material abundance and increased leisure for the mass of humanity."

Bookchin's discussion of Marx's definition of the proletariat is too obscure even to be declared definitively false. He starts by offering to dispose of the notion that for Marx "anyone is a 'proletarian' who has nothing to sell but his labor power." But he immediately adds that "Marx defined the proletariat in these terms." He then states that for Marx the proletariat developed to its most advanced form in the industrial proletariat. He concludes his case by stating that Marx preferred the more disciplined German workers to those in the Parisian luxury trades. It seems to me we can "dispose of" Bookchin's argument by saying that for Marx, "anyone is a 'proletarian' who has nothing to sell but his labor power." Of course the working class has "developed," both before Marx's day and after, along with the development of the capitalist economy; today it includes the overwhelming majority of the population. But that development, unfortunately, has hardly made the great majority who have nothing to sell but their labor power cease to be workers.

I am not making these points to defend Marxism as holy writ. There is enough to criticize in what Marx said, however, without attacking him for things he didn't say.

coercive body, established above society." But this interpretation is a complete distortion of Marx, who held that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was nothing but the armed working population itself. (Marx undoubtedly distorted the anarchist position just as unfairly in his attacks on them.) Marx's writing on the Paris Commune and his *Critique of the Gotha Program* certainly do not call for a state "established above society." The worst we can say is that he failed to separate himself completely from the earlier tradition of revolutionary democracy represented by the Jacobins, although his evolution was steadily away from this approach. The most we can indict him for is failing to recognize in advance the danger of a state "above society" developing out of the revolutionary process, and thus failing to preclude the development of a state socialism established in his name. But although he failed to preclude the state socialism of today, it is simply false to assert that this was what he had in mind.

Bookchin repeatedly states that Marx's thought is obsolete because we now live in an era of potential abundance and leisure, while in his own time Marx could only conceive of a world of scarcity and want, even under socialism. But at the core of Marx's view of modern history was his understanding of the tremendous and continuing growth of productivity and the potential it gave for the drastic reduction of impoverishment and toil. While Marx did not of course predict the specific technological developments of the past 100 years, he made the general trend his most basic assumption. Indeed, Bookchin even cites a statement by Marx and Engels showing they believed communist society would be based on the overcoming of

_____

name. The entire revolutionary movement has been weakened for a century by the irresponsibility of both sides in this debate; both have systematically distorted each others' positions. Historical experience, far from vindicating either party, has shown that each was weakest precisely where it failed to learn from the other. Surely we can now foregoe the sterile polemics and synthesize the insights of both traditions.

tention on how this coordination can be conducted from below, rather than attacking it altogether.

Indeed, Bookchin has modified an earlier version of one essay to admit that such coordinating councils need not become focusses of power, if they are "limited by direct relationships" of the face-to-face group, "leaving policy decisions to the latter." In discussing the specialized committees and boards in a neighborhood, Bookchin suggests the means by which this can be done. "They must be answerable at every point to the assembly; they and their work must be under continual review by the assembly; and finally, their members must be subject to immediate recall by the assembly." It is precisely such principles that "mediated" coordinating organs too can function without becoming central bureaucratic authorities.

In addition to multiple levels of organization, one other principle of biological and other systems is essential for conceiving a society with coordination but no authority, the principle of feedback. In the classical model of centralized socialist planning, a group of Planners sits around a table and draws up the Plan, listing everything that is to be produced for the next five or however many years. Such planning is, as Bookchin would argue, inherently centralist, bureaucratic, and authoritarian; experience has shown that it is also hideously inefficient, producing anarchy in the most derogatory sense. But there are other types of systems which provide for the disperate needs of their sub-units by a very different type of coordination — mutual regulation through feedback. The systems of computerized inventory control used by large companies today — regulating hundreds of stores and plants and thousands of products — illustrate the essential simplicity of this approach. In one system, for example, a punch-card accompanies each item produced. When that item is sold, the card is returned to a central computer, which adds up the needs of all the stores for replacement of each product. This information is then conveyed to the various plants, which expand or contract their output accord-

ingly. Their own inventory — the parts and material they need for their work — is coordinated with their suppliers in exactly the same manner. This information network allows the various factories and stores to coordinate their activities, maintaining a stable level of needed materials, without any one of them holding general authority over the others.

We can envision the entire productive process of a socialist society as a system designed to provide a steady flow of those things individuals and sub-units need and want. Economic coordination at any given level of production requires little more than adjusting the level of flow of the various products, which can be done simply by feeding back information on needs and comparing them with present flow. A constant monitoring of inventory fluctuation provides an additional check.

Of course, the process becomes more complex when a change in the system is desired — for example a new product or process, a change in location, a combination or subdivision of units, or whatever. Before making changes in the production process, people would no doubt try to simulate their effects, using computerized models of the entire economy to test their ramifications. With the economy itself run on a continuous feedback principle, the economic effects of any proposed change would be relatively easy to trace. All those affected by the change could thereby be assured of an opportunity to participate in deciding on it — after their own discussion and vote — through mandated representatives. Then the change could be tried experimentally, its effects on the entire system carefully monitored, and the necessary adjustments made throughout. By such an approach it is possible to have a coordinated economy with continuous planning but no Central Plan or Plan Authority.

in their interest in as much as it would create a better life for most of them as people. But unlike the working class, they are not faced with revolution as the only alternative to a daily life of exhausting and brutalizing labor under the total domination of the employer, with an income just enough to keep going, punctuated by periods of unemployment without even this. If that is not enough for Bookchin to give people an interest in abolishing hierarchical control of their lives, I wonder what is.

There is one other aspect of the situation of the working class that deserves mention. In a society of independent owners of productive property, an individual naturally views the road to freedom as gaining sufficient private property to support himself. In a modern economy, however, most work is done collectively, indeed, is part of an overall collaboration of the entire working class. A worker can hardly conceive the basis of his freedom as lying in his individual ownership of his own stretch of the assembly line. Thus the only road to freedom for the working class is collective rather than individual ownership of the means of production. The problem of moving from individual to collective solutions to our problems — the critical need to surpass economic individualism — Bookchin ignores. It is precisely the situation of the workers as a class which provides the basis of a solution to this problem. It is this, not as Bookchin implies the regimentation of the capitalist factory, which made Marx see the working class as the basis of an alternative, collective society.[4]

Certain other Bookchin distortions of Marx cannot pass without comment:

According to Bookchin, Marx believed that after the revolution, basic social decisions would be left to "a state power … a

_____

[4] Bookchin makes a telling critique of the socialist movement; it is unfortunate that he has perpetuated the traditional anarchist habit of holding Marx responsible for the sins of all those who would speak in his name. This is exactly as fair as the traditional Marxist habit of portraying anarchism as nothing but the irrational bomb throwing occasionally perpetrated in its

cept the exercise of power over them in many areas of life. They share many of the racist and sexist attitudes of our society. But anyone who thinks workers like the factory hierarchy or the industrial routine has ample opportunity to learn otherwise by lining up at the nearest factory employment line.

We come to the third base of Bookchin's argument when he chooses to "flatly deny" that "workers are driven by their interests as workers to revolutionary measures against hierarchical society." Unless Bookchin is using "interests as workers" in some peculiar and idiosyncratic manner[3], this statement is, I believe, false. Anyone familiar with the day-to-day conflict with authority of workers in a plant or office, let alone the history of spontaneous rebellions against it in strikes, occupations, and attempts to establish self-management, would surely be sceptical of Bookchin's assertion. Workers as workers have an interest in eliminating the power of anyone who can direct and exploit their labor; for only by eliminating that power can they gain control of their own time and their own share of social resources. The difference between workers — those who have no share in society's means of production — and other classes who do, is that workers have no means of escape from the power of authority except to eliminate that authority. In this their interests are far more opposed to hierarchy than the affluent youth Bookchin celebrates, who can achieve a life of relative freedom by buying a piece of land in the country or living without having to work full-time in the city — all on the basis of parental subsidy, educational advantage, personal connections, and other forms of privilege. Of course, such people may favor revolution. (In the eyes of many working class people this is only another aspect of their privileged position; affluent youth needn't worry about losing their jobs, if they get arrested they can hire fancy lawyers who get them off, and they have funds and contacts to travel around the country accumulating prestige and attracting publicity — not to mention all-expenses paid visits to Hanoi.) Revolution is undoubtedly

III

Bookchin expresses one of the most characteristic themes of 1960s radicalism, that the working class is a conservative supporter of the existing society, while the "middle class" is so psychologically manipulated and oppressed that it is potentially revolutionary. "The proletariat" writes Bookchin, "instead of developing into a revolutionary class within the womb of capitalism, turns out to be an organ within the body of bourgeois society." On the other hand, "Capitalism, far from affording 'privileges' to the middle classes, tends to degrade them more abjectly than any other stratum in society … there is nothing more oppressive than 'privilege' today, for the deepest recesses of the 'privileged' man's psyche are fair game for exploitation and domination."[2]

Of course, Bookchin's point of view reflects the empirical facts of the time in which it was written. During the 1960s, affluent youth were in visible revolt; industrial workers by and large were not. But it is a great mistake to extrapolate too directly from this kind of short-range alignment of social forces to the more fundimental power conflicts that come out in a genuinely revolutionary struggle. Two years before the Russian revolution aristocrats were conspiring to assassinate top members of the government while workers were threatening to lynch Bolsheviks in the shops for their stand against the war.

---

[2] It seems that no one is so unhappy as the poor little rich kid. The solution to the misery of the privileged, however, can be found without resort to revolution if Bookchin is correct. All that is needed is to enlighten the unprivileged workers about the miseries of the affluent, and I confidently predict that streams of workers will step forward of their own free will to take on themselves the burden of these false "privileges," relieving the middle classes of their pain and allowing them to occupy the workers's place in the factory, secure in that happy organ of bourgeois society. In their new-found leisure and misery, the workers might then even experience the "exploitation and domination" of their psyches which would make them at long last ripe for revolution.

If the radical movement of middle-class youth in the 1960s cannot be dismissed as merely petty-bourgeois dilettantism, neither can it now be seen as a serious revolutionary movement determined to overthrow capitalism and all hierarchy. Perhaps it can best be seen as the revolt of a segment of society resisting its reduction from free professionals to hired workers if in the process it made a valuable challenge to the values of capitalist society, it hardly possessed the understanding, the commitment, and above all the social power to reverse that proletarianization, let alone eliminate its source. The post-1968 recession has not made this stratum any happier with their lot, but it is successfully forcing them to accept it. We may expect that this stratum will not revolt again until they realize that they too are condemned to a life of toil, and can only escape it by eliminating any separate group that would control and exploit the labor of others. At that point they will see their interests as identical with those of the rest of the working class.

Bookchin's conception of the working class rests on three bases. One is the undoubted fact that working class struggle was at a low ebb during the years in which the current generation grew up — roughly 1950 to 1965, years also marked by the relative stabilization of the capitalist economy. Social theorists of the "end of ideology" school interpreted this as indicating a fundimental change in Western society. Many radicals, notably C. Wright Mills and Herbert Marcuse, while attacking the "end of ideology" rhetoric, accepted the premise that the working class was no longer a potentially revolutionary force in economically developed societies. This assumption dominated the thinking of the New Left until roughly the time of the May 1968 general strike in France. Since that time, the assumption has been largely shattered by the resurgence of working class revolt and direct action not only in France but in Italy, England, Chechosolvakia, Poland, and to a lesser extent the U.S. and other countries. We can now see this theory in historical context. Every period of capitalist expansion and relative qui-

escence of the class struggle has produced theories of the same sort, which have held wide public acceptance until their factual basis crumbled under their feet. We are witnessing another such collapse today.

The second base of Bookchin's attitude echoes another idea popularized by the "end of ideology" school, the theory of working class "authoritarianism." Through the 1950s, many sociologists and historians argued that the conditions of working class life made workers a group with an authoritarian personality structure, prone to following fascistic leaders and trampling on liberty. Bookchin argues that "our enemies" include an outlook supported by "the worker dominated by the factory hierarchy, by the industrial routine, and by the work ethic." He views the worker as someone who must shed "his work ethic, his character-structure derived from industrial discipline, his respect for hierarchy, his obedience to leaders, his consumerism, his vestiges of puritanism." This statement expresses perfectly the moral contempt with which the New Left generally regarded workers, and goes far to explain why it had so little appeal to them. The New Left hated and feared the working class, and considered it an enemy. Such self-righteousness is hardly becoming in radical students whom capitalism provides the privilege of living off the labor of others, pursuing a life relatively free from the factory hierarchy, industrial routine, and, in short, the need to sell their labor. Workers, like others, ac-

---

[3] Perhaps he means "interests as workers" as contrasted with "interests as human beings." Perhaps he means that the interests in freedom, plentiful goods and services, self-direction, etc., are "interests as humans" rather than "interests as workers." But then all interests would be "interests as humans" and the concept of "interests of members of a class" would be meaningless. I would maintain, however, that the concept of the common interests of a class is extremely useful, since groups of individuals do in fact have common interests growing out of a common situation in society which differs from that of other groups. Their interests are of course "human" in that they are the interests of human beings — but decidedly not in the sense that they are the interests of all human beings.