

Neno Vasco, Anarchosyndicalism and Anarchist Communism

When we hear talk of social life being organized during time of revolution by “anarchist groups,” we cannot, we will freely admit, suppress a certain unease. Such groups, populated more by rebels than by anarchists, operating in a context that still lacks consciousness and is partly expectant, if not filled with misgivings and animosity in the face of the straits in which the revolution finds itself, inevitably call to mind the famed “civil revolutionaries” and “defenders of the Republic,” not to mention the “termites” and the resulting discrediting of the revolution and what they were “championing.”

The struggle intoxicates and the hatreds amassed by tyranny blind and lead astray. Between the revolutionary force with its ultimate yearning for liberation — the ageless right of the oppressed and exploited — and the force that switches from being revolutionary to being irksome, arbitrary, bullying (on a lesser scale, to be sure, than the preceding organized violence but bullying for all that), there is a line that rebels not sufficiently enlightened by a clear appreciation of freedom may cross in the intoxicating heat of battle. The noble enthusiasm for collective emancipation may indeed degenerate into a sectarian mentality, heart-felt but narrow-minded.

So we have to make it as clear as possible what the mission of the action groups and minority driving forces is, and that we do not mean to “emancipate” the people by force and stake our own claim to the right to act on its behalf, but rather seek to prompt it to look to its own liberation and to direct management of the wealth usurped and wrested from its grasp.

To take a concrete example: the housing question, so recently broached in Italy by Saverio Merlino [former anarchist turned democratic socialist].

The social revolution does away with the rights of the landlord and guarantees every worker a right to undisturbed possession of the home he needs.

Practical difficulties crop up due to the fact that at present nearly all of the poor are in dire housing, not forgetting those who have no homes at all. And unfortunately, contrary to Kropotkin’s optimistic thoughts, the vacant housing stock including sumptuous mansions, falls well short of offering adequate accommodation for the population from the slums, even in our largest cities.

Meanwhile, and until such time as our builders can erect hygienic single homes in sufficient numbers and tear down the dark slum districts, we must, if we are to make progress, do our best to improve the lot of those housed in existing accommodation, vacant or otherwise, by making arrangements and carrying out urgent improvements and redistributing fit housing stock on as equitable a basis as possible, with as little relocation and disruption as we can manage.

But how is all this to be organized? Should the revolution make the mistake or succumb to the weakness of allowing the establishment of some “provisional government” or “proletarian dictatorship” and the emergence of study and statistical commissions, boards, committees and sub-committees, then, besides the precious

time (and in times of revolution time is a very precious commodity) squandered on interminable reports, draft studies, compilation of figures and tiresome discussion, not to mention the injustices, favouritism and discontent that this would generate, we should be faced with the burden or danger of bureaucracy and centralization.

Consequently, it should be the persons concerned that take the matter directly in hand. This is what Kropotkin says when, in *The Conquest of Bread*, he leaves the task of rehousing the badly housed to the populace, operating on the basis of housing cluster, street or district. But, paradoxically, or at any rate ambiguously, he also foresees, without quite seeking to recommend any particular mode of organization, that, right from the outset, there must emerge “teams of men of good will” to draw up an inventory of vacant accommodation, healthy or unfit housing, housing which is under-occupied or over-occupied and to allocate the available housing stock to those living in accommodation unfit for human habitation.

But who might these “volunteers” be? Who invests them with these rights? On what basis are they to carry out their task? In what spirit? A sectarian spirit, inviting suspicion, or the spirit of justice, that sees only men and workers?

What assurance have we against possible arbitrariness or tactlessness, incompetence or trespass in a matter as delicate as housing allocation?

What assurance do we have that they will not take a superficial approach, requiring people to co-habit and trampling upon family feelings, triggering countless unspoken resentments and fostering a counter-revolutionary mentality?

No. The task is one that should be left to the tenants themselves. Prompted to act directly and promptly by activist minorities and banding together on the basis of ward, district or street, they can select people they trust, in all likelihood technicians — builders, architects, engineers, hygienists, physicians, etc. — and commission them to handle matters that cannot be handled by everybody at the same time.

Such commissions, welcomed by the residents of course, can draw up figures relating to the stock of disposable single habitable (or readily made so) dwellings. They will draw up lists of houses in need of refurbishment or demolition and of individuals in most urgent need of rehousing. And liaise with one another in a cooperative effort. They can draw up norms (as uniform as possible) subject to the approval and endorsement of the residents and widely publicized.

With the urgent housing issue resolved thus on technical grounds under the direct oversight of the residents, we may anticipate that discontent, injustice and hurt feelings will be reduced to a minimum.

The same can be said of all the other production, transport and distribution services. All should be entrusted to the workers working in each sector, who will aim primarily at an economic organization of labour and will look upon each of their comrades as a producer and not in terms of his beliefs. As far as they are concerned, work is the passport to all rights. Who does not work, neither shall he eat; but whosoever does

work is entitled to life, no matter the beliefs to which he may subscribe. Which is, in any case, a profoundly libertarian approach.

And not merely in terms of tolerance of views, a fundamental anarchist idea. The revolution is destructive: technology is constructive and innovative. Its function and its natural inclination is to facilitate and dignify labour, securing the greatest return from the least expenditure of energy, milking brute force as much as possible in order to reduce human effort to a minimum — and man's freedom is then enhanced through increased free time, satisfaction of his needs and the broadening of his scope for action. If, though, the revolution clears the road ahead of obstructions, purging it of the dead-weight of authority and the interests of mastery, technique strides out on the road to Anarchy, its stride all the firmer and faster, no doubt, the better its route is illuminated by a wide-awake minority.

Anarchism's role will still be as it is today: a free tendency operating without the use of coercion in the ranks of the people and organizations...

The revolution must of course socialize and make public services of every branch of production, transport and distribution key to the operation of a modern society. And, for the organs that are to both manage and implement said services, we need look no farther than the respective associations of workers — local groups, these groups banding together at local level to run the industries they operate, insofar as they operate them, in that locality (production, storage and delivery of basic goods and clothing; civil construction; urban transport, power and cleansing services, health and educational services, etc.), with the local branches and unions uniting to run federal services, such as the railroads, marine shipping, aircraft, telegraphs and postal services, etc.

These producer groups will be able to devise various new formats (which may well be wholly unforeseen) tailored to the needs of the revolution and as changes are made to factories, oversee major workforce redeployments; but if we want socialization to be effective and in fact to retain direct management of production and render it equally beneficial for all, they will not allow the imposition of any political superstructure, no matter how proletarian it may call itself.

At the same time, these economic organs will be political or administrative organs too; the basic political unit will be the economic unit, as the argument of the old, federalist International had it [Volume 1, Chapter 6]. Of course there will be delegation of labour; but the power to frame laws and have them enforced must be bestowed upon none...

But — I hear someone object — what assurance does the public have against the de facto monopoly wielded by each of these associations? Who is there to stop the producer association from looking after its own corporate interests first and foremost and neglecting the needs and preferences of the consumer and foisting inferior and inadequate goods upon him?

Who? Why, the public itself, it being a producer also and it furnishing the membership of all the producer associations. The public itself, master of the means of production and from which each of the producer groups receives its delegated service. Or would you rather a government that, in forcing its own rules upon other people's work, would be primarily looking out for itself and its followers and servants?

The real monopoly (and when we use that term we are not generally using it in the legal sense of lawfully-enshrined exclusive rights over manufacture and sale) is the de facto monopoly exercised by a tiny band of actual possessors of the means of production over the heads of a mainly proletarian public bereft of any of the instruments of production and of effective means of defence. On the other hand, the wage-earners working for that monopoly as mere instruments have not the slightest input, nor do they derive any benefit from it.

In the communist society, it is the actual managers-associated workers who make up the entirety of the public and their units are of equal standing, one with another.

Thus every association member who happens to ignore the public interest will soon discover, in his capacity as consumer, the dangerous implications of such short-sighted selfishness.

What is more, if he, in his capacity as a consumer, is dependent on other corporations, they are equally dependent on him in terms of production, given the extreme complexity of the modern labour in which he is engaged. The latter could not proceed without the contributions and good will of those who extract the raw materials for industry, those who carry out various transformations of it prior to the finishing of it, those who transport it, those who build the plant, those who supply the machinery and fuel, etc.

Once this interdependency and solidarity is outlined to him, the producer-consumer quickly catches on to the individual and social benefits of cooperation and the need to properly serve the public — the public being all the associated workers.

In most instances, anyway, the pressure of public opinion (a lot more homogeneous than it is today) brought to bear by men in the same circumstances would be enough and that public opinion can be constantly stimulated and informed by freer and more enterprising minds. Even today, in spite of the range of antagonistic interests that bring forth a thousand schools of thought that counteract and neutralize one another, and in spite of the people's weakness (the people being ingenuous in every respect) it is often the case that shifts in opinion fail to achieve splendid successes without violence!

The ultimate and telling guarantee is the right enjoyed by all in a communist society to join any one of the producer associations and avail themselves of the instruments of labour in their care. Ultimately, but for the existence of that right backing up all the other defences available to the public, those defences would eventually lose their effectiveness — just as popular protests and movements today lose theirs once the oppressors become convinced that armed insurrection is a material impossibility.

Unless we want the means of production not to be socialized and authority not to be done away with, the trade union, the professional association of the future, must be open and not claim exclusive ownership of the means of production. Everybody who so desires should be free to switch jobs or indeed to set himself up as a sole producer. When, say, the local union has passed the optimum point and the size of the association is no longer of service in grappling with complexity and loses its appeal to the individual, those who are of that mind should be able to set up a separate flanking federation or commune.

This freedom does not mean... mandatory variation or instability, any more than freedom in love means instability in one's associations or any duty to flit from one affair to another. On the contrary, for the good of the individual, for the good of humanity, it is only proper that a sexual union should be lasting and it is very much in this interest and to that end that it should not be inspired by economic considerations, or any compulsion or motive other than genuine attraction; and that it should not be underpinned or prolonged by any bond other than mutual love, the love of the individual and shared inner feelings and a deep-seated appreciation of the educational advantages of home life.

That it should be voluntary is the best and most solid guarantee of the union and its affection.

In social life too, this is the only way of determining the worth and extent of liaisons, the only way of matching temperaments, the only way that producers have of directly administering things for themselves.

As for defending the public, the methods we have mentioned will certainly suffice: force of public opinion in an egalitarian society and the interdependence of associations and individuals, whether as producers or as consumers. And we can rest assured that they will suffice all the more, the more certain and effective the right enjoyed by every single one of them to freely avail themselves of the means of production and ready access to the producer associations.

Such rights lie at the very heart of a communist society which, but for them, would degenerate into monopoly and authoritarianism.

Generally speaking, its presence, its ever-present promise would be enough to raise individuals' and associations' awareness of the respect owed to the public interest, just as, in today's violence-based society, the mere threat of the likelihood of revolt would be enough to dampen tyranny's rage.

But scarcely any effort is made to guarantee the rights of the consumer and that includes teaching by practical example and instructing him in how to procure a product that he does not know how to manufacture.

If these key (or, if one prefers, constitutional) rights are to be guaranteed, what is required is that the working man should enjoy freedom in his choice of trade and freedom of enterprise.

Meanwhile, the need for variety of task, for changing one's trade in order to escape the monotony of the daily grind and the burden of excessive toil or to set a mistaken vocation straight is largely countered by the force of acquired professional habits, the dexterity that lightens the work and reduces the required exertions and by attachment to habitual behaviour.

Variety, of course, is the best form of rest. Except where sleep is concerned, lack of movement is generally a symptom of pain or over-tiredness (poisoning); but variety brings repose because it restores the balance through alternate use of the organs.

But during the period of reconstruction, which is one we are mainly concerned with here, we will be dealing with the workers bequeathed to us by today's society, workers ill-equipped for variety, sorry to say. Later, with a proper division of labour through the widespread and mighty assistance offered by machinery, with the eradication of parasitism and pointless labour, production of necessities will take up less and less time, leaving us with a lot of leisure hours. Progress can be measured by the number of such hours. During them, the individual can look after his intellectual, moral, recreational, artistic needs and so on, or even secondary economic needs. Thus he will be able to switch between one occupation and another, and direct his activity down a thousand different avenues, marrying intellectual with manual labour. Here we have the ever-widening realm of fluid and flexible associations held together by all manner of affinities.

Even today we can see this natural division at work. Alongside the trade unions, which are not everything, but stand for the essential interests of life, there are like-minded groupings, countless more pliable associations concerned with society's moral, intellectual, aesthetic and emotional life.

In the future, we imagine that the same division will persist: the trade unions, which are in any case open to all, will look after public services; other groups will look to the very important remainder of social life.

The very people who, oblivious of the genuine monopoly exercised by the bourgeoisie and guaranteed by the State, purport to be worried that, to the detriment of the public interest and individual freedoms, autonomous but interdependent workers' associations might assert exclusive rights to the means of production, scream in terror when one tells them that such associations would be free and open and that every single person would be entitled to join or to make use of the instruments of labour — the essential basis of a self-governing society.

— That would be a shambles, chaos, a fool's errand, disorganization, a dead-end, asphyxiation!

As if authority, as if government was really the impartial arbiter and judge in disputes and disagreements, the source of justice and order, rather than the mainstay and creator of privileges and confusion, the ultimate handicap! As if it did not, by virtue of its very nature and position, have a tendency to extricate itself more and more from

production and labour and become less and less competent to lay down practicable rules!

But there are creatures who see in freedom little other than dangers and drawbacks and who see nothing but benefits and reassurance in authority. Such timid souls recoil from awarding freedom to everyone, but have no hesitation in placing their trust in the few who are well-endowed with powers and sanctions!

Which does not prevent these good souls from wearing themselves out in ongoing protests against what they naively imagine to be abuse of power, dishonest politicians, manufacturing faults and minor mechanical failures, and in pointlessly switching between personnel and governmental institutions, in changes of placards and emblems.

Are there drawbacks to freedom? Of course. Infinitely fewer than authority has, but they are there. However, the only brake upon and remedy to such drawbacks lies in freedom per se.

Free men's mistakes are made by themselves and at their own risk. They learn by them, just as the experimenter learns from the thousand failed attempts before he arrives at his invention.

But authority is prone to much bigger mistakes, especially ones damaging to the interests of those it governs and due to a congenital defect is always blundering around, incorrigibly making mistakes. And what, under freedom and for freedom's sake, amounts to a lesson to be seized upon and put into effect, is, under authority and in authority's case, stubbornness and capriciousness. The prestige that it needs if it is to survive forbids it from owning up and making amends and reasons of State compel it to claim infallibility and show inflexibility.

On pain of suicide.

The very fact that the individual's right of free access to the means of production is the very cornerstone of a libertarian society (one that is free in practice, rather than just in the letter of the law) not only is no impediment to association but is no barrier either to the establishment through voluntary pacts of norms that render exercise of that right feasible and easy, reconciling it with the public interest of which it is, in effect, the ultimate guarantor.

And the individual gladly abides by these freely accepted rules which can always be amended in the light of the lessons of experience because, once his right is positively assured him, and not just asserted in theory, once he can actually exercise it, his chief concern is to see that work and society function smoothly, because of that very interdependence of interests that we have been examining.

— But what if we are talking, not about simple organizational norms, but of a concrete undertaking that does not admit of two simultaneous solutions? What if there are two opinions that cannot be reconciled? Which is to step aside? The minority view? Or should the venture proceed?

— In all likelihood, because of the need to hammer out agreement, the majority, bereft of any means of coercion, will make every concession and offer all sorts of assurances just to win the support and assistance of the minority, and the latter, not out of any obligation, but rather prompted by the very same need, will end up giving in to the greater number, especially since, faced with a choice between a fait accompli not quite entirely to our liking and nothing at all, the former is always the better option..

— But what if the majority's plan were, in the eyes of its adversaries, a genuine calamity, an utter evil?

— To tell the truth, folly due to incompetence and public calamities... for private profit, are the stock-in-trade of governments today, pressing ahead stubbornly and frequently in the face of all warnings and counter-arguments — unless there is resistance coming from the government camp.

Let us hope that men who are free and equal, directly administering their own interests, will be more rational and far-seeing and that when it comes to actual projects, these will be sorted out without such diametrically opposing disagreements between the experts and the interested parties.

Meanwhile, it is plain that the minority would always have the right to withhold its support and, in the event of this refusal not preventing the evil event, it would still have the consolation that it can await its revenge and wait for the mistake to be put right, if possible. At present, it does not even have that: so many vested oligarchic interests congeal around every mistake that a change of tack is rendered impossible...

— But ultimately, in practice, anarchists always abide by the law of majorities[?]....

— Sorry! It is not a matter of an imposed law, but rather of a rational expedient willingly embraced. Furthermore, what in democracies goes under the name of "majority rule" is in fact the rule of a tiny minority. Since there is delegation of power, no matter how genuine, honest and guarantee-girded the suffrage may be, the outcome, filtered through parties, regionalism and the contradictory interests of the thousand electoral and parliamentary sub-divisions, is still, inescapably, law imposed by a minority.

— You speak of freedom in choice of trade. But what if vocations and individual wishes do not tally with society's production needs? What if some services are short of manpower while other trades are overmanned? When there is not the allure of higher wages, nor the bosses' authority to make cuts...

— Look into the reasons why there is a manpower shortage, improve the least sought-after jobs in terms of technique and hygiene or cut working hours. Later, the advancement of machinery, health and work organization will have an ongoing tendency to remove the differing degrees of difficulty, onerousness and healthiness separating the trades.

And if, in spite of all this, a crucial and irreplaceable service remains understaffed, there is still the option of all those concerned taking it in turns to help out.

As for work that no one is willing to perform, there will be nothing for it but for it to be done by all of the able-bodied, if it represents a genuine shared need...

The term "communism" has had a number of adventures. When the communists gathered in London in 1848 and commissioned Marx to draft the Communist Manifesto, the word was used deliberately to distinguish themselves from a number of suspect "socialisms" then flourishing among the petite bourgeoisie and in conservative quarters and even in the salons of the aristocracy. But that communism is a generic term for socialism, alluding to the issue of distribution of products, and its preferred method for attaining its target is the authoritarian course of conquering public authority.

Seventy years on, the Bolsheviks revived the Marxist tradition in an effort to put clear water between themselves and the so-called Second International and a discredited social-patriotic reformism. Their example was aped by the far left of international democratic socialism, and at present, there are "Communist Parties" in every country.

A short time prior to the Great War, the Italian anarchists had done likewise: they had jettisoned the label "socialists" for fear of a disastrous confusion with a socialism that had been corrupted through and through by parliamentarianism. But, styling themselves "communists" instead, they invested that term with the same broad sense in which they had been using the previous term.

Today, there is a rapidly escalating tendency to invest the term with the generic meaning of a society in which the means of production have been socialized or communized, regardless of the manner in which products are distributed in relation to labour.

In the First International, however, the description "collectivism" was bestowed upon the system which advocated the formula "to each the fruits of his labour," while the arrangement doctrinally encapsulated in "from each according to his abilities; to each according to his needs" was, in contrast, described as communism.

Initially, all anarchists were collectivists; but the Italian militants Cafiero, Malatesta, Covelli and Costa suggested that there was a more equitable and fraternal resolution to the distribution issue, one that was also better suited to the functioning of an anarchist society: namely, the communist formula. At the Florence congress, this was embraced by the Italian Federation and the two delegates (Malatesta and Cafiero) sent to the Berne International Congress in 1876 drew up a statement of principles with respect to certain omissions from the minutes of the Congress, and, writing in the Jura Federation Bulletin, reached this conclusion:

"3. The Italian Federation looks upon collective ownership of the fruits of labour as the necessary complement of the collectivist programme, the contribution of all to-

wards meeting the needs of everyone being the only precept of production and consumption suited to the principle of solidarity.”

The new teaching spread like wildfire. Later, Kropotkin, who was to move to western Europe in 1878, launching *Le Révolté* in Geneva the following year, expanded upon this, publicizing it in France and from France, under the designation communism.

Enthusiasm for the communist notion of distribution led anarchists to look upon it as the chief feature of anarchist socialism, yet the collectivists were still around in large numbers in anarchist circles, especially in Spain. Arguments between anarchists and democratic socialists (collectivists almost to a man, but only almost) generally revolved around this issue and the terms “communism” and “collectivism”, intended essentially as economic terms, eventually came to be attached to “anarchism” and to “the socialist State”, respectively.

The communists broadly rejected unity with the anarchist collectivists proper.

The pioneers of the communist formula in Italy and inside the International had a better grasp of the essentials of anarchism. In 1889 they tried to promote a libertarian international which they entitled the Revolutionary Anarchist Socialist [International], primarily so as to accommodate the anti-authoritarian collectivists. They clung to the belief that “collectivism could not live up to the notions of justice and solidarity by which we, and not just we but the collectivists themselves, are driven; that it could not operate without a complicated machinery which would reproduce the State under another form; that it would inevitably turn more or less rapidly to communism or lapse back into bourgeois-ism. But just as the return of privilege and wage slavery would be a moral impossibility because of the revolutionary morality that must necessarily accompany economic revolution, and a material impossibility because of anarchy, namely, the absence of government, it cannot be gainsaid by either side, it seems, that there is nothing to fear from an experience that we, alas! might not be able to avert and which, let it be said, might, in certain circumstances and in certain countries, help overcome the initial difficulties.”

Their over-riding worry was about methodology, for “in sociology as in topography we do not go where we please to go, but rather where our chosen path leads us. All that is required for the formation of a party is a shared subscription to the same method. And that method – the practical line of conduct that revolutionary anarchist socialists mean to follow – is shared by all, communists or collectivists alike.” (*L’Associazione*, London, 30 November 1889).

Inscribing “anarchist socialism” upon their banner, they set out its essential points: effective socialization of the means of production, free organization and freedom to experiment socially.

Taken literally, the collectivist formula is of course impracticable. To each the fruits of his labour, or in accordance with his labour. But how is one to divine, amid the extreme complexity and the warp and weft of modern production, the contribution made by any one individual towards the finishing of a product? How are we to arrive at a common measurement, when the individual’s work is of varying intensity, value and

effort per unit of time? And, anyway, how does one set a price upon exchange value?

That formula is, though, open to another interpretation. In essence it affirms the producer's right to enjoy the entire fruits of his labour and not to suffer exploitation and to resist the crime of parasitism. To the workers, and to them only, the fruits of their labours. Or, to borrow from Russian tradition: he who does not work, neither shall he eat.

Shunning the drone, denying him the advantages and assurances of society, the new society does him no violence, insofar as it denies no one the right to work and makes the requisite resources and tools available to everyone. Work is not something that one man imposes upon another, but a natural necessity: and the able-bodied person who evades it, shoving it off on to the shoulders of the remaining members of the community – while not a parasite on the scale of today's capitalist, who curtails production and keeps prices constantly at a high level – he is carrying out an anti-social act against which the community adopts a posture of self-defence. He has no right to make the slightest objection because he still has his right to use the means of production, allowing him to work separately in whatever way he may deem fit, on his own or with his followers.

Without doubt, the communist approach is infinitely fairer and freer. Not only is the sense of a higher justice deep-rooted within society, but within it, it has been fitfully or incompletely implemented, in spite of prevailing privilege, in spite of favouritism and sinecures, in spite of parasitic bureaucrats.

From each according to his ability: this encapsulates voluntary labour. Meanwhile, collective effort needs to be adapted to the demands of production so that general needs can be met, and later there will come a time when, even bearing in mind the abilities of the individual, an additional sacrifice is called for, one that will not bear down exclusively upon one class of men, but which will be equitably shared by all, except for the disabled.

To each according to his needs: here we have equality in essence. Inequality would mean standard rations to satisfy all unequal needs in the same way.

But obviously there are common needs, to meet which the community organizes public services. Individual needs are unlimited and if society were to try to satisfy every narrow, particularistic need, secondary need and imagined need, which are not general or non-existent, it would certainly be putting essential production in jeopardy and asking too much of its members. This is something that must be entrusted to the enterprise, cooperation and efforts of the interested parties, additional to the amount of service they may have committed themselves to rendering the community.

In conclusion and to sum up: the greater the abundance, the easier it will be to implement the communist formula. But it is up to the new society to create that abundance (and only it can create it) by requiring sacrifices of labour and imposing restrictions upon consumption. Bourgeois society has left us a poor inheritance.

Collectivism? Communism? (We say again that, in all our remarks in this book, our focus is primarily on the period of revolution and reconstruction, rather than upon a communist society in full possession of all its faculties.)

In their feat of imagination, *Comment nous ferons la révolution* [How We Shall Bring About the Revolution], Pouget and Pataud broach both systems: basic necessities are distributed according to needs (communism) and other goods are temporarily acquired by means of additional labour (collectivism), until they are available in abundant supply. And there is every chance that this may come to pass, and even that solutions may vary from place to place.

Likewise other, mixed solutions are possible, whereby communism – initially restricted (due to the possible dearth of basic necessities) – will spread, since there will be no authority with the capacity to impose its will and its sectional interests.

Anarchists, of course, will make their best efforts to inject the greatest possible dose of communism into the new social arrangements.

Given, though, that they cannot or ought not to find a separate venture appropriate, they will of course find difficulty in moving the workers in the direction of practicing communism, especially within each commune. Inadequate production; the necessity for intense effort to boost same; the deep-seated, indignant moral revulsion at parasitism, even in the simple guise of work shyness; misgivings about the bona fides and loyalty of educated persons, hangovers from bourgeois society, with their habitual indolence, lack of pride in their work, their slipshod approach, their bureaucratic purposelessness, the high life lived by middle-men and speculators – these are only some of the sometimes insurmountable obstacles.

The working man will object:

– The produce just is not available. We must work harder. There are still lots of layabouts, incompetents and slovens; the new morality does not have the time to look after them. And if the community withdraws its benefits entirely from those who will not work, why should it not withhold a half from those who produce only half of what they should be contributing towards the commonweal? Half an effort, half a ration. Fair distribution this may not be, but we have to protect ourselves.

Anarchists will strive to ensure that no sort of currency lingers or is established, even where products in short supply are concerned; the latter should be distributed pretty much in proportion with the work performed. All that would be required would be for the direct distribution agencies to be furnished regularly with charts showing frequency of attendance at work and corroborated by personal records.

Money would work against the desired aim. It allows the amassing of wealth and plays right into the hands of thievery, as well as being a factor in idleness and dangerous parasitism.

By devaluing money to next to nothing, the revolution also works towards its abolition. The rural masses, especially, being mistrustful of devalued currency, reject

assignats, work vouchers or any other financial novelty. They want goods – farming tools, fertilizer, clothing, footwear, etc., – rather than worthless paper. Look at what happened in the French Revolution and what is happening in the Russian Revolution where, indeed, commissions have been set up to exchange products without money changing hands.

While collectivism temporarily established in a commune does not imply that money is needed, it does not necessarily imply the extension of collectivism to dealings between communes either. It seems to us that communism, even partial communism, which is almost always subject to rationing and distribution, could inject fresh vigour into such dealings by relying in each township upon what I said regarding ways of getting their members to put in the required amounts of labour.

Of course, in our view, a regimen of whole-hearted trust, fraternity and openness must be established between the liberated communes, regions or countries if we are to destroy the abundant misgivings, distrust and misunderstandings that create a gulf especially between city and country, and between one country and another. The bigger cities in particular are regarded today by the rural masses, and not unreasonably, as hotbeds of bureaucrats and bloodsucking parasites, and they must make a great effort for the sake of the countryside, honestly adapting to its real needs, giving unstintingly and not making an issue of the value they receive in exchange.

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Neno Vasco – Anarchosyndicalism and Anarchist Communism

Neno Vasco (1878-1920) was a Portuguese lawyer and anarchist active in the Brazilian anarchist movement from 1901 to 1911. He maintained a presence within the Brazilian movement after his return to Portugal through his writings in the Portuguese anarchist press. His posthumous publication, *A Concepção Anarquista do Sindicalismo* [The Anarchist Conception of Syndicalism] (Lisbon: A Batalha, 1920; republished 1984), was particularly influential in the Brazilian movement. It was through writings like these that the anarcho-syndicalist movements in Latin America remained committed to anarchist communism as their ultimate ideal (see *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, Volume 1, Selections 58 & 95). Vasco answers the objection of some anarchists (such as Luigi Galleani, Volume 1, Selection 35) that anarcho-syndicalist organization is just a new form of government, as well as dealing with more common objections to anarchist communism. The following excerpts from Vasco's book have been translated by Paul Sharkey. I have now set up a Neno Vasco page with a much lengthier excerpt in which Vasco criticizes Kropotkin's more optimistic approach to anarchist communism and argues for a flexible approach to economic issues in order to prevent anarchist communism from becoming its own imposed dogma.

The revolution must of course socialize and make public services of every branch of production, transportation and distribution key to the operation of a modern society. And, for the organs that are to both manage and implement such services, we need look no farther than the respective associations of workers – local groups, these groups banding together at the local level to run the industries they operate, insofar as they operate them, in that locality (production, storage and delivery of basic goods

and clothing; civil construction; urban transportation, power and cleaning services, health and educational services, etc.), with the local branches and unions uniting to run federal services, such as the railroads, shipping, aircraft, telegraphs and postal services, etc.

These producer groups will be able to devise various new formats (which may well be wholly unforeseen) tailored to the needs of the revolution and, as changes are made to factories, oversee major workforce redeployments; but if we want socialization to be effective and in fact to retain direct management of production and render it equally beneficial for all, they will not allow the imposition of any political superstructure, no matter how proletarian it may call itself.

At the same time, these economic organs will be political or administrative organs too; the basic economic unit will be the political unit, as the argument of the old, federalist International had it. Of course there will be delegation of labour; but the power to frame laws and have them enforced must be bestowed upon no one....

But – I hear someone object – what assurance does the public have against the de facto monopoly wielded by each of these associations? Who is there to stop the producer association from looking after its own corporate interests first and foremost, neglecting the needs and preferences of the consumer and foisting inferior and inadequate goods upon him?

Who? Why, the public itself, it being a producer also and furnishing the membership of all the producer associations. The public itself, master of the means of production and from which each of the producer groups receives its delegated service. Or would you rather a government, which, in forcing its own rules upon other people's work, would be primarily looking out for itself and its followers and servants?

The real monopoly (and when we use that term we are not generally using it in the legal sense of lawfully-enshrined exclusive rights over manufacture and sale) is the de facto monopoly exercised by a tiny band of actual possessors of the means of production over the heads of a mainly proletarian public bereft of any of the instruments of production and of effective means of defence. On the other hand, the wage-earners working for that monopoly as mere instruments have not the slightest input into it, nor do they derive any benefit from it.

In the communist society, it is the actual managers-associated workers who make up the entirety of the public and their units are of equal standing, one with another.

Thus every association member who happens to ignore the public interest will soon discover, in his capacity as consumer, the dangerous implications of such short-sighted selfishness.

What is more, if he, in his capacity as a consumer, is dependent on other corporations, they are equally dependent on him in terms of production, given the extreme complexity of the modern labour in which he is engaged. The latter could not proceed without the contributions and good will of those who extract the raw materials for industry, those who carry out various transformations of it prior to the finishing of

it, those who transport it, those who build the plant, those who supply the machinery and fuel, etc.

Once this interdependency and solidarity is outlined to him, the producer-consumer quickly catches on to the individual and social benefits of cooperation and the need to properly serve the public – the public being all the associated workers.

In most instances, anyway, the pressure of public opinion (a lot more homogeneous than it is today) brought to bear by men in the same circumstances would be enough, and that public opinion can be constantly stimulated and informed by freer and more enterprising minds. Even today, in spite of the range of antagonistic interests that bring forth a thousand schools of thought that counteract and neutralize one another, and in spite of the people's weakness (the people being ingenuous in every respect) it is often the case that shifts in opinion achieve splendid successes without violence!

The ultimate and telling guarantee is the right enjoyed by all in a communist society to join any one of the producer associations and avail themselves of the instruments of labour in its care. Ultimately, but for the existence of that right backing up all the other defences available to the public, those defences would eventually lose their effectiveness – just as popular protests and movements today lose theirs once the oppressors become convinced that armed insurrection is a material impossibility.

Unless we want the means of production not to be socialized and authority not to be done away with, the trade union, the professional association of the future, must be open and not claim exclusive ownership of the means of production. Everybody who so desires should be free to switch jobs or indeed to set himself up as a sole producer. When, say, the local union has passed the optimum point and the size of the association is no longer of service in grappling with complexity and loses its appeal to the individual, those who are of that mind should be able to set up a separate federation or commune alongside it.

This freedom does not mean... mandatory variation or instability, any more than freedom in love means instability in one's associations or any duty to flit from one affair to another. On the contrary, for the good of the individual, for the good of humanity, it is only proper that a sexual union should be lasting and it is very much in this interest and to that end that it should not be inspired by economic considerations, or any compulsion or motive other than genuine attraction; and that it should not be underpinned or prolonged by any bond other than mutual love, the love of the individual and shared inner feelings and a deep-seated appreciation of the educational advantages of home life.

That it should be voluntary is the best and most solid guarantee of the union and its affection.

In social life too, this is the only way of determining the worth and extent of liaisons, the only way of matching temperaments, the only way that producers have of directly administering things for themselves.

As for defending the public, the methods we have mentioned will certainly suffice: the force of public opinion in an egalitarian society and the interdependence of associations and individuals, whether as producers or as consumers. And we can rest assured that they will suffice all the more, the more certain and effective the right enjoyed by every single one of them to freely avail themselves of the means of production and ready access to the producer associations.

Such rights lie at the very heart of a communist society which, but for them, would degenerate into monopoly and authoritarianism.

But during the period of reconstruction, which is one we are mainly concerned with here, we will be dealing with the workers bequeathed to us by today's society, workers ill-equipped for variety, sorry to say. Later, with a proper division of labour through the widespread and mighty assistance offered by machinery, with the eradication of parasitism and pointless labour, production of necessities will take up less and less time, leaving us with many leisure hours. Progress can be measured by the number of such hours. During them, the individual can look after his intellectual, moral, recreational, artistic needs and so on, or even secondary economic needs. Thus he will be able to switch between one occupation and another, and direct his activity down a thousand different avenues, marrying intellectual with manual labour. Here we have the ever-widening realm of fluid and flexible associations held together by all manner of affinities.

Even today we can see this natural division at work. Alongside the trade unions, which are not everything, but stand for the essential interests of life, there are like-minded groupings, countless more pliable associations concerned with society's moral, intellectual, aesthetic and emotional life.

In the future, we imagine that the same division will persist: the trade unions, which are in any case open to all, will look after public services; other groups will look to the very important remainder of social life.

The very fact that the individual's right of free access to the means of production is the very cornerstone of a libertarian society (one that is free in practice, rather than just in the letter of the law) not only is no impediment to association but is no barrier either to the establishment through voluntary pacts of norms that render exercise of that right feasible and easy, reconciling it with the public interest of which it is, in effect, the ultimate guarantor.

And the individual gladly abides by these freely accepted rules, which can always be amended in the light of the lessons of experience, because once his right is positively assured him, and not just asserted in theory, once he can actually exercise it, his chief concern is to see that work and society function smoothly, because of that very interdependence of interests that we have been examining.

– But what if we are talking, not about simple organizational norms, but of a concrete undertaking that does not admit of two simultaneous solutions? What if there are two opinions that cannot be reconciled? Which is to step aside? The minority view? Or should the venture proceed?

– In all likelihood, because of the need to hammer out agreement, the majority, bereft of any means of coercion, will make every concession and offer all sorts of assurances just to win the support and assistance of the minority, and the latter, not out of any obligation, but rather prompted by the very same need, will end up giving in to the greater number, especially since, faced with a choice between a fait accompli not quite entirely to our liking and nothing at all, the former is always the better option.

– But what if the majority's plan were, in the eyes of its adversaries, a genuine calamity, an utter evil?

– To tell the truth, folly due to incompetence and public calamities for private profit are the stock-in-trade of governments today, pressing ahead stubbornly and frequently in the face of all warnings and counter-arguments – unless there is resistance coming from the government camp.

Let us hope that men who are free and equal, directly administering their own interests, will be more rational and far-seeing, and that when it comes to actual projects, these will be sorted out without such diametrically opposing disagreements between the experts and the interested parties.

Meanwhile, it is plain that the minority would always have the right to withhold its support and, in the event of this refusal not preventing the evil event, it would still have the consolation that it can await its revenge and wait for the mistake to be put right, if possible. At present, it does not even have that: so many vested oligarchic interests congeal around every mistake that a change of tack is rendered impossible...

– But ultimately, in practice, anarchists always abide by the law of majorities [?]....

– Sorry! It is not a matter of an imposed law, but rather of a rational expedient willingly embraced. Furthermore, what in democracies goes under the name of “majority rule” is in fact the rule of a tiny minority. Since there is delegation of power, no matter how genuine, honest and guarantee-girded the suffrage may be, the outcome, filtered through parties, regionalism and the contradictory interests of the thousand electoral and parliamentary subdivisions, is still, inescapably, law imposed by a minority.

– You speak of freedom in choice of trade. But what if vocations and individual wishes do not tally with society's production needs? What if some services are short of manpower while other trades are over-manned? When there is not the allure of higher wages, nor the bosses' authority to make cuts?

– Look into the reasons why there is a manpower shortage, improve the least sought-after jobs in terms of technique and hygiene or cut working hours. Later, the advancement of machinery, health and work organization will have an ongoing tendency to remove the differing degrees of difficulty, drudgery and healthiness separating the trades.

And if, in spite of all this, a crucial and irreplaceable service remains understaffed, there is still the option of all those concerned taking turns to help out.

As for work that no one is willing to perform, there will be nothing but for it to be done by all of the able-bodied, if it represents a genuine shared need.

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