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The Future Society

Anarchist Communist Federation

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7 June 1997

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Here is the text of the afternoon session of the joint Anarchist Communist Federation/Subversion discussion meeting at Sheffield Red and Black Centre on 7/6/97, presented by Claire and Mike (ACF Nottingham).

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the current society deems ugly, clumsy, talentless, pitiable and useless. It will be through the contribution which we make to each other's happiness, not through how much work we do, that we will evaluate each other.

Introduction

During the McLibel trial it was suggested that there is nothing wrong with raising chickens on a battery farm as long as they had been born into such conditions. Chickens who had never seen a farm-yard, grown up in a normal chicken family, sun-bathed in the hay (chickens do, apparently) or sheltered from the cool rain could not, as though by definition, be stressed by missing these things. Indeed they could not be said to suffer, because they thought their crowded shed was all that there was to life and expected no more. This seems a fitting analogy to the human condition under the tyrannies of capitalism and the state. Those who lead a relaxed and enjoyable, even decadent lifestyle feel no guilt about depriving the world's poor and oppressed of freedom and even the basic means of subsistence. It is as though, having never experienced self-determination and equality, we will be happy without them. But in truth, in the cage, it is sometimes difficult to visualise what else the world could be like. Although we are capable of great creativity, the state/bosses and their media feed us an obese-making, putrefying, cannibalistic diet of 'a fair days work for a fair day's wage', 'normal family life' and 'consume or die' whose invented values conceal the true obscenity of a life in which we are actually starving. When we see through this we see that we are indeed battery chickens, destined only to become golden McNuggets. But revolutionaries know that we have the power to break out of the shed and then to create something better than the 'humane alternative', the 'right' to move around the farmyard and lay eggs wherever we want and even to be followed around the farm by some of our own chicks. This afternoon we will be poking our beady black eyes up to the key-hole of our chicken shed and glimpsing another of many possible alternative futures in the world beyond the walls — the egalitarian and libertarian society.

But the chicken analogy ends there, for now. The first serious point to make is to explain the view point which Mike and I are taking in discussing the future society. We are partially rejecting the pseudo-Darwinistic approach which some political thinkers have taken in describing the 'ideal' world. As atheistic nineteenth-century society discovered that evolutionary laws governed the natural world, so they tried to extend them to human society as part of that world. From this (to condense and simplify too much) rose the view that human history was in itself a process of unstoppable evolution towards higher and more advanced forms of social organisation; from feudalism, through capitalism, state socialism and finally to communism, as Marx envisaged it. To Kropotkin it seemed that under capitalism human society was already evolving forms of voluntary social co-operation which had not existed before: for example farmers' co-operatives and pan-national trading syndicates and, better still, altruistic organisations such as the international red-cross and the lifeboat rescue service. Because these by-passed the state at a time when most people professed to support government, this was proof that they would eventually and inevitably render government redundant. This naive optimism arose from the profound belief that human society was governed and directed by natural, indeed 'moral' laws which would result in massive upheaval by which the working class would eventually govern as their birth-right. Such a view of inevitable and irresistible natural law ignores the fact that, by some freak of nature, human beings and human beings alone, as individuals and as part of society, can, to a limited extent, avoid one 'destiny' entirely and shape the future to suit their desire and will, consciously and deliberately. This is not a judgement on chickens, who accept their fate; it is simply a fact that we have evolved to the point that we can understand our evolution in terms of biology and our history in terms of power, politics, exploitation and so forth. Therefore, given the opportunity, the working class can change the future. The 'nat-

mating exclusively for life will no longer a socially invented expectation. Sex will imply experimentation, physical variety, enjoyment and respect for each other's feelings — but not necessarily emotional commitment. Sex will therefore be less emotionally stressful and more easily obtainable. But such a society will surely be hard pressed to produce equivalents of the great works of art and culture produced in this emotionally tortured society. I can't see moving operas, rock music, poetry, stories and so on being inspired by happy people completely at one with each other, giving each other freedom and being happy spending time alone.

We will probably still enjoy games of various sorts and also sport and physical exertion to some degree. We will enjoy these with more of a sense of community and less one of competition. Re-runs of the FA Cup Final, with deep macho voices in the blue fan enclosure chanting tunelessly against those in the red enclosure, will be one of the highest forms of comedy. In fact, if only because men's voices are gratingly so much louder than women's, partisan based community shouting of all kinds will quickly die out; if we approve of something, we will respond to it creatively and in a way in which all voices, male, female, able and disabled are heard.

New cultural forms will undoubtedly occur as cultures globally retain and invent new forms and these forms are blended in an infinite variety of ways with other forms by people travelling to learn and perform. Physical artistic forms, such as dance, whilst they may be skilful will not be body fascist but include forms of expression in which everyone's contribution is personally fulfilling and generally appreciated, whether they are graceful or clumsy, able-bodied or disabled. Body fascism will disappear as a result of the revolution. We will no longer have a concept of judgement about each other's bodies or each other's physical contribution. One of the priorities of the immediately post-revolutionary society will be to invent artistic and technological forms to give a cultural voice to those who

against the political status quo. The list goes on. But what will provoke such strong creative reactions after the revolution, when we are living more harmoniously together?

The natural world has always inspired cultural forms; folk stories and songs about battling for survival with the elements and dangerous animals, the use of natural colours and shapes in decoration, of sounds and sensuality in music, the literal portrayal of landscapes in pictures. It may fairly be said that the privileged have made most use of this, not least because of their increased leisure time and abundance of resources, which after the revolution we will all share and which will undoubtedly inspire us to communicate our reactions to it to other people. But we can't invent new stories about lakes, hills and daffodils for ever, or this will be a society even more boring than one which spends its life in front of the television.

The other great inspiration which we will experience in some form after the revolution is love and physical desire. Much of current culture is derived from homophobic and chauvinistic notions which are not simply offensive but also limited in creative terms, imposing a norm on sexuality and the nature of sexual expression which it is still takes courage to diverge from. This of course will end, in terms of the political, economic and social hegemony enjoyed by men and by heterosexual couples, indeed by 'couples' full stop. But change will go deeper than this. As we become increasingly social animals, aiming to be individuals operating as part of a community rather than as part of secure family units, the negative emotions and experiences currently associated with love, and so emotive culturally, will also change. I am talking about the pain of rejection and the fruitless pursuit of a chosen 'mate' whose coldness is the cause of our pain. This loathing and suspicion of the teasing object of our affection who rejects us, most especially directed by heterosexual men against women, is the result of a combination of sexual power and frustrated sexual expression. In the new society

ural law' view also ignores the fact that those in whose interests it is to suppress any impulse towards self- and communal-fulfilment in the working class also act consciously to stop it. They seal up cracks in the walls of the chicken shed so that we cannot glimpse alternative futures. They have the power to do this. We have the power to obstruct and destroy them. But there is nothing 'natural' or inevitable about these processes.

Nor is there anything inevitable about revolution; this is why the revolution must be built through revolutionary organisation and culture. And there is nothing inevitable about how post-revolutionary human society will organise itself. No natural laws govern this. Just as we don't believe that human beings are 'naturally' selfish, nor that the 'law of the jungle' will prevail unless that state is there to protect the weak, neither do we believe in a 'natural' human impulse for co-operation amongst equals which has been stifled by the state and the bosses. Human society has been hierarchical, unequal, oppressive, homophobic and patriarchal where the state and money never existed. We believe that the exact nature of the post-revolutionary society will be chosen and shaped by the deliberate and conscious will of those building it. It will not 'evolve' nor be subject to any other 'natural law', pseudo-biological or -sociological. It will be consciously chosen. When the revolution is won, if we vent our destructive and constructive anger in the demolition of the concrete grey architectural edifices until we weary of the debris, it will be because we choose to, not because it is our destiny. From there we must choose to rebuild a world fit to live in, for ourselves and the rest of nature so vulnerable to our whims. Finally, and most importantly, we must envisage and then choose to create a liberated global society beyond the obvious essentials on which all revolutionaries agree 'no government' and 'no money', 'no homophobia, sexism or racist bigotry', also realising what this implies in positive and optimistic terms; this is to say 'creative', 'exciting', 'fulfilling', both 'communal' and 'individual'. It is surely almost impossi-

ble to visualise not only how we will live but what we will be like as people; we are not 'ourselves' under capitalism, because it fucks up every human interaction and relationship, creating and intensifying insecurity, greed, jealousy, the desire to dominate and the fear of the unknown as though these were 'natural' conditions and emotions for us 'animal' creatures to live with. A different society would produce a different type of humanity from the minute of birth. Today we have to try and visualise ourselves without the environmental and sociological features which fuck us up. We must imagine a society in which we are not too chicken-shit to learn how to fly.

Human Relations and The Individual in Society

First of all we will address how the post-revolutionary individual will relate to the whole of society. If we were born free of the assumptions which are thrust upon us from the beginning and into a world where the only learned values were those born of equality and freedom, we would assume that the world, its landscape and its people were there to be experienced and enjoyed without there being any inherent value in this. We would simply 'be' in the world. We would not fear the unknown and so create gods, experience racist bigotry or wage war against 'others' for there would be no 'others', only our global community. The emotion of fear might almost disappear, for who or what would harm us. We would describe the world in rational terms, not in terms of superstition and hidden meanings, ever anxious to secure and better our place in it. If no one controlled us or threatened us our most prevalent emotions would range from calm to ecstatic, because individuals could consciously choose what emotions they want to experience and can create the environment likely to induce them. Or they could let life surprise them. The infliction of great stress on an individ-

farming programme. Similarly, many species have suffered because farm and village fish ponds have been drained, but they were in themselves a form of environmental exploitation. We cannot live without using our environment, but each community will need to acquire both lost and recently explored technical knowledge so as to avoid over-exploitation. And this will of course need co-ordinating globally as we have learned to our cost the global effects of local over-exploitation. What is certain is that we won't undertake a sort of primitivist existence because we will have the resources, when they are shared, and will be all the time developing environmentally and ecologically minded technology to live comfortably.

Culture

I have great difficulty visualising many aspects of post-revolutionary culture. What will be the impetus for change and growth, for artistic or cultural movements and local diversity. Look at what are the driving features of many cultural forms which we find inspiring in this society. Look at protest music or world music which has in many cases been made more dynamic by a response to imperialism; look at the blues, inspired by the poverty, ghettoisation and exploitation of Black Americans; twentieth-century art movements which responded on a philosophical and political level to the state, capital and the ludicrousness of life in the industrial west; gay and lesbian and also feminist cultures which have been given an inch and taken a mile in terms of the 'right' to live certain lifestyles and make new rules enabling us to deal with life in a sexist, homophobic and narrow minded capitalist culture; Rock and roll music in all its diverse forms which has at its heart the expression of tension between generations and (typically) heterosexual tension between partners; punk rock which took all this a stage further in a violent reaction

centres, with their reception and dining rooms being used for the purpose to which they are most fitted — staging huge Asian food festivals; their bedrooms hosting travellers who will tell stories and hold talks and initiate debates about initiatives being taken to improve on the quality of life in places they have visited. the Palaces of Kurdistan, the Pyramids, Mosques and Medieval Cathedrals will be turned into pleasure palaces, the end of private acquisitiveness at home will make it possible to fill them full of couches and cushions, pools of warm water, light and music for the enjoyment of the human body both in experiencing and exploring the full range and diversity of an individual's sexuality (but without any concept of 'normal' or 'divergent') and in erotic displays (the question of art vs. pornography having been resolved as men lose social, economic and psychological power and women consequently gain the power to define what turns them on and what makes them feel vulnerable or objectified). Why not utilise these well-built but elitist structures in this irreverent way. They were built for the enemy, but with the lives and the skill of ordinary people — skills which we should try to re-learn, as modern production has eradicated many of the craft techniques our ancestors knew. We should celebrate these skills with mocking the reclaimed buildings with egalitarian debauchery and pleasures denied to the people who built them. We should also relearn old skills and build beautiful new buildings whose structure, motifs and position reflect egalitarian principals.

Finally, the natural environment. We can put right much of the damage done as a matter of urgency. It don't have the technical knowledge to really address this and I'd value the input of those who have looked into how this would work. But I know it has to be planned in a very long term sense, for we need to create a balanced environment. For example, we are told that the decline of the hedgerow has damaged British wildlife, but hedgerows are unnatural and relatively recent in ecological history themselves and don't necessarily fit well into a communal

ual or a community would be a moment of social crisis for the global community. And there may be stress; in periods of natural disaster for example. But these could be dealt with in a global society geared to compassion and practical aid without repayment, for stress and pain and the fear of stress and pain would become social enemies. Of course we cannot be happy all the time. But when people make this criticism of 'utopias' they are really attempting to justify the status quo. We aren't striving for 'happiness' alone but for the necessary conditions to inspire it, or at least tranquillity, which many people in the world have never known, and certainly not with that knot of fear at the knowledge that peace of mind can be taken away as quickly as it came. We will live in the 'now'. We won't be striving or ambitious for personal fulfilment or success, but instead will take pleasure in what we do, even pride, if our work makes other people happy or healthier.

It is socially invented fear which makes life so unbearable. It isn't just capitalism or the state which is responsible but also early struggling societies, when 'society' was first experienced and someone decided to take power and create 'social order' in their interest. Some generations after the revolution we will realise that a commitment to each other's happiness and our own, through the adoption of libertarian economic and social values, frees us from the ways of behaving which we now take to be normal. If it became normal to feel personally fulfilled and cherished by our communities we would not seek to make ourselves indispensable, and we would be taken for who we were not how useful or skilful we were. We would not seek to be in an exclusive sexual relationship for life, nor to sleep with whoever we could without emotional content or respect because we would not be afraid of being unwanted or on our own, nor to find an attractive and able bodied partner in the supposed search for good genes irrespective of whether they are fun to spend time with and to have sex with. Will we fall in love? Isn't this process one whereby we mystify and glo-

rify what is a combination of a biological urge and sociological pressure to pair off? Maybe we will still feel such strong feelings about another person, after all, they are some of the most pleasurable feelings we have under capitalism. But these won't be based on an idealised image of a loyal, healthy and attractive partner. And we won't feel social pressure to stay forever in that relationship or failure and betrayal if we want to experiment outside of it. We won't own each other, because the element of control will be alien. We may grow apart from a partner, but we won't 'leave' them as such because, unlike under the state, we are part of each other's sorrow and happiness.

Philosophically minded people will be able to address the question of exactly how the individual relates to the whole of society better than I can. But I know what it means politically. It means the end of politics. It means that there is no conflict between what an individual wants and what the 'majority' want. The needs and wishes of an individual simply reflect the diversity of that society. There is no 'majority', only society. Where there is room and resources for everyone to pursue what they want and need, they will. Maybe this means the break up of a community into two new ones, but this will be seen as a process of growth and free expression, because there will be no 'status quo' to maintain and no one interested in maintaining it. Every possible way to fulfil that individual will be employed and if, at the end of the day, they need more resources, time or whatever than is available after everyone else in the community has attempted to accommodate their happiness, then, when they settle for less, far from feeling let down or in conflict with their community they will be valued and understood by it. If they don't feel this, then it is the job of the community to explore why that person is unfulfilled, not of that person to keep trying to get their own way. Conflict comes from unequal, or perceived unequal, scarcity of resources, affection, attention

leisure time to travel and gain and share new experiences and to finally have a choice about where and how they live, which is in reality a choice denied to the majority under the choice obsessed culture of capital. The destruction of poor housing and the gradual emergence of imaginatively designed and good quality housing and amenities will eventually eradicate the qualitative difference between town and country living. Not only will rural slum housing never reappear, but the 'quaintness' of country cottages will never be imitated; they will be replaced by modern structures with naturally inspired shapes, or shapes which contrast pleasingly with the natural curve of hills, the stark crags of mountains or dead flatness of reclaimed land on which they are built. Not only will tower blocks be blown up, with those once forced to live in them pushing the detonator, but the cardboard box mock-Georgian nuclear family units which pass for affluent housing amongst the aspiring upper middle class will be replaced by a variety of urban buildings designed with the whole town and the chosen lifestyle of the people who will live in them; for example, units for single people designed for a complete life, not a room in someone else's house or with shared facilities endured until 'real life' starts when they enter a relationship; units for communal living where people share cooking and leisure and maybe even sleeping space as the company of others becomes a pleasure rather than an endurance; houses for several people of different ages who choose to live together with people they care about and whose specific company they enjoy.

Some large buildings such as already exist and are attractive will be re-utilised, part of their enjoyment being in the ironic uses to which we will put them. Banks will become food distribution centres. Bingo halls will be turned back into cinemas (unless whole communities want to play Bingo without cash prizes). Concert halls and theatres, designed acoustically for the purpose, will resound with non-elitist music and performance. Stately homes and huge hotels will become cultural

tached to town life and don't feel so much alienated by it as frustrated at the fact that what it offers is currently best enjoyed by people with money. It will still have much to offer when its motive is not profit, because concentrations of people can imply cultural and architectural variety and the chance to experiment with different lifestyles. The concentration of resources in towns which now feel decadent and symbolise affluence will be shared out more equally (health clubs, opera houses, elaborately decorated restaurants). Where once were office blocks, shopping malls, factories, DSS and local government offices and police stations we can build parks planted with flowers and trees, inner-city herb and vegetable gardens, landscaped ponds and open air areas for congregation with beautiful structures for shelter, areas for performances, dances, picnics. We can adapt usefully sized or shaped buildings such as already exist for elitist purposes, for our own uses if they are not destroyed in the revolutionary process.

To reduce the psychological distance between town and countryside, many major arteries of communication such as road and rail will be preserved, although many will be destroyed, especially ringroads; these have destroyed much irretrievable natural land but will be redundant when lorries no longer transport goods for profit and the term 'commuter' is antiquated and travellers no longer wish to avoid towns and city centres but to experience what they have to offer. Transportation, of produce and people, will no longer be urgent but will be pleasurable. Canals will be reopened and waterways will cease to be accessible only to the privileged as boats of all descriptions will be used as a communal resource and source of leisure. Private cars will of course have long ago been scrapped, but environmentally friendly cars of some sort will still be pooled communally and be available for individuals and small groups who want to get out of the city on their own, or into the city from rural areas. Transport will of course be excellent, encouraging people to use increased

and so on. We may not always have a surplus, but what we have will be for everyone.

Related to the idea of conflicting interests is that of decision-making in post-revolutionary society. Most anarchists and some left-communists are really fetishistic about the need for open and non-parliamentary/non-representative-democratic decision-making. This stems from the correct analysis that the state is largely responsible for our alienation from the decision-making process i.e. our disempowerment. However, anarchists who try to claim 'direct democracy', 'accountable delegates' or more vaguely 'real democracy' for the post-revolutionary society badly miss the point. What matters in the future society is not the form of decision-making but the content. This point is well argued in the Workers Playtime article "What is Wildcat" (circulated by Subversion in the preliminary reading). There it is pointed out that those who want proper democracy "revere the moment of decision, and class the revolution as the creation of a new decision-making process [...] They do not understand the revolution as a process of creating new forms of activity". Revolutionaries are sometimes keen to resolve perceived 'conflict' in a 'fair' way through the community instead of resorting to the state. This implies that 'fairness' is more than an abstract concept which exists in context only under the mediation of the state, even though we understand this to be the case about 'rights'. But 'conflict' and its 'resolution' exists in an entirely different context once the concept of property, profit and scarcity are removed.

On this question of property then. We have in our political vocabulary the phrase 'common ownership', but ownership of any kind implies property. 'To own' something only makes sense if you have it and someone else is denied it. Under communism we will be a global community and, until Martians come to take over the Earth and dispossess humanity, it makes no sense to speak of 'ownership' of any kind. This is not

just semantics, it indicates a weakness in much revolutionary rhetoric, showing that we are subconsciously still expressing ourselves in terms of bourgeois property rights. This was illustrated in a recent informal debate which we had in the ACF. Someone suggested that if she made something, say a pot, that, as she had created it, then it was hers to dispose of and not her community's, even though the clay was perhaps common 'property'. In a sense, she 'owned' it. No one argued against it and at the time it was a convincing argument that in a sense, after the revolution there would be some kind of ownership, by individuals and communities. It did not occur to us that the debate missed the point entirely. It only made sense if someone would want to take the pot off her; either because they 'lacked' one themselves or because hers was more 'attractive', and therefore more 'valuable', than one that they had. We were still assuming a society of scarcity and acquisitiveness as an expression of wealth or affluence. The concept of property implies that someone would want, or need, to dispossess you after the revolution. What our debate lacked was the psychological understanding of life without these motives. Even if we had the intuitive ability to understand what the communist psychology will feel like, we still lack the necessary language to express our relationship to the world. The new global language of the post revolutionary society will lack words which can be translated as 'owning', 'loosing', 'keeping' and 'needing' as we currently understand those words. Just as people will not be owned in legal or social relationships, neither will objects; they will either be being used or enjoyed by us, or by someone else with whom we have a common interest.

Back to democracy — once we remove the concept of 'property', the concept of 'conflict' looks radically different. Differences of opinion, of need, and of desire, look exciting areas to explore and to attempt to satisfy, not to set up machinery for arbitration and accountability. To quote from the same article, "democracy has nothing to do with the communist revolution

native to northern Europe does not mean that we couldn't eat them. In fact, even with the technology of Kropotkin's day it was possible for him to envisage that vast areas of agriculture could be turned over to greenhouses. Imagine taking a fraction of the glass that is currently in car windscreens and building hot houses to grow avocados, grapes, basil, dates. And even foodstuffs which already grow in relatively cold climates grow more easily under glass, and are more easily protected from pests. Imagine melting down all the cash registers, ATM machines, cars, tanks and using the metal to installing underground heating in fields; outdoor central heating with a closed-water system that was not wasteful, and fuelled largely by waste products from the community whose food it grows. So much for the frozen North and South. In areas parched or over-exploited, of course food will have to be imported initially and local subsistence have to be complemented by subsidy. But when we compare this to the amount of wastage of fuel which occurs now transporting goods globally from areas of cheap production to where they will be sold at a profit, the transport of decent food, and even water, to where it is needed does not seem so decadent. In the very long term, with proper planning, regions currently desolate can be made productive.

The Shaping of Our Environment

Utopian thinkers often picture a predominantly rural society, identifying rightly the misery of urban life under capitalism and desiring a closer and calmer relationship with nature. But does town life preclude this, and do we actually want a predominantly rural environment. It is certainly desirable to have less of a division between towns and country in technological and productive terms. We probably should have small factories and workshops in villages. But many people are very at-

shifting the expert base from the ‘skilled’ worker to the ‘technologist’ – someone has to design and maintain an automated system of production! This poses some problems for libertarians as we need to avoid power being concentrated in anyone’s hands, so these aspects need to be discussed further.

The ‘Ownership’ and Distribution of Resources

The Malthusian view of human society says that, because it has few predators, it cannot support each individual with adequate food, shelter etc. as its population grows and grows. This view is still quite prevalent, and justifies the inequality by which some thrive and some struggle. Kropotkin pointed this out in his view of the future society which, because of improved technology, could indeed support a growing world population. He believed that each community could in fact be more or less self-sufficient, the transportation of food being largely the product of profit and rendered unnecessary if resources went into collective farming without the profit motive. This is probably an optimistic view, as was pointed out to him at the time. Since then, town populations, i.e. ones that do not grow food on a large scale, have grown and the population of the countryside decreased (an unproductive trend which he raised his voice against to no avail). In addition, his work is notable for only dealing with the northern hemisphere. In the south, even more than in his day, land is often over-exploited. The end of capitalist exploitation would partially remedy this, but natural climate alone surely makes it impossible that, if self-sufficient, all the people of the world would have available locally a diet that was equally nutritious, let alone enjoyable.

Obviously we want to eliminate the waste of resources which currently goes into transporting luxuries; for example perishable foods like bananas. But the fact that they are not

– it is a form of political mediation in a society fractured by capitalist social relations where people are alienated from their productive activity, from themselves and one another, from life itself. The communist revolution is precisely the suppression of these social relations and of politics as a separate ‘privileged sphere’

Once we remove or minimise the emotional and physical insecurity of life and attempt to challenge the fearful mentality that those things gave us, other things will also change. The need for the family will surely also disappear. The nurturing of new individuals will surely be the job of the community. The parent who conceived and gave birth should not have rights of control over a child. When born, able or disabled, planned or unexpected, a child will be a member of the community, and the community will educate it in what it needs and what it wants to learn until it has learnt enough to take adult decisions for itself. The community can do this better than the nuclear family or even the extended family (the virtue of which is a myth in any case because the parents or patriarch usually still have the most control and the child is a family resource allocated as wanted or needed). This doesn’t mean that children will not be close to adults and know them only as teachers. Nor that babies will be raised in dormitories. It means that a child will, from an early age, form bonds of its choosing aside from those with its mother who gave it life, who will not pursue it when it makes these choices because she will not be being rejected nor feel rejected. We can choose not to be driven by biological urges – to reproduce, to control and protect our ‘produce’ – especially as security and happiness will give us other options in life than reproducing idealised images of ourselves. If we are good at making children happy and teaching them interesting things, they will flock to us. If we aren’t interested, they will have other ‘parents’.

Technology and Education

At present the way we live is dictated by the way capitalist society is organised. The technologies which are available to us, whether they are the car, the internet or the microwave, have been developed to suit the existing order. Many people are forced, whether they want to or not, to drive to work, use electronic mail, or cook food as quickly as possible. Whether we actually enjoy driving, talking on the net or eating microwave porridge is irrelevant. It is the options which are not available to us that should concern us. In the future society our imaginations won't be constrained by the work-ethic-ridden, stress-laden, or competitive mentalities of capitalism. Boring work will be reduced to a minimum as we'll aim to do these as quickly and with as little effort as possible, so we'll have more time to do interesting things in a variety of different ways, some which may take longer but be more satisfying, some which we'll want to do more efficiently than capitalism will allow. To do this, we'll want to have the appropriate technologies.

We cannot seriously imagine the future society with none of the inventions and discoveries which have resulted from the minds of people under capitalism and before – turning back the clock to a world without plastics, synthetic pharmaceuticals and fabrics, electronics?. Obviously what is so offensive about technology is the extent to which it has been used for useless, harmful and degrading purposes. Much of the technology we have today is a direct result of a search for profits. A process which produces something more quickly, calculates faster, washes whiter is there to sell more, faster, not to improve our lives – technology produced without regard for the effect on the environment or on the people that have to implement it and use it. How different it will be when we have destroyed capitalism. Then the use value of technology together with its effect on society and the environment will be all impor-

terest in participating in finding a solution would get together. This would of course include people with that disability. Participation could be local or global, depending on the level of communication possible in the future society, and on the difficulty of the task. The solution would not necessarily depend on existing technology so sensors could be designed specifically for the task in hand. Results would be more readily available at all stages.

For this example, and others like it, some questions still remain? How do people find out about problems? At the moment, it is often left up to the scientist to identify a problem, and pose a solution. In other cases, interest groups have to compete to put their needs forward e.g. charities fighting for media attention. Would we have a list of unsolved tasks and how would these be prioritised if at all? What if there is no one interested in carried out a task which would be beneficial to one group but which that group is not able to do themselves? Could society deem such a task to be necessary and compel people with the knowledge to do it anyway? What if there is the interest, but those people are doing other things, or a group does not have all the expertise necessary? Can our education program be flexible enough to respond to these situation?

Related to the above are other questions I have not addressed here. What about less obviously 'useful' research? Should it be the case that a person is free to pursue whatever interest takes their fancy, or does the future society need an ethical committee or some sort? What if someone thinks that the way to find a cure for a disease involves wiring up a monkey?; or that they want to produce genetically engineered blue tomatoes for fun? Why not? Who governs what is 'ethical'? Do we have 'ethics' in a communist society? If we only innovate in 'acceptable' directions, will the new society be too short-sighted? If industrial work is organised like that described above, some people will need to be involved in the tasks of keeping track of who is where, doing what etc. Also, there is still the problem of

ety. The steel-making area, rather than being a grim and isolated industrial region as it is now, could deliberately become a thriving cultural centre, by virtue of the many different people visiting and working in it from different regions. Neither will people be making steel all day long as we won't be working the stupidly long hours we do at the moment, and will have lots of time to do other things. This will help offset the uncreative nature of the work itself.

How might we produce and develop a technology in the future? Taking an example from my own experience, namely the design of a speaking computer which is operated by moving your limbs, which would help a person with cerebral palsy who cannot speak to communicate more easily. It uses mass-produced home computer technology and programming software, and special 3D motion sensors originally designed for fighter aircraft pilots but now being used for all sorts of body measurements, for rehabilitation and for making animations. The money needed to do the research has to be bid for from a government body or charity, so the funds are limited and short term. It is not in the interests of the university to divulge the details of the design before it is finished or at least until results have been published, nor is it in the interest of other institutions to do likewise as all are in competition for funding. This means collaboration is limited. The sensors are far from perfect for the job — they should be wireless, light-weight and (in capitalist terms) cheaply available. New 3D sensor technology is appearing which are all these things, but only because they can also be used in mass-produced computer games.

Now, let us assume such a device would be useful in the future society. How would all this be done differently? Well for a start, the needs of a disabled person would come before video game entertainment and we wouldn't be wasting resources developing weapons technology. The original problem would be made widely known (that is, the problem of communication of people with motor disabilities) then individuals with an in-

tant. The electronics industry is a good example of the way capitalist innovation has helped people, yet enslaves us. We have pacemakers and hearing aids, telephones and recorded music, food mixers and escalators, air traffic control and radar-aided sea rescue. None of these would exist without electronics or generation of electricity. In this case decisions will have to be made, for example, on whether we can have computer chips made using toxic production chemicals, or powered by fossil fuels. Do we decide we do need computers so we find an environmentally acceptable method, or can we find an alternative to electronics and computers in our future lives?

Much of this may be answered in a world where the pace of life and technological progress is slower. So many of the products we are made to consume exist only because they can be sold in volume, and to compete with a similar product from another company. Future technology will be based on need, and there will be more time to come up with a good solution to a problem. It will be acceptable to create things to help one individual or many, not just for a mass consumer market and not because an individual is rich enough afford it.

Another problem with today's technology is how it is kept mystified or hidden, which suits the individual scientist seeking to preserve an elitist position, or a company wanting to keep knowledge and profits to itself. We need to find technologies which are accessible and more understandable by as many people as possible. In this way we will not be in awe of their creators/discoverers. Bakunin argues that political liberty depends on preventing domination by academies of "the most illustrious representatives of science", that even the most well-meaning of geniuses will be corrupted by the privilege that person gains by membership of an academy. Although he is talking about science and legislation over the organisation of society, the same applies to technology. Once technology starts to sit in the hands of a few experts, it is difficult to see how society does not begin to be led by their desires, however

well-intentioned. This is not to say that every individual will have to be trained in the minutest detail of every technology, as this is an impossibility, but we will need to identify which technologies have the most impact on how society is run and organised. This inevitably means a broad understanding of the organisation of fuel production, communication etc. by everybody. Kropotkin argues that the division of 'brain work' and 'manual work' must be avoided. Users of technology must be aware of the theory and research which underpins it. Inventors of technology must be aware of the social impact of putting their idea into practice. So ideally, the user and the innovator are one and the same. Kropotkin went on to explain how working class people are deprived of creativity, whereas the upper classes are taught to despise manual labour (and the people doing it), which is true to this day. He also points out the division of the scientist from the engineer into the pure and applied fields. Though these ideas are hardly groundbreaking nowadays, he also explains how the divisions actually stifle creativity. How can a design be improved if most people haven't the faintest idea how the existing one works? Also mentioned is the problem of how most school work seems irrelevant, and how it is quickly forgotten once people start mind-numbing exclusively non-creative work, or how most people are not given the time or resources to think about and apply creative ideas, how theory feeds off application as well as vice-versa, how the division of art from science is to the detriment of both.

We must have a program of basic education which includes the teaching of numeracy and literacy to all, explanation of the organisation of society and its technologies from an early age. The vision we have of the new society can only work if we redefine both education and work. Education would benefit if it entailed producing something visibly useful, entertaining or interesting to society, and would give children a sense of being part of society, not just in the process of learning how to be part of society. They'd be useful to that society and val-

ued by it. They would contribute to society from the start of their lives and thereby learn to have opinions and new ideas about that society. But not only for children. Free leisure time from necessary community labour can be used resting or doing nothing, but equally to pursue interesting avenues of art or science, alone or with others, whether playing of or some foreseen practical purpose. This can only be to the benefit to both the individual and society.

How will we produce and process necessary resources in the new society? There will undoubtedly be geographical areas where certain widely-needed resources are processed, but not in others, for logistic reasons. Take steel production, which is at present often carried out near coal mines as this is the fuel required for producing steel from iron ore. Assuming that we decide we need steel and there is no other way of producing it but from coal and iron ore, how would the future society do it? No one should consider it sensible for the future society to produce steel in every locality (the disastrous Maoist experiment of an iron smelter in every village spring to mind here...). But does this mean that the communities living close to a natural resource have to be responsible for it? Will they become the unwitting experts of steel production just because of where they happen to live? Far from it — instead it would be the responsibility of some individuals from other areas to work in that industry for a small part of their lives. The implications of this is that the process will have to be made as simple to learn and to use as possible — it should be highly automated thanks to technological innovation, enabling it to be carried out with as little skill as possible. This is in contrast to the present, where certain work has often been maintained as a skill to protect workers interest and wages, seeing automation (quite reasonably) as a threat to livelihoods. The idea of de-skilling of industrial tasks may help to counter the problem of the mystification of technology, which some primitivists would probably argue is a strong case for the alternative de-technologising of soci-