Review of Social Ecology and Communalism

Anarcho

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lost in his anti-anarchist diatribes nor is it helped that this need has long been recognised in anarchism and placed in a revolutionary context missing from his version.

Ultimately, though, I take no pleasure in showing up Bookchin's contradictions and personal revisionism. It is a shame that he ended such a fruitful political life by writing such rubbish. Hopefully, his post-anarchist work will be ignored in favour of his real, important and still relevant contributions to libertarian theory – along, of course, with his silly *"libertarian municipalism"* fetish which became his undoing.

Still, during the time he considered himself an anarchist he contributed immensely to our movement and its ideas. Even at his worse (and his post-1999 work was, at times, terrible) he is worth reading. AK Press should be praised for publishing this book for it allows anarchists to question their politics by looking at Bookchin's critique, flawed as it is. If we can learn from and clarify our own ideas by doing so, then even this last work by Bookchin will be of some value although not as much as reading **"Post-Scarcity Anarchism"** or **"Toward an Ecological Society."**

This collection of four essays contains the last works of Murray Bookchin. As such, it is of interest to all greens and radicals. Eirik Eiglad, the editor of the journal "Communalism", provides an introduction and end piece to the book. Of the four essays, the first three were written when Bookchin was still considered himself an anarchist.

The first, **"What is Social Ecology?"** is a good introduction to Bookchin's ideas and is useful for those unaware of his important contribution to libertarian ideas and ecological politics. The second and third are okay, although the third does present (I think) a psychological clue of why he broke with anarchism.

The second essay (**"Radical Politics in an Era of Advanced Capitalism"**) is unremarkable, although Bookchin makes the important point that cities can be *"politically decentralised institutionally ... despite their large structural size and their internal interdependence. Indeed, how well they can function if they do not decentralise structurally is an ecological issue of paramount importance, as problems of air pollution, adequate water supply, crime, the quality of life, and transportation suggest."* The third, entitled **"The Role of Social Ecology in a Period of Reaction"**, ends with the apocalyptic conclusion that *"should the darkness of capitalist barbarism thicken to the point where this enterprise [social ecology] is no longer possible, history ... will indeed reach its definitive end."* Given that few anarchists were remotely convinced by Bookchin's *"libertarian municipalism"*, it does not take much of a jump to conclude that anarchism itself is contributing to this *"darkness."* As such, anarchism itself must be denounced, otherwise the worse will happen. However, disagreeing with Bookchin need not contribute to this darkness in the slightest...

It is the last (and longest) essay, **"The Communalist Project"**, is of most interest to anarchists. The last article he wrote, it explains why he rejected anarchism and explains his alternative (what he terms *"communalism"*). As the introduction notes, Bookchin publically broke with anarchism in 1999

and, subsequent works were increasingly marred by petty and inaccurate attacks on anarchism and queasy attempts rewrite his own history. Both of which are reflected in this final work. Thus we find him noting that *"I myself once used this political label, but further thought has obliged me to conclude that, its often-refreshing aphorisms and insights notwithstanding, it is simply not a social theory."* Given that he was an anarchist for most of five decades, it took him an uncharacteristically long time to have *"further thought"* on such a key aspects of his politics!

Now *"eco-anarchism,"* a term once used by Bookchin to describe his own ideas, becomes a *"simplistic ideology"* equated with *"primitivism, austerity, and denial."* Suffice to say, comparing Bookchin's criticisms of anarchism to what anarchism actually stands for we find that his previous position was a more accurate one and his post-anarchism of 1999 easily refuted by looking at Bookchin's early works. Which is not a pleasant position to be in for any thinker.

He calls his new position "communalism", arguing that *"[n]one of the professedly anticapitalist ideologies of the past – Marxism, anarchism, syndicalism, and more generic forms of socialism – retain the same relevance that they had at an earlier stage of capitalist development and in an earlier period of technological advance. Nor can any of them hope to encompass the multitude of new issues, opportunities, problems, and interests that capitalism has repeatedly created over time."* While applauding the desire to make radical politics relevant to today's world, it can be fairly said that Bookchin does not do this. By rejecting anarchism, the inherent reformism and impracticalities of his favoured means of social change become glaringly obvious.

For example, Bookchin states that his new ideology's *"most important goal is clearly spelled out in a conventional dictionary definition."* Communalism, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, is *"a theory or system of gov-*

broader and perhaps more extensive conflict of society as a whole against capitalist social relations." Yet it seems to be, as with anarchism, he threw the baby out with the bath water. Still, his confusions and limitations on class analysis and struggle do not impact his focus on oppression as well as exploitation: *"Hierarchy, today, is becoming as pronounced an issue as class – as witness the extent to which many social analyses have singled out managers, bureaucrats, scientists, and the like as emerging, ostensibly dominant groups."*

Not that anarchists before Bookchin did not notice social hierarchies, far from it. for anarchists oppression is as important as exploitation As he is forced to admit (*"From anarchism, it draws its commitment to antistatism and confederalism, as well as its recognition that hierarchy is a basic problem that can be overcome only by a libertarian socialist society."*) So it is not only social ecology which presents *"a coherent vision of social development that intertwines the mutual impact of hierarchy **and** class on the civilizing of humanity."* One of Bookchin's many contributions to anarchism was to link this to ecological issues, that *"we must reorder social relations so that humanity can live in a protective balance with the natural world."*

Conclusions

Sadly Bookchin is not around to reply to these points. I doubt he would have agreed with this analysis, particularly as they draw upon his own works. He did not seem to take criticism easily, which undoubtedly helped make the debates in the 1990s worse than they had to be (although the responses to Bookchin's **"Social Anarchism and Lifestyle anarchism"** did not seem designed to provoke comradely debate).

Suffice to say, his account of anarchism and its flaws is inaccurate and petty and does his memory no favours. The valid core of his argument, the need for communal organisations, is

eye to the mutual defences of insurgent areas that the universality of the Revolution … will emerge triumphant."

The question is, surely, why the CNT-FAI did not pursue this *"next step",* this vision of social organisation at the heart of anarchism. To blame a theory when that theory was not implemented seems, on the face of it, unconvincing and so best left to Marxists.

Class Analysis

Finally, there is Bookchin's class analysis he inherited from Leninism. Thus he repeated his identification of "working class" with industrial workers rather than all wage slaves. *"Contrary to Marx's expectations,"* Bookchin argued, *"the industrial working class is now dwindling in numbers and is steadily losing its traditional identity as a class."* Yet wage slavery is just, if not more, predominant today as in the era of "proletarian socialism" which Bookchin argued ended in the 1930s. And like Leninists, class becomes transformed into a perspective rather than an objective position within society: *"the traditional proletariat, upon which syndicalists and Marxists were overwhelmingly, indeed almost mystically focused, into a largely petty-bourgeois stratum whose mentality is marked by its own bourgeois utopianism of 'consumption for the sake of consumption'."* While their *"mentality"* may be *"petty-bourgeois",* their *"stratum"* is still working class. Durruti, for example, no more became *"petty-bourgeois"* when he became an anarchist than Marx became a *"proletarian"* when he wrote **"The Communist Manifesto."**

That class consciousness seems to be at a historical low is an issue which needs to be addressed and fixed, along with the other negative impacts of capitalist society on individual development. As such, Bookchin was right to state this *"by no means excludes it [the traditional proletariat] from a potentially*

ernment in which virtually autonomous local communities are loosely bound in a federation." Bookchin then quibbles over this definition in a footnote, stating that what is *"so surprising about this minimalist dictionary definition is its overall accuracy"* before, ironically, *"tak[ing] issue"* with its *"virtually autonomous"* and *"loosely bound"* because they *"suggest a parochial and particularistic, even irresponsible relationship of the components of a confederation to the whole."* Yet getting rid of those words does not leave much: *"a theory or system of government in which local communities are in a federation."* Which says nothing much – many would even say it described the United States of America.

Not that this notion is particularly new. Kropotkin discusses *"communalism"* in **Words of a Rebel** stating that the next revolution would be *"communalist"* but also *"communist."* He contrasts communist-anarchism to this by stating that while the "communalist" would seize the town hall before letting the masses expropriate property, the anarchist would abolish both at the same time. Indeed, his critique of the Paris Commune contained in that anthology would have been written with Bookchin's post-anarchist politics in mind – particularly given Bookchin's use of the Commune as an example of his approach. As will be seen from our discussion, Bookchin's attempts to distance "communalism" from anarchism not only fail but show the limitations of his own politics in comparison to it.

Rejecting and revising the past

What is particularly galling is the re-writing of Bookchin's own history. Thus he pronounces that *"Anarchism has often been confused with revolutionary syndicalism"* without mentioning that he himself pointed to the similarities of syndicalism with Bakunin's ideas. He noted that the *"bitter antagonisms between*

anarchists and syndicalists have a long history" without bothering the reader with the awkward fact that, previously, he had sided with the anarchists and their opposition to the narrowing of the libertarian vision and struggle syndicalism implied. Similarly, the CNT-FAI becomes *"a truly confused organization"* rather than the high-point of libertarian proletarian organisation it had been previously. He seems to seriously have come to conclude that it was only *"somewhat confused anarchists"* who coexisted with the revolutionary syndicalists in the CNT, a product of *"verbal confusion rather than ideological clarity"*!

Somewhat ironically, he repeats the communist-anarchist critique of syndicalism (as best expressed by Malatesta), arguing that *"as invaluable as the general strike may be as a prelude to direct confrontation with the state"* their *"limitations are striking evidence that, as episodic forms of direct action, general strikes are not equatable with revolution"* A position, it should be noted, most syndicalists have held for some time. His new found appreciation of syndicalism also entailed him downplaying the role of anarchists in creating revolutionary syndicalism, stating that *"Georges Sorel and many other professed revolutionary syndicalists in the early twentieth century expressly regarded themselves as Marxists and even more expressly eschewed anarchism."* Yet Sorel played no role in creating syndicalism, simply commenting on an existing movement (and he noted the key role of anarchists in creating syndicalism, a tactic, which, as Malatesta put it in 1907, "*the syndicalists, forgetting the past, call **new**, even though it was already glimpsed and followed, in the International, by the first of the anarchists."*). Only in Britain, America and Italy was syndicalism notable by the presence of Marxists (the product of the reformism of social democracy). In Italy, it was these Marxist-syndicalists who became fascists while the anarchists increased their influence in the USI before being repressed by their former colleagues. In Britain and America, these Marxist-syndicalists generally became Communists.

sion to collaborate to flow purely from the claimed limitations in anarchist theory rather than the situation they faced. This may have been discussed in the original appendix to this essay which is not included in this book but here we are left with glib idealism which roots the decisions made in the heads of the anarchists, mislead by their own ideology. That said theory urged the destruction of the state and its replacement by a system of workers' councils is left as unmentioned as the reasons why this was not done undiscussed.

The limitations in Bookchin's analysis can be seen when he writes of the *"anarchists' disdain for power"* while, at the same time quoting Bakunin on how the new social order could be created *"only through the development and organization of the non-political or antipolitical social power of the working class in city and country."* The Russian, Bookchin states, *"expressed the typical view of [anarchism's] adherents"*! So much for Bookchin's prized "coherence"! Equally, it should be noted that Bakunin was not *"rejecting with characteristic inconsistency the very municipal politics which he sanctioned in Italy around the same year."* In fact, Bakunin urged his friends to stand for Parliament, not municipal office.

However, this inconsistency should not cloud his real contribution to revolutionary theory, namely this vision of social change:

"the Alliance of all labour associations … will constitute the Commune … there will be a standing federation of the barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council … [made up of] delegates … invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times … all provinces, communes and associations … [will] delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all … invested with binding mandated and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces … and to organise a revolutionary force with the capacity of defeating the reaction … it is through the very act of extrapolation and organisation of the Revolution with an

Bookchin from early days, the question is **how** we organise, not whether we do or not.

Equally bizarrely, Bookchin asserted that *"a case can made that many of the ideas of social and economic reconstruction that in the past have been advanced in the name of 'anarchy' were often drawn from Marxism."* Which would have come as a surprise to Bakunin, but perhaps he was not an *"authentic"* anarchist. Given that Proudhon had raised the ideas of workplace self-management, federalism, communes, mandated delegates long before Marx praised their application in the Paris Commune, we can more truly state that a far stronger case can be made that many of the ideas of social and economic reconstruction that in the past have been advanced in the name of "Marxism" were often drawn from anarchism. This becomes extremely clear when Lenin' **"State and Revolution"** is compared to the ideas Bakunin was arguing for the mid-1860s to his death. As pointed out by Bookchin in *"Listen, Marxist!"* in **Post-Scarcity Anarchism** nearly 40 years previously!

The Spanish Revolution

The crux of the matter is expressed in his account of the Spanish revolution, where *"the Spanish syndicalists (and anarchists) revealed only a minimal capacity to understand the situation in which they found themselves after their victory over Franco's forces in the summer of 1936 and no capacity to take 'the next step' to institutionalize a workers' and peasants' form of government."* This flows from his new found distinction between "government" and "state", not to mention a complete confusion between power over oneself and power over others (which suggests that Bookchin's statement that *"[a]bove all, Communalism is engaged with the problem of power"* is less than accurate).

What is also apparent is the utter lack of context in Bookchin's account. Like the Leninists, he presents the deci-

In another staggering rewriting of his own history, Bookchin states that in *"the late 1950s, when anarchism in the United States was a barely discernible presence, it seemed like a sufficiently clear field in which I could develop social ecology … I well knew that these views were not consistent with traditional anarchist ideas."* Which explain his repeated writings in which he defended his anarchist ideas against those who claimed otherwise! These, significantly, extended well into the 1990s and so to state that *"[t]oday I find that anarchism remains the very simplistic individualistic and antirationalist psychology it has always been"* is revisionism of the worse kind.

He even turns his back on his own leftist past, arguing that the *"revolutionary Left … frankly erred profoundly when it took a so-called 'internationalist' position and refused to support the Allies (their imperialist pathologies notwithstanding) against the vanguard of world fascism, the Third Reich."* That the Second World War was an imperialist war was obvious, with the Allies happily tolerating fascism as long as it did not enter its sphere of influence – a fact confirmed when fascists were placed into positions of power by the victorious Allies in place of alternative social organisations created by partisans. It should also be noted that, at the time, Bookchin was a Trotskyist and so, presumably, supported Stalinist Russia against fascist aggression (and so the Trotskyists, as anarchists noted at the time, violated the "internationalist" position).

Authentic anarchism?

Echoing countless Marxists, Bookchin now believed that anarchism *"represents in its **authentic** form a highly individualistic outlook that fosters a radically unfettered lifestyle, often as a substitute for mass action."* He noted *"the peasant-craft 'associationism' that lies at the core of anarchism,"* arguing that it *"is far better suited to articulate a Proudhonian single-family peasant and*

craft world than a modern urban and industrial environment." Yet as he himself noted in volume 2 of **"The Third Revolution,"** anarchism, like socialism in general, evolved as society itself changed as the capitalist economy developed. This was reflected in Proudhon, for example, who increasingly brought to the fore the need for workers' associations for non-artisan workplaces. Bakunin and Kropotkin built on these changes in both the "Proudhonian" politics and the wider economy and by the 1870s mainstream anarchism was communist-anarchism.

Part of the problem is that anarchists do not actually know what anarchism really is. *"Regrettably,"* he wrote, *"the use of socialistic terms has often prevented anarchists from telling us or even understanding clearly **what** they are."* Given that he considered himself an anarchist for over four decades, he seems to be generalising from his own experience. Luckily, we now have Bookchin (or at least his ghost) to inform us that we are *"individualists whose concepts of autonomy originate in a strong commitment to **personal** liberty rather than to **social** freedom, or socialists committed to a structured, institutionalized, and responsible form of social organization."* In fact, *"anarchism represents the most extreme formulation of liberalism's ideology of unfettered autonomy."* He could have saved himself a lot of wasted energy if only he had read Hal Draper's (or any other clueless Leninist) nonsense on anarchism, which asserts the same.

Sadly for Bookchin this is simply not true. Anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin were dismissive of the claims of bourgeois individualism, or classical liberalism (as he was once aware, writing in **"Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism"** that *"Bakunin often expressed his opposition to the individualistic trend in liberalism … with considerable polemical emphasis"*). Indeed, the *"most extreme formulation of liberalism"* is right-wing **"libertarianism"** whose adherents are most definitely not anarchists (even if some of them try and appropriate that label) as they are staunch supporters

*or better still, a **polity** – is an ensemble of institutions designed to deal with the problems of consociational life in an orderly and hopefully fair manner. Every institutionalized association that constitutes a system for handling public affairs – with or without the presence of a state – is **necessarily** a government. By contrast, every state, although necessarily a form of government, is a force for class repression and control."*

Which is what Marxists habitually assert against anarchists, namely that any form of social organisation created in a revolution is a "state" regardless of its name. It seems as pointless to note that collective decision making is no more a *"government"* than a *"state"* unless you wish to term any form of association a *"government"* regardless of how it is organised. Thus, by Bookchin's logic, even Stirner's **"Union of Egoists"** would be a "government." The key factors, surely, are whether it is freely joined and self-managed within it. If so, it is an abuse of the language to describe an organisation as a *"government"* if it is not hierarchically structured (*"the word 'State' … should be reserved for those societies with the hierarchical system and centralisation"* correctly argued Kropotkin). Otherwise the term becomes so widely applicable as to become meaningless.

Then there is the issue of social change. Bookchin distorts Colin Ward's arguments (without mentioning who he mocks, of course) that *"the good society … exists beneath the oppressive burdens of civilization like fertile soil beneath the snow."* That Ward is simply noting that anarchistic trends exist in every society is hardly controversial nor does it imply, as Bookchin asserted, that we do not need to *"proactively **create**"* an anarchist society, that *"we would simply let the snow above it melt away."* That he felt the need to do this is hatchet job is sad. After all, few anarchists would disagree with the notion that we should *"try to build lasting organizations and institutions that can play a socially transformative role in the real world."* That has been the standard libertarian position from the start. To paraphrase

a libertarian communist society cannot be achieved quickly or simply.

Any attempt to transform society, therefore, will be marked by mistakes and narrow, and ultimately, self-defeating interests expressing themselves. Attempts to get around these with institutional fixes are to be avoided, though. In *"revolutionary Russia"* it was precisely these tendencies which were used by the Bolsheviks to concentrate economic power into the hands of the state, effectively ending workplace freedom and its replacement with state appointed managers implementing (or, more correctly, trying to implement) the decrees of bureaucrats made in ignorance of local conditions within the centralised state machine. Yes, the *"desires for proprietorship"* of individual collectives was apparently ended but it was replaced by the far worse *"desires for proprietorship"* of a bureaucracy.

Given that the problems Bookchin rightly points out about individual workplaces can be expressed by individual communes we simply cannot glibly assume that his solution will work as easily as he suggested.

Communalist confusions

Channelling Engels's infamous diatribe **"On Authority,"** Bookchin asserts that *"anarchists have long regarded every **government** as a **state** and condemned it accordingly – a view that is a recipe for the elimination of **any** organized social life whatever."* For Engels, any organisation implied *"authority"*, for Bookchin it came to imply *"government"* and so collectively making your own decisions is confused with letting a few rulers make them for you. It does feel like he was playing with words when he tried to explain his new position:

*"While the **state** is the instrument by which an **oppressive** and **exploitative** class regulates and coercively controls the behaviour of an exploited class by a ruling class, a **government** –*

of hierarchical organisations (most obviously, wage labour). They dismiss the anarchist critique of private property and the social hierarchies it produces and, in general, support both state (either in minimal or privatised form) to protect the *"unfettered autonomy"* of the boss against his wage slaves and the land lord against his tenants. Unsurprisingly, in the past, Bookchin called these the *"so-called libertarian (more accurately, proprietarian) right."*

Communalism (*"in contrast to anarchism"*) is based on *"decision-making by majority voting as the only equitable way for a large number of people to make decisions."* *"Authentic anarchists"*, apparently, argue that this is *"authoritarian and propose instead to make decisions by consensus."* Yet who are these *"authentic"* anarchists who propose *"consensus"* decision making? It is not to be found in Proudhon, Bakunin, Berkman or Goldman. Kropotkin mentions it once, when discussing the Russian peasant community. Are these not *"authentic"* anarchists?

If Bakunin or Goldman are not *"authentic"* anarchists, who is? Perhaps in those *"extreme"* adherents of liberalism, the right-wing "libertarians"? Yet there consensus is not to be found. Murray Rothbard happily supported the autocratic power of the property owner over their wage slaves and tenants, seeing *"hierarchy"* as one of the *"institutions necessary to the triumph of liberty"* (raising the question of what part of **"an**-archy" was hard to understand?). He was against majority voting, but only because it was egalitarian and did not reflect wealth inequalities. Instead, he favoured majority rule in terms of shares held in a company – with mere workers or tenants having no say if they had none.

So it appears these *"authentic"* anarchists do not exist in reality. This is unsurprising, as anarchists are generally fluid in their vision of decision making. In some cases, consensus may be best, in others majority decision making is acceptable. On the question of minority rights, again, the context is important

– in some situations, majorities are acceptable (for example, deciding to strike) in others there is a right, even a duty, for the minority to ignore the majority. For example, when the majority of German Social Democrats decided to support their state in the First World War it was wrong for the minority to go along in the name of party discipline and majority rights. All this is, surely, simply common sense and requires no need to make a fetish of the dubious notion that the majority is always right?

Bookchin's position was increasingly problematic, as can be seen when he argued that *"the anarcho-communist notion of a very loose 'federation of autonomous communes' is replaced with a confederation from which its* **components***, functioning in a democratic manner through citizens' assemblies, may withdraw* **only** *with the approval of the* **confederation as a whole***."* Yet the right of secession is fundamental to liberty. The freedom to association implies the freedom to not association. Looking at the most basic level, the commune, does this mean that citizens cannot withdraw without majority approval? How free is a society which requires its members to gain permission to move communes? And if the individual can associate freely, why should this be denied the communes they are part of? And how would this be enforced? Would the confederation take up arms against the rebels in order to, Rousseau-like, *"force them to be free"*?

It is, therefore, ironic to read Bookchin state that *"Communalism as an ideology is not sullied by the individualism and the often explicit antirationalism of anarchism; nor does it carry the historical burden of Marxism's authoritarianism as embodied in Bolshevism."* As he was once aware, a love of individual freedom does not equate to "individualism" (an ambiguous term which hides a multitude of interpretations). Equally, refusing to base your politics on free association does raise the *"burden"* of the authoritarianism required to hold a confederation together.

power" to a minimum and ensure that power rests in the hands of those affected by decisions rather than a few (democratically elected) *"leaders"* who are a government in the usual sense of the word.

Municipalize the economy?

Bookchin turns his fire on industrial self-management, repeating his long standing (and basically correct) critique that we *"must also avoid the parochialism and ultimately the desires for proprietorship that have afflicted so many self-managed enterprises, such as the 'collectives' in the Russian and Spanish revolutions."* This involved a *"drift among many 'socialistic' self-managed enterprises … toward forms of collective capitalism that ultimately led many of these concerns to compete with one another for raw materials and markets."* Yet it is not clear that his proposed solution would automatically eliminate this problem:

"its aim is not to nationalize the economy or retain private ownership of the means of production but to **municipalize** *the economy. It seeks to integrate the means of production into the existential life of the municipality, such that every productive enterprise falls under the purview of the local assembly, which decides how it will function to meet the interests of the community* **as a whole***."*

It would be churlish to note that the Spanish anarchists organised rural communes precisely as Bookchin recommends and, moreover, these could and did express *"collective"* selfishness just as much as the self-managed workplaces. As with the urban collectives, the anarchists involved had to combat these tendencies. The CNT was aware of this and consistently fought it, arguing for **socialisation** rather than the compromise of *"collectivisation"* which the revolution had produced. So it should be stressed that these developments came as no surprise, then as now, as anarchists have long argued that creating

over their members and that he placed these at the heart of his vision of social revolution! As such, an awareness of the need to organise in order to *"control"* delegates has existed within "inauthentic" anarchism for some time. Equally churlish would be to point out the logical contradiction in his position. After all, for Bookchin these *"leaders"* are meant to be mandated delegates, **not** representatives. If the *"leaders"* are allocated *"power"* then they can decide on behalf of their electorate and, as such, they are **not** delegates. He cannot have it both ways, arguing that these *"leaders"* should have *"power"* while maintaining that they are mere delegates. The problem every organisation faces is that the *"leaders"* start to act on behalf of the membership, i.e., thaat they exert power over them rather than implementing their mandates. Anarchists have aimed to reduce that tendency, with varying degrees of success, so to suggest we are ignorant of this need is staggering.

Bookchin argued that *"[i]ronically, no stratum has been more insistent in demanding its freedom to exercise its will against regulation than chiefs, monarchs, nobles, and the bourgeoisie."* Unmentioned is their equally *"insistent"* demands that those subject to their *"will"* follow the *"regulation"* that implies! After all, the bourgeoisie have always been keen on asserting *"the managers right to manage"* and resisting any attempt by workers to resist the kind of *"freedom"* which translates into the many following the orders of the few. Equally, the *"stratum"* of trade union and party *"leaders"* has always been keen to accumulate power within their organisations, modifying the regulations to secure that power and limit rank-and-file participation as much as possible. Formal structures can, and have been, used to secure that aim, a fact which Bookchin overlooks.

Ultimately, contra-Bookchin, "*power and leadership*" be easily be forms of *"rule"*, especially if there is an *"allocation of power"* which helps turn delegates into representatives. As such as Bookchin is right on the need for clear organisational structures, this need is precisely to reduce the *"allocation of*

Anarchism and Direct Democracy

Bookchin does, of course, try and present evidence to back up his claim. Kropotkin, he writes, *"rejected democratic decision-making procedures"* and quotes from **Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets":** "*Majority rule is as defective as any other kind of rule*" Yet a quick consultation of the page in question shows that Bookchin has ripped that sentence utterly out of context. It was, in fact, a dismissal of representative democracy, the notion *"that it is merely stupid to elect a few men and to entrust them with the task of making laws on all possible subjects."* Moreover, again on the same page, Kropotkin counterpoises federal organisation based on congresses of mandated delegates to representative democracy.

Somewhat ironically Bookchin asserts that the **"sections"** of the French revolution were *"the authentic motive forces of the Great Revolution and **conscious** agents for the making of a new body politic."* He then states that *"they were never given the consideration they deserve in the literature on democracy, particularly democratic Marxist tendencies and revolutionary syndicalists"* and this *"is dramatic evidence of the flaws that existed in the revolutionary tradition."* Here omission plays its part as he was surely aware that Kropotkin discussed these at length in his **"The Great French Revolution"**, concluding that *"the Revolution began by creating the Commune … and through this institution it gained … immense power."* It was in these popular assemblies that *"the masses, accustoming themselves to act without receiving orders from the national representatives, were practising what was to be described later as Direct Self-Government."* And so *"the principles of anarchism … already dated from 1789, and that they had their origin, not in theoretical speculations, but in the **deeds** of the Great French Revolution."* For Kropotkin, it was a truism that *"the libertarians would no doubt do the same to-day."*

Significantly Kropotkin noted that these communes were not created by standing for elections, but were "*made **from below upward**, by the federation of the district organisations; it spring up in a revolutionary way, from popular initiative.*" Which is the crux of the issue, as few anarchists are opposed to popular assemblies. The critique of Bookchin's *"libertarian Municipalism"* was precisely that it was tied to standing in elections to create these bodies, i.e., it was hopelessly reformist in orientation. This flawed perspective explains his most obvious contradiction. He asserted that communalists *"do not contend that a Communalist society can be legislated into existence"* before, on the very same page, admitting that they "*do not hesitate to run candidates in **municipal** elections who, if elected, would use what real power their offices confer to legislate popular assemblies into existence. These assemblies, in turn, would have the power ultimately to create effective forms of town-meeting government.*" So, apparently, a communalist society **can** be "*legislated into existence*" after all. And what **is** the difference between the *"popular assemblies"* and a *"town-meeting government"*? How do they differ and why should the *"popular assemblies"* hand over their power to them?

Then there is the top-down approach, with *"adherents of Communalism mobiliz[ing] themselves to electorally engage in a potentially important center of power – the municipal council – and try to compel it to create legislatively potent neighborhood assemblies."* Surely we do not need permission to create popular assemblies than did the French sections or the popular clubs of 1848 and 1871? Strangely, given that it was written in 2002, this essay makes no mention of the popular assemblies created in Argentina. These fit into the anarchist vision of social change, but not Bookchin's.

Given the reformist nature of their creation, it seems doubtful that Bookchin would be proved right when he argued that "*the new popular-assemblyist municipal confederations will em-*

*body a dual power against the state that becomes a source of growing political tension is obvious. Either a Communalist **movement** will be radicalized by this tension and will resolutely face all its consequences, or it will surely sink into a morass of compromises that absorb it back into the social order that it once sought to change.*" In reality, the municipal council is part of the state and cannot become an effective *"dual power"* to it and any radicals using elections will, like so many others before them, "*sink into a morass of compromises*" that this tactic produces. The fate of the German Greens and Social-Democrats applied to local elections just as much national ones.

The tyranny of structurelessness

Without naming her, Bookchin repeats some of feminist Jo Freeman's arguments in classic essay **"The tyranny of structurelessness."** We find him writing that a *"serious libertarian approach to leadership would indeed acknowledge the reality and crucial importance of leaders – all the more to establish the greatly needed formal **structures and regulations** that can effectively **control** and **modify** the activities of leaders and recall them when the membership decides their respect is being misused or when leadership becomes an exercise in the abusive exercise of power.*" He presents the usual stereotype of anarchists being against structured organisations, arguing that *"[f]reedom from authoritarianism can best be assured only by the clear, concise, and detailed allocation of power, not by pretensions that power and leadership are forms of 'rule' or by libertarian metaphors that conceal their reality. It has been precisely when an organization fails to articulate these regulatory details that the conditions emerge for its degeneration and decay.*"

It would be churlish to point out that Bakunin raised the issue of union assemblies combined with the use of mandates and recall as a means of restricting the power of union leaders