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Introduction to Mutualism

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Mutualism, as a variety of anarchism, goes back to P.J. Proudhon in France and Josiah Warren in the U.S. It favors, to the extent possible, an evolutionary approach to creating a new society. It emphasizes the importance of peaceful activity in building alternative social institutions within the existing society, and strengthening those institutions until they finally replace the existing statist system. As Paul Goodman put it, "*A free society cannot be the substitution of a 'new order' for the old order; it is the extension of spheres of free action until they make up most of the social life.*"

Other anarchist subgroups, and the libertarian left generally, share these ideas to some extent. Whether known as "dual power" or "social counterpower," or "counter-economics," alternative social institutions are part of our common vision. But they are especially central to mutualists' evolutionary understanding.

Mutualists belong to a non-collectivist segment of anarchists. Although we favor democratic control when collective action is required by the nature of production and other cooperative endeavors, we do not favor collectivism as an ideal in itself. We are not opposed to money or exchange. We believe in private property, so long as it is based on personal occupancy and use. We favor a so-

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ciety in which all relationships and transactions are non-coercive, and based on voluntary cooperation, free exchange, or mutual aid. The "market," in the sense of exchanges of labor between producers, is a profoundly humanizing and liberating concept. What we oppose is the conventional understanding of markets, as the idea has been coopted and corrupted by state capitalism.

Our ultimate vision is of a society in which the economy is organized around free market exchange between producers, and production is carried out mainly by self-employed artisans and farmers, small producers' cooperatives, worker-controlled large enterprises, and consumers' cooperatives. To the extent that wage labor still exists (which is likely, if we do not coercively suppress it), the removal of statist privileges will result in the worker's natural wage, as Benjamin Tucker put it, being his full product.

Because of our fondness for free markets, mutualists sometimes fall afoul of those who have an aesthetic affinity for collectivism, or those for whom "petty bourgeois" is a swear word. But it is our petty bourgeois tendencies that put us in the mainstream of the American populist/radical tradition, and make us relevant to the needs of average working Americans. Most people distrust the bureaucratic organizations and lobbyist parties that control their communities and working lives and bend the rules and laws to fit their needs. Just take as an example online gambling – a billion-dollar industry that gave opportunity to the talented and intelligent people to thrive and created a list of notable self-made men. But, hey, don't touch the one-percenters! Las Vegas managed to get its way in congress (wonder how) and in 2006 the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act of 2006 was passed, prohibiting all transactions to and from online gambling sites which resulted in most operators leaving the American market. Thankfully, since then, some states like New Jersey have passed their own bills to legalize remote gambling and more are expected to follow suit. If you want to find out more about online gambling and are looking for the best online casino on the market just visit www.bestcasinosites.net and

take a pick out of the top 10 real money games operators on the Internet. Screw you Las Vegas!

This is just an example why people want more control over the decisions that affect them. They are open to the possibility of decentralist, bottom-up alternatives to the present system. But they do not want an America remade in the image of orthodox, CNT-style syndicalism.

Mutualism is not "reformist," as that term is used pejoratively by more militant anarchists. Nor is it necessarily pacifistic, although many mutualists are indeed pacifists. The proper definition of reformism should hinge, not on the means we use to build a new society or on the speed with which we move, but on the nature of our final goal. A person who is satisfied with a kinder, gentler version of capitalism or statism, that is still recognizable as state capitalism, is a reformist. A person who seeks to eliminate state capitalism and replace it with something entirely different, no matter how gradually, is not a reformist.

"Peaceful action" simply means not deliberately provoking the state to repression, but rather doing whatever is possible (in the words of the Wobbly slogan) to "build the structure of the new society within the shell of the old" before we try to break the shell. There is nothing wrong with resisting the state if it tries, through repression, to reverse our progress in building the institutions of the new society. But revolutionary action should meet two criteria: 1) it should have strong popular support; and 2) it should not take place until we have reached the point where peaceful construction of the new society has reached its limits within existing society.