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could be immediately and universally implemented. *"In the meantime, each community will decide for itself during the transition period the method they deem best for the distribution of the products of associated labor."* (Guillaume, 1980, p. 362) This is very similar to Malatesta's approach.

To return to Michael Albert's challenge to Malatesta, "Yes, yes, but how?" Malatesta did not have a worked-out model for what anarchist socialism should be immediately after a revolution. He did not believe in such an approach. Yet he was not for "anything goes." He advocated that working people take over the means of production and distribution and organize ourselves to run them directly through free association and federation. It was just such a self-managed society which would be capable of an experimental and flexible method. However, this was *"always on condition that there is no oppression or exploitation of others."* He was not against speculations or programs, so long as they were presented with a certain modesty and willingness to see them change in practice. He might have appreciated Parecon as a set of ideas for after a revolution, although not as a completed blueprint for what must be done. His goal was libertarian communism, but he was willing to see progress toward his goal go through various paths.

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Contents

359) He expected society after a revolution to still show the bad effects of coming out of capitalism. This would be *"the first phase of communist society,"* to be followed eventually, when production has increased sufficiently, by the "more advanced phase of communist society." (Marx, 1974, p. 347) (For reasons known only to him, Lenin was to call these phases "socialism" and "communism.") Politically this transition would take *"the state…form of a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."* (p. 355) Unlike Parecon, Marx was clear that the "first phase," precisely because it could not yet implement full communism, was following bourgeois norms. Unlike Parecon, he expected it to develop into free communism. (This might happen by the expansion of free-for-all services as society became more productive).

Whatever the virtues of this set of ideas, they have been used by Marxists to justify Leninist-Stalinist totalitarianism — since, after all, we cannot expect post-revolutionary society to immediately fulfill the libertarian-democratic goals of classical communism. This was not Marx's intention; by the dictatorship of the proletariat he meant something like the Paris Commune. But that is how the "transitional period" concept has been used by Marxist-Leninists.

Both Marx and Malatesta believed that it is not possible to immediately leap into a completely classless, moneyless, noncoercive, nonoppressive, society. However, Marx's concept, despite its insights, was rigid, stating that the lower phase of communism would be thus-and-so (as laid out in "The Critique"), which would come to pass in the course of the Historical Process. Malatesta preferred to make suggestions while leaving things open to pluralistic experiment. Also, Marx included a belief that some form of the state will be necessary — instead of thinking about how working people will be able to provide social protection without the bureaucratic-military machinery of a state. (Malatesta advocated a popular militia.)

According to Bakunin's friend, James Guillaume, Bakunin's economic goal was libertarian communism, but he did not believe it

to its history. This will vary from country to country, however. Instead, Malatesta preferred the vaguer and more generic title of "socialist-anarchists." (1984, p. 143)

Related Views

Others have pointed to the flexible and experimental approach as central to the anarchist program. For example, Paul Goodman, the most prominent anarchist of the 60s, wrote: *"I am not proposing a system…It is improbable that there could be a single appropriate style of organization or economy to fit all the functions of society, any more than there could be — or ought to be — a single mode of education, 'going to school,' that suits everybody…We are in a period of excessive centralization…In many functions this style is economically inefficient, technologically unnecessary, and humanly damaging. Therefore we might adopt a political maxim: to decentralize where, how, and how much [as] is expedient. But where, how, and how much are empirical questions. They require research and experiment."* (1965, p. 27)

Goodman had many insights. However, he was a reformist — in favor of gradualism now, while Malatesta only advocated "gradualism" after a revolution. Like Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Marx, Malatesta was a revolutionary. Similarly, Goodman advocated a "mixed system," similar to (his image of) the Scandinavian countries, which included both capitalist corporations and cooperatives. But Malatesta was only for a "mixed system" which did not include exploitation. It might include various forms of producer and consumer cooperatives and federations, as well as individual workshops or farms, perhaps, but not capitalist enterprises which hired wage labor.

Anarchist experimentalism may seem to resemble the Marxist concept of a post-revolution transitional period. This was first raised in Marx's "Critique of the Gotha Program." (1974, pp. 339 —

The Anarchist Method

One of the most prominent attempts to present a model for a post-capitalist society has been the theory of Parecon ("participatory economics"). One of its two founders, Michael Albert, has written a new book (2006) with the subtitle of "Life Beyond Capitalism." Among other topics, he criticizes anarchists for their lack of a vision of what institutions a new society would have. Anarchism *"…often dismisses the idea of vision, much less of providing a new political vision, as irrelevant or worse."* (p. 175) He makes the same charge against the Marxists, even the *"libertarian Marxists or anarcho marxists…[who are] the best Marxism has to offer."* (p. 159) In my opinion, there is truth in this accusation, especially for the mainstream Marxists, but also the libertarian Marxists and even anarchists. At the same time, it is exaggerated. His appreciation of the positive proposals of anarchists and other libertarian socialists is clouded by a desire to see fully worked-out programs for a new society, such as his Parecon, which leads him to ignore valuable, if less detailed, antiauthoritarian proposals.

For example, Albert refers to the great Italian anarchist, *"Errico Malatesta tells us…that what anarchists want, 'is the complete destruction of the domination and exploitation of person by person…a conscious and desired solidarity….We want bread, freedom, love, and science — for everybody'. Yes, yes, but how?"* (p. 176) So Albert challenges Malatesta. *"Yes, yes, but how?"* Well, how did Malatesta believe that everybody would achieve "bread, freedom, love, and science" in an anarchist society? That is my topic here. As I will show, he did not have a developed blueprint, but he did have an approach to developing anarchist institutions — the anarchist method.

Who Was Malatesta?

But first, who was Errico Malatesta? Born to a middle class Italian family in 1853, he made his living as an electrician and mechanic. He personally knew Michael Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin, but unlike either he lived to see the rise of fascism. He was imprisoned many times and sentenced to death three times. Due to political persecution in italy, he spent over half his adult life in exile. He lived in the Middle East, in South America, in the United States, and, for about 19 years, in Britain. Dying at 79 in 1932, he had spent his last years under house arrest in fascist Italy.

As a young man, he participated in a couple of fruitless little uprisings, attempts to spark peasant rebellions without first being assured of popular support. (Pernicone, 1993) He abandoned that for a more thought-out approach, but he never ceased being a revolutionary (unlike Michael Albert who does not seem to believe in revolution). He criticized those anarchist-syndicalists who believed that a revolution could be won nonviolently, by "folding arms," just through a general strike. The capitalists and their state could not be beaten, he insisted, without some armed struggle. Because he was an advocate of popular revolution, however, he did not support the bomb-throwing and assassination tactics ("attentats") of anarchist terrorists . (Malatesta, 1999)

To Malatesta, *"There are two factions among those who call themselves anarchists...: supporters and opponents of organization."* (1984, p. 84) These differences continue to this day. Malatesta was a pro-organizationalist anarchist. Aside from disagreements with anti-organizationalist anarchists such as individualists, this was also the basis for his dispute with the anarchist-syndicalists. In the international anarchist conference of 1907, he debated the French anarchist Pierre Monatte (1881 — 1960). Monatte argued that anarchists should stop concentrating on small-group propaganda, putting out small newspapers and pamphlets, and should get into the work of building unions (syndicates) with other workers. Malatesta was not

the means of communication, relations between anarchist groupings and those living under under some kind of authority...And in every problem [anarchists] should prefer the solutions which not only are economically superior but which satisfy the need for justice and freedom and leave the way open for future improvements..." (1984, p. 173)

It is precisely this flexibility, pluralism, and experimentalism which characterizes anarchism in Malatesta's view and makes it a superior approach to the problems of life after capitalism.

"...Only anarchy points the way along which they can find, by trial and error, that solution which best satisfies the dictates of science as well as the needs and wishes of everybody. How will children be educated? We don't know. So what will happen? Parents, pedagogues and all who are concerned with the future of the young generation will come together, will discuss, will agree or divide according to the views they hold, and will put into practice the methods which they think are the best. And with practice that method which in fact is the best will in the end be adopted. And similarly with all problems which present themselves." (1974, p. 47)

Malatesta stopped calling himself a "communist," partly for the reasons given above, while continuing to declare that libertarian communism was his goal. The other reason was that the Leninists had effectively taken over the term (with the help of the capitalists, who agreed — insisted — that this was what "communism" really was). *"...The communist-anarchists will gradually abandon the term 'communist'; it is growing in ambivalence and falling into disrepute as a result of Russian 'communist' despotism...We may have to abandon the term 'communist' for fear that our ideal of free human solidarity will be confused with the avaricious despotism which has for some while triumphed in Russia..."* (1995, p. 20) If this was true in the 1920s, it has become much more true by now, after about 80 years of Leninist/Stalinist rule under the banner of Communism. Unfortunately, the term "communist" may have a negative impact (setting up a barrier between us and many workers) due

bility of suspending consumption of the necessities of life will make it necessary to take decisions for the continuation of daily life at the same time as expropriation proceeds. One will have to do the best one can, and so long as one prevents the constitution and consolidation of new privilege, there will be time to find the best solutions." (1984, p. 104)

Is it likely that every region and national cultures will chose the exact same version of libertarian socialist society? Will every industry, from the production of steel to the education of children be managed in precisely the same manner?

"For my part, I do not believe there is 'one solution' to the social problems, but a thousand different and changing solutions in the same way as social existence is different and varied in time and space. After all, every institution, project or utopia would be equally good to solve the problem of human contentedness, if everybody had the same needs, the same opinions, or lived under the same conditions. But since such unanimity of thought and identical conditions are impossible (as well as, in my opinion, undesirable) we must…always bear in mind that we are not …living in a world populated only by anarchists. For a long time to come, we shall be a relatively small minority…We must find ways of living among nonanarchists, as anarchistical as possible…" (1984, pp. 151 — 152)

This would be true not only now but even after a revolution. We cannot assume that even when the workers have agreed to overthrow capitalism, they would agree to immediately create a fully anarchist-communist society. What if small farmers insist on being paid for their crops in money? They may give up this opinion once it is obvious that industry will provide them with goods, but first they must not be coerced into giving up their crops under conditions they reject.

"After the revolution, that is, after the defeat of the existing powers and the overwhelming victory of the forces of insurrection, what then? It is then that gradualism really comes into operation. We shall have to study all the practical problems of life: production, exchange,

against building unions. In Argentina, he participated in building the Bakers' Union, one of the first labor unions there. But he opposed any tendency to dissolve anarchists into mass organizations. Effective unions had to include workers with all sorts of politics — revolutionary and reformist, statist and anarchist. And effective unions had to concentrate on winning reform struggles for better wages and conditions through bargaining with the capitalists — at least in nonrevolutionary times, which was most of the time. Therefore he insisted that revolutionary anarchists should also form specific organizations of anarchists only, to raise anarchist politics inside and outside of unions.

With hindsight, it is clear that Monatte was right about the need to join and build unions. The anarchist militants greatly expanded their influence among the workers through this work in several countries. However, Malatesta was also right. This became clear as the French unions which the anarchist-syndicalists had worked to build became dominated by hardheaded "practical" officials. Then when World War I began, these union leaderships became supporters of the imperialist war. (Monatte opposed it and remained a revolutionary.)

Today we pro-organizationalist anarchists, calling ourselves "platformists" or "especifistas," agree with Malatesta about the need for two types of organizations: the mass organization and the narrower revolutionary organization with more political agreement. Even many (but not all) of today's anarchist-syndicalists would agree. Malatesta did reject the specific draft proposals of the Organizational Platform of Libertarian Communists, written by Makhno, Arshinov, and others, which has since inspired the platformist tendency among anarchists. I will not review the discussion between Malatesta and the original platformists. Whether he was right or wrong on this issue, Malatesta continued to support a pro-organizational position.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, Kropotkin and a few other well-known anarchists supported the Allied side. De-

spite his long friendship with Kropotkin, Malatesta denounced this stance, calling its supporters "pro-government anarchists." (Trotskyists like to throw in our faces that Kropotkin supported this imperialist war. True, but so did most of the Marxist parties and leaders at the time. For example, George Plekhanov, founding father of Russian Marxism, supported the war. Unlike the world's Marxists, however, the majority of anarchists were in revolutionary opposition to it.)

Malatesta's last battle followed his return to Italy. As an editor of revolutionary publications, he worked with other anarchists and the anarchist-syndicalist unions. They tried to form a united front with the Socialist Party and the Communist Party and their unions to beat back the fascists, through self-defense, confrontations, and political strikes. But the Socialists and Communists would not cooperate with the anarchists or with each other (the Socialists signed a peace pact with the fascists at one point and the Communists were in a super-sectarian phase under the leadership of Bordiga). And fascism came to power. (Rivista Anarchica 1989)

The Anarchist Method

All his adult life Malatesta identified with the tradition of libertarian (anarchist) communism. This was his goal, a society where all land and means of production were held in common and there was no use of money. Everyone would work as well as they could and would receive what they needed from the common store of products ("from each according to ability, to each according to need"). "Free associations and federations of producers and consumers" (1984, p. 17) would manage the economy "through an intelligent decentralization." (p. 25). This would provide economic planning from below. His economic vision went along with the goals of abolition of the state, of national borders and nationalist passions,

as well as with the "reconstruction of the family" (p. 17) and the liberation of women.

However, over time he came to be critical of some anarchist-communist thinking, which he found too simplistic. He criticized *"the Kropotkinian conception…which I personally find too optimistic, too easy-going, too trusting in natural harmonies…"* (1984, p. 34) He continued to believe in communist anarchism, but in a more flexible fashion. *"Imposed communism would be the most detestable tyranny that the human mind could conceive. And free and voluntary communism is ironical if one has not the right and the possibility to live in a different regime, collectivist, mutualist, individualist — as one wishes, always on condition that there is no oppression or exploitation of others."* (1984, p. 103)

Malatesta warned against believing that we have the Absolute Truth, as do religious people or Marxists. *"One may, therefore, prefer communism, or individualism, or collectivism, or any other system, and work by example and propaganda for the achievement of one's personal preferences, but one must beware, at the risk of certain disaster, of supposing that ones system is the only, and infallible, one, good for all men, everywhere and for all times, and that its success must be assured at all costs, by means other than those which depend on persuasion, which spring from the evidence of facts."* (1984, pp. 27 — 28)

His goal continued to be free communism, while understanding that others believed in "collectivism," that is, common ownership but rewarding workers according to how they work (Parecon includes a version of this), or "individualism," that is, as much individual ownership and small scale production as possible.

After a revolution, *"probably every possible form of possession and utilization of the means of production and all ways of distribution of produce will be tried out at the same time in one or many regions, and they will combine and be modified in various ways until experience will indicate which form, or forms, is or are, the most suitable. In the meantime, the need for not interrupting production and the impossi-*