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Anarcho-Syndicalism and Libertarian Municipalism

Editors' note: On August 26-28 the first international conference on "The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism" was held in Lisbon, Portugal (see Left Green Perspectives, no. 38). A total of 125 people from fifteen countries participated. The conference proceedings will be addressed in later issues of Left Green Perspectives. Here we publish a debate that took place in the months immediately preceding the conference, between the conference's International Organizing Committees (IOCs) and the anarcho-syndicalist international, the International Worker's Association (IWA), which is known in Portugal as the AIT, where its local branch is the ASAUL. The debate has so far involved two exchanges, both of which are reprinted here in their entirety. We could not reproduce the official seals of the AIT and of the "ASA UL-AIT: Asociacao Sindical da Area Urbana de Lisboa (anarco-sindicalista), Seccao Portuguesa da Asociacao Internacional dos Trabalhadores," which were impressed upon each page of the AIT documents. We ask our readers for patience: we have not corrected the grammar in the AIT's own English translations of their documents, since doing so could have distorted their meaning (which is not always clear).

Despite the sometimes extravagant nature of the AIT's critiques, we feel that this debate illuminates both differences and commonalities between anarcho-syndicalism and libertarian municipalism.

About the "International Conference on libertarian Municipalism" to [Be Held] This Year at Portugal

by the Asociacion Internacional de los Trabajadores

Seeing that:

- This conference is supported by two Portuguese Democratic state institutions: the Superior Institute of Economy and Management and the Superior Institute of Enterprise and Work Sciences.

- The sponsors of this conference's task is, according to the government, to create specialists in social alienation: economists, that is to say, apologists for the capitalist economy, managers of social exploitation, etc.

- Executive members of City Councils and political leaders ("Os Verdes," ecologist party) have been invited to take part of this meeting, though the last elections have proved the party's dependency (left and right) on capitalist investment.

- This conference's promotion and organization is supported by confessed "anarcho" - capitalists, that have supported last years USA's military action in the "Gulf war" and all democratic elections (political, syndical, parliamentary and local).

- In this conference's organization, the "Commemoration of Portuguese anarchist 100 years" promoters take part, a ceremony supported by the civil government of Lisbon and the Culture State Secretary, and where notorious political people (the ex-Security Secretary, Alberto Costa, the Trotskist PSR leader, Francisco Louca, one of the "Os Verdes," representants, etc.) were invited, but excluded the defenders of social revolution, international, egalitarian and libertarian, that is to say, the Anarchist and Anarchosyndicalist people. That "commemoration's" promoters tried, but in vain, to replace revolutionary anarchism, that is "out-of-date," in their words, with a "modern" anarchism, that is to say, an anarchism that is compatible with market or liberal capitalism and representative or bourgeois democracy.

- To get the participation of Murray Bookchin in this meeting is another effort of the conference's promoters. This American ecologist set the deprived and exploited American people's direct action against an ecological and municipalist struggle undertaken by the American middle class, named liberal. The concept of Hegelian history, stood by Murray Bookchin and his Marxist ideas about the syndical question, led him to think that anarcho-syndicalism is dead in the U.S.A.

In conclusion, we have before us another "neoanarchist" counterrevolutionary manœuvre, that tries to attack the libertarian struggle not only in Portugal but in Spain and the another latin countries as well. Taking an IWA Secretary member's words, Portugal is the place selected to celebrate this conference because the libertarian movement is very weak in this country. The conference's promoters know the hard response that this meeting would have in other latin countries. So these modernizers of anarchism are afraid that there arises, even in Portugal, a great opposition to their counterrevolutionary manœuvre. For this reason, they tried to compromise certain young libertarian people, and even Spanish libertarian people, in their counterrevolutionary manœuvres; in this way, they have called for a libertarian camping, with an innocent appearance, in Izeda.

To avoid a strong and wide response to the "libertarian conference," the promoters and supporters have dared to say that the AIT-SP and the FAI Portuguese groups' antireformistic and anti-election ideas are not shared by the Spanish CNT and the other Iberian FAI regions. This isn't true. It is notorious that the FAI and CNT reject the action of anarcho-syndicalism's enemies, for example, the Portuguese friends of the Spanish CGT (a reformistic organization borned into the CNT). The CNT and FAI do not support transforming the libertarian struggle into another media-market product. that is to say, an idea compatible with capitalist democracy and an academic promotional medium for the Pedagogical Council's president of the Superior Institute of Management and Economy (the "neoliberal-academic" authority that distributed the "Commemoration" invitations), for the anarcho-capitalist Julio Figueiras and other thieves of the Portuguese academy. Specially, the CNT-AIT, in a steady effort to recuperate all their historical inheritance that was robbed after the Spanish Civil War, cannot be placed by the side of the sociologist Julio Figueiras, principal responsible for delivering a high part of the historical Portuguese libertarian documents to the Portuguese government. In short, the CNT and FAI, in accordance with their principles and resolutions, cannot support thieves and defenders of the libertarian participation in democratic elections that are political or syndical, parliamentary or local.

In this way, we defend that the Iberian libertarians make an extensive campaign to unmask the true "international conference's" objectives, showing those things that, in practice, separate libertarians from all the authoritarian people, that is to say, showing the antipolitical. antistate, antiauthoritarian sense of our struggle. Our propaganda has not only unmasked the "neoliberalians" but has also attacked the democratic power elements that are included in this antilibertarian manœuvre, in particular the leaders. It is fundamental that our propaganda, using demonstrable facts, shows in which sense local power has been the object of the great capitalist several investments.

Reply to the AIT (June 19, 1998)

*by the International Organizing Committees of the Libertarian Municipalism Conference
(Montreal-Vermont and Lisbon)*

To the Secretariat:

We have recently received a document approved by your office entitled "About the 'International Conference on Libertarian Municipalism,' to [Be Held] This Year at Portugal." It denounces the conference, which we are organizing, as an "antilibertarian" effort and a "neo-anarchist" counter-revolutionary manœuvre."

This document has its origins in the ASUAL, the Portuguese section of the AIT, and stems ultimately from local disagreements within Portugal that have no bearing on an international conference or the ideas it represents. As an account of the conference, the document is wholly false, and its allegations have no basis in reality. Its condemnation of the conference rests on

sheer misinformation, in an apparent attempt to defame.

Indeed, so absurd are the document's allegations, so patently nonsensical are its formulations, and so wholly uninformed are its accusations about libertarian municipalism/social ecology, that we were initially disposed to ignore it altogether, rather than dignify it with a reply. But the document also makes certain specific allegations about the conference that may raise questions in the minds of people unfamiliar with our project. We are therefore replying to the document by answering such possible questions.

Is libertarian municipalism/social ecology an attempt to replace "revolutionary anarchism, that is 'out-of-date'" anarchism, with "a 'modern' anarchism compatible with market or liberal capitalism and representative or bourgeois democracy"?

Like anarcho-syndicalism, libertarian municipalism is a theory and practice of social revolution that is explicitly antistatist and anticapitalist. Unlike anarcho-syndicalism – which supports workers' control as a means to achieve that revolution – it seeks to revive the democratic possibilities latent in existing municipal political life and create popular assemblies as the fundamental institutional structure of a direct democracy. Instead of drawing on the anarcho-syndicalist tradition, however, it draws on the anarcho-communist tradition-which is deeply embedded in anarchist history – as a logical and continuous development.

It aims for men and women as citizens to collectively take responsibility for managing their own communities, according to an ethics of sharing and cooperation. It aims to decentralize municipalities so that they are humanly scaled and tailored, as much as possible, to their natural environments. Further, it advocates that the direct-democratic municipalities knit themselves together into confederations that would constitute a revolutionary dual power and ultimately challenge both capitalism and the nation-state, leading to a rational, ecological anarchist society. For the AIT to describe this program as an "apologia for the capitalist economy," let alone as "counterrevolutionary," is quite simply bizarre.

Does libertarian municipalism/social ecology favor politics and therefore the State?

It favors politics in the sense of direct democracy-community self-management through citizens' assemblies. It decisively distinguishes politics in this sense, however, from statecraft and representative "democracy." Moreover, it regards municipal direct democracy as potentially the political antithesis to statecraft and parliamentarism, inasmuch as the municipality has historically existed in tension with the nation-state and potentially could do so once again. The distinction between municipality and State, between politics and statecraft, was understood by Bakunin in 1870, when he wrote that the people generally

"have a healthy, practical common sense when it comes to communal affairs. They are fairly well informed and know how to select from their midst the most capable officials. Under such circumstances, effective control is quite possible, because the public business is conducted under the watchful eyes of the citizens and vitally and directly concerns their daily lives. This is why municipal elections always best reflect the real attitude and will of the people. Provincial and county governments, even when the latter are directly elected, are already less representative of the people"

However clear this distinction was to Bakunin, it is regrettably absent from the thinking behind the AIT statement. In fact, the statement perpetuates the notion that all politics – even local direct democracy – is statecraft and therefore to be rejected. The authors of the document exhibit no knowledge whatever of libertarian municipalism's place in the tradition of the "federation of communes."

Do libertarian municipalists/social ecologists support parliamentary elections?

They categorically reject parliamentary elections as statist. They condemn all statements in support of participation in parliamentary elections and the centralized state. People who support

participation in parliamentary elections are not knowingly being admitted to the Lisbon conference.

Does the libertarian municipalism/social ecology conference support "libertarian participation in democratic elections that are political or syndical, parliamentary or local"?

To reduce all these very different kinds of elections to a low common denominator-as elections-and then reject them as such is absurd. Elections in bourgeois nation-states are hardly equatable with elections in trade unions-for example, in the CNT. Nor are parliamentary elections equatable with local elections in which libertarian candidates seek to foster a direct democracy. Libertarian municipalism/social ecology rejects participation in parliamentary elections, but it does support participation in elections at the local municipal level in this respect: it supports candidates who, running on a libertarian municipalist program, call for the democratization of community politics and the creation of direct -democratic popular assemblies, among other demands.

Is libertarian municipalism/social ecology an "anarcho" -capitalist ideology?

This accusation is farcical. Not only does libertarian municipalism oppose corporate capitalism, it takes a very critical view even of cooperatives when they are advanced as a mode of peaceful evolution from capitalism into anarchism. What it does call for is the "municipalization of the economy" – as distinguished from its nationalization (advocated by state socialism) and its ownership by the workers in a given enterprise (syndicalism). In a libertarian municipalist/social ecological society, property – including both land and factories-would not be privately owned. Rather, the economy would be "owned" and managed by the community's citizens in their assemblies. Citizens would make policy decisions about all local economic life, not in their capacity as workers in a particular *factory* or enterprise (which could easily render them parochial, pursuing the narrow economic interests of that enterprise) but in their capacity as citizens, looking out for the interests of the community as a whole. On economic issues that transcend one community, the citizens' assemblies would make decisions through their regional confederations.

Do libertarian municipalists/social ecologists call for the abrogation of class struggle?

Categorically not. Very real class differences exist between workers, peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, and the bourgeoisie, manifesting in latent and actual conflicts between these classes. But people may wage the class struggle not simply on the production line, where wage labor confronts capital (important as that is), but also on the civic level, in municipal assemblies. In the assemblies the differences between different classes will emerge and be contested in all their intensity. The assembly in effect becomes an arena for class struggle.

Important revolutions of the past have had not only an economic dimension but a civic one. In three major French revolutions, Paris was the locus of revolutionary initiative, inspiration, and conflict; in the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, Petrograd played the same honorable and crucial role; and in Spain, after the fall of Zaragoza, Barcelona was the authentic center of anarchosyndicalism. To overlook the revolutionary potentialities latent in the civic sphere-the neighborhood, the quarter, the district, the borough, and other urban components-is to overlook one of the most important features of revolutions as they have appeared in history. Libertarian municipalism/social ecology tries to place this important dimension on the agenda of future struggles and social revolutions.

Does Murray Bookchin, the leading theorist of liberation municipalism and social ecology, "set the deprived and exploited American people 's direct action against an ecological and municipalist struggle undertaken by the American middle class, named liberal"? Have his "Marxist ideas about the syndical question ... led him to think that anarcho-syndicalism is dead in the USA. "?

Bookchin's ideas on "ecological and municipalist struggle" do not exclude working people but rather emphasize their potentiality to function as citizens concerned not with workplace issues alone but also with the neighborhoods in which they live, with educational, ecological, health, aesthetic, and other urban issues. The class struggle occurs in the community, not only in the workplace. This dimension has been insufficiently emphasized in both the anarcho-syndicalist and Marxist movements.

Like Bakunin, Bookchin is influenced by Marx's ideas, principally on economics, and he has also tried to advance dialectical philosophy along ecological lines. But to label Bookchin, the author of "Listen, Marxist!", a Marxist, is absurd. If he believes that anarcho-syndicalism is "dead in the U.S.A.," he has reason to do so. Although he regards anarcho-syndicalism as the best-organized form of anarchism to have appeared historically, he believes that its problems today are enormous, including the cooptation of the proletariat and its steady reduction to a small fraction of the population, the diminution of traditional class consciousness, and the probability that a great deal of work that was formerly performed by the proletariat will in the future be performed by machines.

In the United States the communalist tradition is much stronger, as in the assemblism of the New England town meeting. For this reason leading anarchist theorists in the United States have given greater importance to libertarian communalism as a basis for an anarchocommunist perspective and movement than to anarcho-syndicalism.

What is the purpose of the Lisbon conference?

Far from "creating specialists in social alienation" and "apologists for the capitalist economy," as the AIT alleges, the purpose of the conference is to advance the antistatist, anticapitalist politics of libertarian municipalism.

Who has been invited to participate in the conference?

People "interested to discuss and advance the politics of social ecology: libertarian municipalism" are welcome to participate in the conference. Contrary to the AIT statement, no one involved with the conference is an "anarcho"-capitalist. If any "anarcho"-capitalists support the conference, they have misunderstood its intentions. No members of "Os Verdes" have been invited to take part in the conference. No supporters of the Gulf War are involved in the conference. Neither the civil government of Lisbon, nor the Culture State Secretary, nor the "ex-Security Secretary, Alberto Costa," nor the "Trotskyist PSR leader, Francisco Louca" have been invited to participate in the conference. The AIT statement's allegations that these people are involved in the conference are wholly untrue.

The AIT statement says that "executive members of City Councils and political leaders" have been invited to participate. The only shred of truth here is that a Portuguese municipal official has been invited to give an informational talk on "The municipality and the Portuguese constitution." As it happens, Portugal is – politically, if not economically – one of the most decentralized countries in Europe. We find that information on this situation is very relevant for building a revolutionary municipal movement there and elsewhere.

Is the conference "sponsored by two Portuguese Democratic State institutions: Superior Institute of Economy and Management and Superior Institute of Enterprise and Work Sciences"?

It is true that these two institutions are among the conference sponsors. They are academic institutions that routinely assist in financing conferences, providing assistance with translating expenses, publishing, and other logistical necessities. They have absolutely no say in the content of the libertarian municipalism/social ecology conference or its proceedings.

Was Portugal chosen as the site for the conference because "the libertarian movement is

very weak in this country"?

No. The International Call for the conference states very clearly that Portugal was chosen because: "the libertarian municipalist dimension of contemporary anarchism and the social ecology of Murray Bookchin have been extensively propagated in Lisbon among some Portuguese comrades." Moreover, "given the heritage of the libertarian and communal aspects of the Portuguese revolution of 1974,... the Portuguese have shown themselves consistently interested in the renewal of anarchism" along these lines.

Are "defenders of social revolution, international, egalitarian and libertarian" excluded from the conference?

Far from being excluded, they are welcome, insofar as they support or sympathize with libertarian municipalism/social ecology as an approach for achieving that revolution. By calling other anarchist approaches an "attack on the libertarian struggle," the AIT appears to identify anarcho-syndicalism alone with revolutionary struggle. But anarcho-syndicalism has no monopoly on social revolution. The anarcho-communism from which libertarian municipalism/social ecology emerges as a logical and continuous development is no less part of the anarchist tradition than anarcho-syndicalism. Nor do we wish to postpone the realization of *comunismo libertario*; rather, we seek its implementation in a useful and coherent manner, taking the social revolution beyond the workplace.

We note that the *CNT* newspaper published the entire International Call unedited and without comment. We respect the anarcho-syndicalists of yesterday and today, and we work alongside them on the road to an ecological and anarchist society.

Organizational sponsors of the Libertarian Municipalism/Social Ecology conference:

SOCIUS Department of the Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestao (Lisbon)
Department of Sociology, Instituto Superior de Ciencias do Trabalho e da Empresa (Lisbon)
Black Rose Books (Montreal)
SODECM (Montreal)
Institute for Social Ecology (Burlington)
Institute for Social Ecology (Brisbane)
Institut pour une Ecosociete (Quebec)
Fundacion de Estudios Libertarios "Salvador Segui" (Madrid)
Trotzdem *Verlag* Schwarzer Faden (Grafenau)
Centro Studi Libertari "G. Pinelli" (Milano)

About the Farce of the Conference of Lisbon on Libertarian Municipalism (Reply of the IWA Secretariat to a Writing Addressed to this Secretariat by the Organizing Committee of the Self-named Anarcho-Communists)

by the Permanent Secretariat of the International Workers' Association (AIT-IWA)

To all libertarian sensibilities,

If some well-meaning libertarian had any doubt about the reach of the conference of Lisbon on libertarian municipalism (26-28 August 1998), and if he/she had the scruple of denying their participation in something that could serve the libertarian cause, he/she can already abandon all kinds of fears. The letter sent by the International Organizing Committee (Montreal, Vermont, Lisbon) to the IWA secretariat, with regard to its critical attitude toward the conference of Lisbon,

opens the eyes, even the blindest ones: it is clearly a reformist maneuver, with the pretense of deviating forces from militant anarchism to the field of political collaboration.

The argument of such a writing in favor of the so-called movement of libertarian municipalism oozes falsehood from all sides. The main foundation on which this falsehood pivots consists in keeping silent about the fact that municipalities are a basic part of the State, and that the whole so-called local administration is firmly set in the territorial and central administration; and that, in consequence the legal body of the whole (central, territorial, and local plane) bourgeois State is a unitary whole that doesn't admit internal contradictions. It is therefore a flagrant falsehood to argue that fighting for the decentralization of the municipalities in the bourgeois State is fighting against this bourgeois State. The bourgeois State is the bourgeois state that, according to circumstances, can adopt the Fascist form or the function of a totalitarian character, or the democratic form, in its unitary, autonomous, or federal version, without losing an apex of its condition of the bourgeois State. A hypothetical bourgeois State of the municipalities would be possible only when the bourgeois State understood that such a political form could be assumed inside its own essence and condition.

The opposite thought – that is to say, to suppose that from inside the bourgeois State you can destroy the own essence of the State – is, on the one hand, to believe in the quadrature [squaring] of the circle and, on the other, to confuse two fundamental terms, that is, evolution and revolution. Certainly the results of evolution, always an effect of social tensions, are not worthless. For example, it is an object of congratulation that today we don't live with a ring around our necks, as many of our ancestors did. But it is also certain that today we still have around the neck multiple forms of visible and invisible rings, we all that don't form part of the institutions and privileges of the bourgeois State.

Therefore, at least three things must be clear: (1) that inside the bourgeois State there is no possibility of destruction of this bourgeois State but, on the contrary, it is strengthened; (2) that only the revolution brings a qualitative change of the social sign; (3) that the positive changes that are products of evolution always leave intact the essential class domain and exploitation, and that the reformist roads that point to the evolutionary changes, in fact, have only as a mission to remove forces of the revolutionary field to avoid or to postpone the qualitative changes of the society.

Then it is clear that this municipal political road that accepts the electoral way and, with it, the formal democratic methodology represents, in fact, the creation of a political party. And it is here where another falsehood appears: to believe that the municipal and union elections are essentially different from parliamentary or autonomous elections. In a bourgeois democracy, any class of election has, necessarily, a representative-formal character, as the imperative mandate is explicitly excluded by its possible constitutions. This cannot be ignored by the organizers of the conference of Lisbon, so it is clear their hypocrisy and deceit will by omission, which is also evident when they say the CNT participates in union elections, which is absolutely false, as any schoolboy who reads the newspapers can see. These people don't seem to be very skillful in anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism. If they knew something about them, they would know that our inexcusable method of practice is direct action, and that all electoral practice in institutions and organisms of the bourgeois state is a refusal of this direct action.

That argumentational falsehood appears again when, deforming a text of Bakunin, which deals only with the necessity of base organization, they seek to justify municipal action of a political character. That reply's writers, and with them the organizers of such a monster conference, are silent about the fact that, once the First International was broken, the members of the Alliance (Bakunin, Guillaume, Fanelli, Malatesta, Farga Pellicer ...), at the St. Imier Congress (September 1872), condemned all political participation and its methodology, setting up [instead] the direct action of workers and citizens, as well as the direct federative organization of workers and citizens out of the state institutions.

Their evident lack of intellectual honesty is clear, as most of their writing is directed (as a smokescreen to deceive uninformed people) to present, as if it was their own, a municipalist doctrine and practice that was always an anarchist keynote. Anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist district organizations, with their corresponding revolutionary activity, have existed since the First International, and anyone who wants to see them theorized (here in Spain, for example) has only to

appeal to Juan Peiro's writings or to the verdict on libertarian municipalism of the fourth CNT congress in Zaragoza (May 1936).

Apart from this, here in Spain, that tradition was historically active in the 1873 canton movement, a movement realized by the libertarian internationalists, that, naturally, following the bourgeois state request, deserved the repulse of the Marxists expressed in Engels's pamphlet "The Bakuninist State in Action: Report on the Spanish Rebellion in the Summer of 1873."

Ali that fight, previously made and theorized, out of the State institutions and opposite the State, was put into practice during the Spanish revolution (1936-39) in all the places where the libertarian movement was preponderant. Then the practice of direct municipalist organization was not only possible but an effective reality, but it was a reality because of the inactivity and practical disappearance of the Republican State. Now then, once during the Spanish Civil War the Republican bourgeois State was reestablished by the counterrevolutionary action of communists, socialists, Basque and Catalan nationalists, and the bourgeoisie of the Republican Left, that same State was in a hurry to end the municipalist situation, dissolving, for example, the Council of Aragon (8 August 1937), using communist and nationalist military divisions.

The will to deceive nonadvised people is clear when they pretend to present the libertarian municipalist struggle as if it was different from the economic-union struggle. Both of them were always a unitary plan of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism, and it makes no sense to see them isolated. We believe that same determination by Murray Bookchin in saying anarcho-syndicalism is dead, together with the whole proletarian movement. Is not an objective analysis but the will of keeping sure a political way. The IWA reproaches the conference of Lisbon for its hypocrisy, boasting of a theory and a practice that cannot be carried by a political way, which is just the way proposed by this conference. The IWA denounces that it is pretended, disguising as anarchism, to realize a practice that is purely "possibilist." which we denounced as being against the Arshinov Platform or the Syndicalist Party of Angel Pestana.

So the foundations of the rejection of the arguments of those supposed anarcho-communists have an unanswerable consistency, and because of this they exclude from the conference all those that, with a critical discourse, don't want to support and recognize their proposal as a reading of approaching revolution.

These anarcho-communists say that they don't subscribe theoretically to anarcho-capitalism, but it's true that, when they subscribe to the electoral and political way, they are setting the conditions for a coexistence with that same anarcho-capitalism. Likewise they declare themselves antiparliamentary, when what they do is just move the parliament to municipal areas.

Why the initiative of Lisbon now? The bourgeois State, as a political form of organization, is in a deep crisis. The civil society is more and more aware of its corrupting essence and has less and less interest in it. The lack of popular participation is already, in spite of media tricks, scandalously visible. The famous "primary" election of the social democrats in Spain, which will be followed very soon by the populist of Aznar, have no other purpose than to create some agitation, give the impression of participation, and encourage people to vote. After having brought socialists and communists to their line, the decadent bourgeois State, which no longer has the virtue of delighting anybody, now looks for the complementary resource of bringing the popular forces that sympathize with anarchism, and receive from below the oxygen balls that allow it to continue breathing and to have the appearance of representativeness.

With the result that Portugal has been chosen as the headquarters of the event since the Portuguese "anarchism" that moves around *A Batalha* and the Centro de Estudos Libertarios has been protected by the Portuguese State since 1974, as the Spanish State of the so-called "political transition" after 1976 promoted and aided that small division of the CNT that is today the CGT. Both of them are the best vehicles for the State to benefit from anarchist troops. Then the precedent that these two states used to impact on Portuguese anarcho-syndicalism and convert it into a group of revisionist propaganda, and on the Spanish one to bring it to union elections, was the practice of the SAC, the Swedish organization that was expelled from the IWA because of its pro-State deviationism in 1956-57. This same organization, already in that slope to the State, subscribed later the bourgeois municipalist polity. So the model comes from this organization that already today, like the Spanish CGT, is a piece of the bourgeois State and paid and subsidized by this State.

Murray Bookchin always ignored the meaning of the workers' struggle, so he never believed in the proletariat as a revolutionary agent and therefore in its instrument of liberation, the union. If one of his arguments to declare anarcho-syndicalism dead is the lack of class consciousness and the will to fight, how would these workers get, in the municipality, the class consciousness that they would have lost in the union? And if they would not be active in the municipality because of this lack of class consciousness, why do the conference organizers scream when we say that they are part of a petty-bourgeois movement and this movement is what they really want to set?

To understand what Bookchin is, we would have to go back to *One-Dimensional Man* by Herbert Marcuse, with his disqualification of the present-day proletariat as a revolutionary agent. And we would have to add the influence of men that, as an effect of the political press, boasted of deserting the proletarian fight, which is the case, for example, of Andre Gorz, and over all, the case of the tendency, favored by the bourgeoisie, to multifragment the unity of the libertarian movement and give the ecological struggle a proper and complete sense, out of the workers' fight. Only inside that mortal "reductionism" is it possible to reach the blindness that avoids seeing that labor will always be necessary; that, although machines work a lot, they cannot build themselves; that the point is to demand that this necessary labor be equitably and justly distributed and paid; that only the labor struggle can get to this point through revolutionary unions; and that these same members of the unions must act in citizens' organizations with a revolutionary sign; and to have this sign in towns and villages, they have to keep necessarily that fight opposite and out of the state institutions.

And now finally, the unmasking of this farce of Lisbon that we denounce: why do these hardened "revolutionary" anarcho-communists believe that it is absolutely necessary that a top official of the actual municipality of Lisbon give an oral lecture on the municipality and the Portuguese constitution? It is evident that they are on a tightrope and, to disguise such an idea, they create a story: Portugal is one of the most decentralized countries in Europe, and the participation of this top official of the Lisbon council is very interesting. Who do they pretend to deceive with this kind of academic trick?

According to these champions of "anarchism," their proposal is a way of struggle for the revolution and against capitalism and the State. But two institutions of the Portuguese State, the Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestao and the Instituto Superior de Ciencias do Trabalho e da Empresa, are not only the providers of the economic, logistical and material means of the meeting, but also take part of the Organizing Committee of Lisbon. Can you imagine top state representatives fighting for the social revolution and screaming "Down with the State!?" What kind of brain subnormality do all the promoters of this farce believe to address?

With respect to the smokescreen of the ecological aspect of the meeting, today it is well known that the capitalist State has "recovered" a dimension of the ecological vision. Capitalism rejects an ecology that claims healthy districts for the proletariat. But it is not suicidal and is sensitive to the dangers that can affect this planet, because it poses serious risks for capitalism. In this way its own ecology is born, an ecology purely conservative that keeps sure its industrial exploitation and its dominion.

The social ecology of the municipality, aesthetically understood as parks, gardens, fountains, and groves – why would capitalism be against all of this? But friends, the social ecology that affects the workers' mental and moral health and their environment, the wage structure, and labor-capital relations, the fact of the exploitation of man against man – this ecology cannot be assumed by capitalism and the State, this ecology cannot be subsidized by them, so it cannot be a part of the State institutions, in this case part of the municipalities of the bourgeois State.

These are the pretended "anarcho-communists." The facts are these, the rest is pure rhetorical palaver that, together with other similar strategies, only seek the absorption of the libertarian movement in the designs of the bourgeois State.

Reply to the AIT (September 1, 1998)

by the International Organizing Committees and International Advisory Committee of the Libertarian Municipalism Conference

To the Secretariat:

We are very pleased to observe that, in their reply to our letter of June 19, 1998, our AIT comrades have ceased to label the libertarian municipalism/social ecology conference a "counterrevolutionary manoeuvre." We are very pleased that they no longer call us "confessed 'anarcho' -capitalists" or "apologists for the capitalist economy." True, they still accuse us of "setting the conditions for a coexistence with ... anarchocapitalism," but this very weak accusation is based only on our differing interpretations of the meaning of local elections. Happily, they no longer accuse us of supporting the Gulf War in any way, and they no longer charge that representatives of various parties, including Trotskyists, have been invited to the conference. We are pleased that these misconceptions have been cleared up.

Above all, we are pleased that the comrades express understanding that "municipalist doctrine and practice ... was always an anarchist keynote." Since we have long pointed out that municipalism is consistent with and part of anarchist history, we are delighted that the AIT finds it in many places, recognizing that "anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist district organizations ... have existed since the First International"; and that "that [municipalist] tradition [was] historically active in the 1873 canton movement" in Spain; and that in the Spanish Revolution of 1936 "the practice of the direct municipalist organization" was "not only possible but an effective reality." The comrades even affirm that "the libertarian municipalist struggle" (along with the "economic - union struggle") was "always a unitary plan of the anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism, and it has no sense to see them isolated."

Actually, we ourselves would not make such grandiose claims for libertarian municipalism. No anarchists or anarcho-syndicalists, to our knowledge, ever called for anything named "libertarian municipalism," either alone or as part of any other struggle. It is also historically inaccurate to say that the May 1936 Zaragoza conference addressed itself to ideas of "libertarian municipalism," when in fact it addressed "libertarian communism," grounded in both the free commune and the labor union. We would also not be eager to accept the judgment of Juan Peiro on municipalist ideas, since he was a supporter of the reformist Treintista wing of the CNT and became a minister in the Caballero government in November 1936.

Nonetheless it is gratifying that the AIT comrades acknowledge that municipalist ideas are part of anarchism. So it is also something of a shock to read, in the very same document, that the AIT comrades believe that libertarian municipalist ideas are in fact "reformist," "possibilist," "parliamentarist," and so on. Given their support for "libertarian municipalism" as a valid part of anarchism, it puzzles us that they would argue that this program is a "a reformist maneuver with the pretense of deviating forces from the militant anarchism to the field of political collaboration." "The municipalities are a basic part of the State," the comrades insist, and: "to suppose that from inside the ... bourgeois State you can destroy the ... essence of the State ... is, on one hand, to believe in the [squaring] of the circle and, on the other, to confuse ... evolution and revolution."

These formulations make two contradictory arguments. The AIT comrades can argue that municipalism has been a legitimate sphere for anarchist struggle; or they can argue that the municipality is integral to the State and therefore is not a realm for anarchist struggle. But they cannot make both arguments without engaging in a fundamental self-contradiction.

Since the AIT comrades' views on this point are inconsistent, we will proceed to examine their list of three items that they explicitly affirm "must be clear." Two of the items they list are very clear to us: (1) that "reformist roads that point to ... evolutionary changes, in fact, have only as mission to remove forces of the revolutionary field to avoid or to postpone the qualitative change of the society"; and that (2) "only the revolution brings a qualitative change of the social sign." (While we appreciate that the AIT comrades have made the effort to translate their document into English, their English is so incorrect that it often obstructs their meaning. It would be helpful if their international organization could find someone to remedy this problem.) The sentence appears to mean something like "Only revolution can fundamentally – or qualitatively – change society" – that capitalism cannot be eliminated without a revolution. If our supposition is correct, then we are in complete agreement with the AIT comrades on this point as well.

It is about the third item that we are not clear: the question of the municipality and the State.

"Inside the bourgeois State," write the AIT comrades, "there is no possibility of destruction of this bourgeois State, but on the contrary, it is strengthened." They argue that

"the whole *so-called local administration* is firmly set in the territorial and central administration" and therefore "the legal body of the whole (central, territorial and local plane) *bourgeois State* is a unitary whole that doesn't admit internal contradictions. It is therefore a flagrant falsehood to argue that fighting for the *decentralization of the municipalities* in the *bourgeois State* is fighting against *this bourgeois State*."

It is true that municipal governments in many parts of the world today are afflicted by Statelike and bureaucratic features, indeed constitute small parliaments. Their primary social function is very often merely the efficient delivery and administration of public services, and they play the reactionary role of maintaining order within their jurisdiction.

Unfortunately the AIT comrades believe that we, as libertarian municipalists, accept *this* concept of the municipality. They assert that, by focusing on the municipality, we simply "move the Parliament to municipal areas." But far from accepting existing municipal institutions, we seek to eliminate them and replace them with radically different institutions within the political space of the municipality. We explained this matter in our previous reply, but since the comrades have chosen to ignore our explanation, we will try to explain it again.

The municipal institutions that we seek to establish are popular citizens' assemblies, in which all competent adult residents of a municipality are free to participate in the political self-management of their community, on a face-to-face democratic basis. This direct democracy would take a confederal form in order to address trans-municipal issues and problems. Libertarian municipalism, then, is a program, not to accept or work within the existing municipality, but to simultaneously decentralize and democratize the local public sphere into a revolutionary "form of freedom."

Anarcho-syndicalism (in an admittedly brief and crude definition) seeks to gain workers' control of industry through syndicalist labor unions, on a factory-by-factory basis, confederating such units by trade (in conjunction with a parallel structure of territorial, indeed municipal administration). But the same kind of argument that the AIT comrades make against face-to-face democracy at the municipal level – that it is not revolutionary – could easily be made against this kind of workplace organization. Let us replace the italicized words in the sentences quoted above with words pertaining to workplace activity:

"Inside the *capitalist system* there is no possibility of destruction of this *capitalist system*, but on the contrary, it is strengthened."

"the whole *factory or workplace* is firmly set in the ... administration [of the corporation]]" and therefore "the legal body of the whole ... *corporation* is a unitary whole that doesn't admit internal contradictions. It is therefore a flagrant falsehood to argue that fighting for *workers' control of industry* in a *capitalist enterprise* is fighting against *capitalism*."

Just as the AIT comrades consider the workplace to be a *potential* realm of emancipation, even though it exists today within the capitalist system; we argue that the municipality is a *potential* realm of emancipation, even though today it has definite ties to the bourgeois State. Despite these ties, we believe that the municipality is not an inherent and intrinsic part of the existing State system, any more than the factory or workplace is an intrinsic and inherent part of the existing capitalist system. If one argues that the State cannot be fought by democratizing the municipalities and restoring political power to citizens, then one could very well also argue that capitalism cannot be fought by democratizing the workplace and giving workplace control to the workers.

We would ask our AIT comrades to consider this point carefully. Indeed, the factory/workplace is far more integral to capitalism than the municipality is to the State. Historically, the city long preexisted the rise of the State, and it has very often existed in tension

or antagonism with State power. Early State-builders in Europe had to struggle to bring municipalities under their control and destroy the vestiges of the popular power that inhered in them. But factories became the leading sphere of industrial production only in conjunction with the rise of industrial capitalism. Indeed, the factory has been a creature as well as a building block of that system.

Understand that by making this argument, we are not questioning either the revolutionary intentions of the AIT comrades or the necessity or possibility of separating the factory from capitalism. On the contrary, we are simply trying to show that the kind of argument they raise against us could easily be raised against themselves.

On the subject of elections, we agree with the AIT comrades in rejecting elections in the bourgeois State: they are means of robbing people of their power rather exercising it. The comrades are correct that we "accept the electoral way" – but we do so only in libertarian municipalist campaigns in local elections, for the establishment of citizens' assemblies as the decisive vehicles of popular political power. The democracy we are advancing is not the pseudo-democracy of the bourgeois State but, as we have seen, the management of local community life by the citizenry in a direct, face-to-face democracy.

Again on the question of elections, the AIT comrades accuse us of "deforming a text of Bakunin," saying that in the quotation we use Bakunin was "deal[ing] only with the necessity of base organization." But who is "deforming Bakunin" here? He was explicitly talking precisely about municipal elections: "municipal elections;" the quotation reads in part, "always best reflect the real attitude and will of the people." We believe that unlike the AIT comrades, we have interpreted Bakunin correctly here. The comrades rightly point out that in 1872 "the members of the Alliance" including Bakunin, "condemned all political participation and its methodology." Regrettably, Bakunin's statements are often contradictory-but who is to say which are to be accepted and which rejected?

As for the libertarian municipalism/social ecology conference, the AIT comrades claim that we have invited "a top official of the actual municipality of Lisbon" to speak. Actually, the person in question is not a top Lisbon official but the mayor of a small Portuguese town, who will provide a purely *informational lecture*. The AIT comrades have already denounced us for accepting funding from State organizations, to which we have replied that this funding, commonplace for conferences, is being used only for routine economic, logistical, and material means and has no influence whatsoever on the content of the conference. Now the comrades are pointing out that members of the Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestao and the Instituto Superior de Ciencias do Trabalho e da Empresa are actually participating in the organizing committee, as if there were something wrong with this. Yes, they are. The AIT implies that these members are "top state representatives." In fact, they are no such thing; they are fine anarchist comrades who happen to hold faculty positions at the university – as do quite a few anarchists in the United States, Britain, France, Italy, and elsewhere – through which positions they have able to obtain funding for our anarchist conference. Does the AIT seriously intend to argue that anarchists should be prohibited from holding academic positions in State-supported universities or use those positions to gain funding for anarchist conferences? By that harsh standard, a great many anarchist activities would not be able to exist today.

In their earlier statement the AIT comrades asserted that Portugal was chosen as the site for the conference because "the libertarian movement is very weak in this country." In the present document, they make exactly the opposite argument: that now the "decadent bourgeois State" is so weak that it needs "oxygen balls" in order "to continue breathing." Once again it would be desirable that the AIT comrades take a consistent position – but in this case, as we explained in our previous reply, neither of the explanations proposed here would be the correct one.

Continuing to discuss local matters, the AIT comrades claim that the Portuguese anarchists around *A Batalha* are "vehicles for the State." But they provide no documentation for this reckless allegation (and none, indeed, exists). Instead, they merely attempt to connect these excellent comrades with the CGT, an organization with whom the AIT famously has a troubled relationship. This attempt is entirely spurious since no such connection exists.

The AIT comrades go on to deny our observation that Portugal is one of the most decentralized countries in Europe. (Again, they lamentably provide no supporting information.) We suggest that they themselves examine the provisions on municipalities and parishes in the 1976 Portuguese constitution, then compare them with similar provisions in the constitutions of other European nation-states. We believe they will find that municipalities in Portugal have a relatively greater degree of definition and autonomy. Now, let us be clear here: We are not claiming that this or any constitution of any nation-state prescribes the institutions or structure of the society we desire. Least of all do we regard the Portuguese constitution as some kind of model of a libertarian municipalist society – and to allege that we do would be a gross falsehood, since it is not even close to the truth.

Constitutions of all kinds are of enormous interest to us for several reasons: (1) Insofar as we and even our anarcho-syndicalist comrades wish to build a face-to-face democracy of self-managing citizens in decentralized communities, then the existing legal framework is a relevant piece of information for this struggle. (2) As in any war, one must know the strengths and weaknesses of one's enemy. In our war – the class struggle – we need to know the strengths and weaknesses of our enemy, the bourgeois State and capitalism. Any class struggle fought in the real world will require this information, which many people – including, apparently, the AIT comrades – do not have. (3) In a nonrevolutionary period, knowledge of the limits of the political system is essential. Our people are doing the painstakingly slow work of attempting to expand direct democracy in their municipalities. Where slight openings appear in existing legal frameworks, a crucial part of our activity is to widen those openings, in order to either create or expand local face-to-face democracy in the institutions that we have already described.

We call upon social anarchists of all kinds to bring anarchism out of the historical cul-de-sac in which it presently finds itself and help us create a direct democratic, self-managing political sphere.

On the subject of Bookchin: It is incorrect to say that he "never believed in the proletariat as a revolutionary agent and, therefore, in its instrument of liberation, the union." Actually, he was a member of the American Communist movement in the 1930s and a Trotskyist into the 1940s, all the while fervently believing that the proletariat was the revolutionary agent. In the late 1930s and 1940s, while variously employed as a foundryman and autoworker, he held positions as shop steward and unpaid secretary and was a labor activist in the United Electrical and Machine Shop Workers (UE) and the United Auto Workers (UAW), among other Unions.

In the postwar years he did not need Herbert Marcuse or Andre Gorz (whose writings came much later in any case) to understand that the industrial workforce was no longer a hegemonic revolutionary agent. On the contrary, he witnessed it himself in the famous General Motors strike of 1946, in which the UAW sold out to the company in return for higher wages, longer vacations, increased unemployment benefits, and the like. His turn to the ecology issue was not an attempt to "multifragment the unity of the libertarian movement" but to preserve the revolutionary nature of that movement against the accommodationism of the labor movement – and such accommodation continues to this very day.

At the same time, Bookchin was trying to widen the base of the libertarian movement, beyond a focus on the industrial workplace, in order to encompass people oppressed by their gender, ethnicity, race, sexual preference, and the like. The AIT asks, "How would these workers get, in the municipality, the class consciousness that they would have lost in the union?" Bookchin argued that the destruction of the environment, due to capital accumulation and the expansion of the competitive market – could generate a potentially anticapitalist movement that would sweep in the growing middle class as well as the diminishing industrial working class in a struggle against the bourgeoisie, a small minority of the population.

On political ecology: The AIT comrades protest that ecology is a "smokescreen" issue, that the "capitalist State has 'recovered' a dimension of the ecological issue." They offer as their alternative a "social ecology" that "cannot be subsidized" by the capitalist State. We are pleased that the comrades understand the need for a revolutionary social ecology (which calls for a radical transformation of society), as distinguished from environmentalism (which is merely technocratic reformism of environmental issues). Of course, Bookchin made this distinction decades ago, in

the early 1970s, sharply opposing social ecology to environmentalist reformism.

But where social ecology calls for a fundamental revolutionary transformation of society along ecological and democratic and libertarian communist lines, what does the AIT's new-found "social ecology" involve? It must, they say, affect "the workers' mental and moral health and their environment." Who is making the reformist proposal here? Safeguards against harmful or toxic effects on workers' health caused by substances in the workplace environment are commonplace; they have been part of American reformist programs since the turn of the century, and part of the American system at least since 1970 (when the Occupational Safety and Health Administration was created). Although such safeguards are much contested in the U.S., they are perfectly consistent with capitalist imperatives; after all, a healthier worker is a more productive worker.

Progress has been made in this debate: The AIT comrades have ceased to call us "counterrevolutionary" and now merely call us "reformist." We hope that further progress in understanding will be made, and that the comrades will soon recognize that we are no less "revolutionary" than they are.

We find, however, that we will be unable to continue this debate unless two conditions are met. One: The debate must adhere to basic, minimum ethical standards. That is, criticisms should be made not on the basis of rumor and allegation but on the basis of evidence. We must insist that our comrades not accept allegations made against us at face value, but that they go to the source to get information to either confirm or refute those charges before publishing them as fact. Two: We observe that the AIT's documents against the conference have been published in some of the anarcho-syndicalist press organs, but that our reply has not. We cannot justify continuing this debate unless the relevant media publishes our documents as well as the AIT's documents.

We repeat our earlier expression of respect for the anarcho-syndicalists of yesterday and today, and we work alongside them on the road to an ecological and anarchist society.