

Letters

Demarchy

Dear *KIO*:

I write in reply to Brian Martin's letter in issue #32.

As a preliminary point, I did not conclude that demarchy is not anarchy based on my etymological comparison of the two words. I used etymology to present my thesis, and then went on at some length to "look at the way society is organized rather than the way words are constructed." Anyway, presuming the terms are apt, I fail to see why a look at their meaning is not helpful.

Amid various intriguing points, Martin makes certain comments which are indicative of the manner in which the essential core of anarchy as a political philosophy becomes diffused and thus susceptible to unwarranted criticisms. Martin states: "In my view, because demarchy is based on abolishing the state and empowering the people, it fits within a broad definition of anarchism." Unfortunately, demarchy would *not* abolish the state, but only alter it dramatically, such that power becomes more dispersed, and more broadly accessible by individuals. So much the better, perhaps, but the power itself remains (in a fashion somewhat analogous to the Laws of Conservation of Mass & Energy). Under demarchy, the potential still remains that an individual can be confronted with a demand by some authority which s/he is unable to refuse. The fact that the demand emanates from an authority whose bailiwick is limited and which the individual had and will have a fair chance at wielding her/himself does not amount to a relief from coercion *at the time*.

Later, Martin states: "Anarchists generally want to reduce the power of the few over the many and increase the role of rational persuasion." Such a description goes no further than the traditional principles of democracy. There is more to anarchy. As opposed to a democrat, the anarchist also wants to reduce (to nothing) the power of the many over the few. It is this goal which I contend demarchy cannot meet. At variance with my original understanding, Martin points out that under demarchy "there is no state or military to enforce decisions made by the groups (committees): the decisions will only be followed if people agree to do so." What about those who do not agree? Are they free from participation? What if their participation is necessary for the success of the venture? Should I take it that Martin agrees with

me that individuals should be completely free to opt out? If so, how does demarchy propose to deal with non-contributing citizens? These are key issues with which anarchy deals.

Martin also suggests that those selected for committees would have credibility because they would have no vested interests in the results. This proposition does not follow, if indeed the random selection regime is to be strictly applied. In a random system *anyone*, with vested interests or not, has an equal chance of being selected, and, moreover, it is likely that more volunteers will be generated from among people with a "vested interest." If instead Martin postulates some eligibility criteria, then somewhere (presumably with a metacommittee) the theoretical authority exists to derogate from the random principle which is the *sine qua non* of demarchy. In effect, demarchy under this construction has a built-in potential for gerrymandering.

Martin offers two possible solutions to my criticism that statistical representation on committees leads to hegemony. I fail completely to understand one suggestion: that such problems can simply be taken up by the metacommittees. What could the metacommittee do but eliminate the problem as I suggest, or tinker with numbers which leave the problem in place? In any case, I note that this solution hinges on some solution of the metacommittee problem. Martin's other solution for the statistical representation problem is that "those who are concerned about this could encourage suitable people to nominate for groups to redress the balance." With due respect, this is no solution at all. If representation levels are already predetermined by demographic statistics, additional nominations will not alter the problem of minority hegemony because more volunteers will not result in more misrepresentation since the random system has been circumvented.

To add a new argument against statistical representation, I submit that a problem arises in defining what constitutes a demographic group entitled to special representation. Again, this would presumably be handled by metacommittees, and the metacommittees themselves would be composed of statistical representatives who might have an appearance of bias in maintaining the exclusivity of group representation at the expense of deserving, yet unrecognized groups. I am

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grateful to Martin for correcting my erroneous belief that the selected committees would oversee bureaucracies. Apparently the committee members themselves would carry out all the activities necessary to their bailiwick. I do not see how this can work. Either the committees will become populated exclusively with trained specialists, resulting in a balkanized government of syndicates, or the society will be unable to maintain a system of occupational specialization and the huge economic efficiency it entails. Perhaps I am missing something.

At the end of his letter, Martin included questions about my previous suggestions (*KIO* #31) which I am pleased to answer. First, Martin seems to misunderstand my meaning where I propose that society should be composed by "each individual being in contact with each of all the other individuals." I made analogy to the contract structure of partnerships to explain my meaning, but some clarification will be helpful, I hope. I meant that each individual has *one* social contract with *all* the other members of society in their individual capacities instead of (as presently prevails) with the theoretical entity called the state.

Martin asks: "Who will enforce the contracts?" Admitting, as always, to utopian optimism, I propose that to a large extent the necessity for even slightly coercive enforcement would be greatly reduced because of the voluntary nature of the contract process. Furthermore, the system I propose provides for complete freedom to opt out anyway (assuming previous debt is discharged) so enforcement requirements are made largely moot. Finally, the consequences of complete failure to abide by contract or opting out provisions would amount to self-exile and are therefore unlikely (though possible). For what little enforcement requirements remain, I presume it would be contractually, co-operatively arranged somehow, in the same fashion as any other societal need such as emergency service (like firefighting).

Asks Martin: "How are decisions about collective issues (transport, pollution, technical standards) made?"

The simple, general answer is through co-operation of individuals acting out of rational self-interest. As to the specific examples: Where roads and bridges, etc. are needed, those with the need or who see possible profit, would build them either by themselves or cooperatively. This proposal relates to familiar anarchist notions of "good" and "bad" property which I am unwilling to address here. As to pollution, the implied parallel to the Tragedy of the Common fails if one accepts the assumption that people will act in *rational* self-interest if they can rely on others to do so and are permitted/encouraged to do so themselves. Finally, technical standards are already merely codifications of whatever sets of standards survive the Darwinist process of progress. Standards that work are those already adopted by and large because of their superiority over available others. Conversely, where a standard is applied which has not proved itself by general acceptance beforehand, it is either ignored or becomes a hindrance rather than a help.

"Doesn't a contract system give undue power to those with scarce skills who are willing to threaten to opt out?" First, while many may be willing to threaten, only very few are likely to actually opt out fully, when the consequences are considered. More problematic is the possibility of persons withholding expertise but not labour, thus NOT foregoing the benefits of society, but still applying almost full bargaining pressure. Under the system I propose, this is perfectly legitimate and institutionally protected activity. Under my proposal, this will not cause significant problems because the distorting effects of power/authority/Rule are absent. Persons bargaining for their services will receive exactly what they are worth. (The totally free market for labour would thus achieve the Marxian goal of rendering the surplus product unto the proletariat who creates it.) Furthermore, generally through history the most significant contributors have failed to receive a return commensurate with their full value, mainly because society (and the person him/herself) are unable to perceive the true value produced. Compare the remuneration received to the vast benefit generated by Tesla, daVinci, Ford, Edison, Bell, Salk, Leeuwenhoek and many others. Even those who became millionaires did not get back the full value of their contribution to improving quality of life.

Finally, as I have appeared to rely on a market system, I will deal with the expected objections of what to do about the problems of (1) how to pro-

vide for the weak and (2) rapacious greed. In both of these respects, I return to my premise that in the absence of Rule a society would function on a basis of rational self-interest. Decisions about whether one would rather feed the destitute or have them die in the streets, or turn to theft or violence would be dramatically changed toward rationality in the absence of a coercive Rule system to enforce and protect exploitative property arrangements. Similarly, there is no danger to society from rapacious greed where there is no Rule system for wealth to co-opt. Everyone will automatically receive what his or her contributions are worth, because no means exist to distort the market. The greedy will have only the option of contributing more if they wish to receive more. I submit that this improved operation of a free-market under an anarchist system is analogous to the manner that markets are now presumed to operate better under democracies than under authoritarian regimes.

Yours truly,
Nils R. Connor

Population

Dear *KIO*:

As regards my article *The Stork is the Bird of War*, in *Real World*, summer 1993, the address is: 91 Nuns Moor Road, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK NE4 9BA. Subs (£6/year).

By the way, I just love the 20-year-old Bookchin reprints. Really cutting edge!

Bill McCormick

bob melcombe replies:

It's both amazing and amusing to see an "ecologist" succumbing to the cult of the new, i.e. that only new products, new music, new ideas are worthwhile. This is the essence of capitalist consumerism. I believe that the value of an idea is determined not by when it was conceived or enunciated, but by the quality of the idea itself. *Kick It Over* will continue to reprint selections from older writings whenever it seems appropriate.

Alternative Economics

Dear *KIO* Comrades:

I found the discussions in *Building an Alternative Economics* in *KIO* #33 very thought-provoking. It does seem that anarchists have avoided economics to our "cost," as Jeff Stein and Brian Martin think. Although, like them I am also looking for some new ideas on anarchist economics and like their suggestions, it doesn't seem to have been noted that a necessary condition for an alternative economy (presumably one free of hierarchy, com-

petition, domination) would have to be an alternative to the economy, that there is no real alternative to the economy today, which is perhaps the major cause of our problems. The capitalist state is the only society that has ever believed that everything can and should be within the exchange economy, and that via money anything should be exchangeable with anything else. We should not make the same mistake.

With capitalism, the economy is expanding infinitely not only physically, but into ever more details of our lives. We are all either purchased commodities or being processed to become them, or out of demand on the shelves or in rubbish dumps. We are so dazzled at the range of things that can be bought we don't notice that nothing can be done or obtained for free. Not just basics for survival, food, clothing, shelter, but even the basics for actually existing such as peoples' space and time are also, mindlessly, entirely enclosed within the economy of the capitalist state.

This means truly everything is inside and conditional on the economy, even the state itself in my opinion, with the economy running the state rather than the state running the economy. Even the other economies of the household, the alternative economy and the underground economy that Gary Mofatt mentions are ultimately subject to the capitalist-state economy because it has monopolized all space and time, and everything can only take place within this framework. According to the TV, people the world over are waking up to the truth that the far right are right, capitalism is the only right way — because it makes alternatives impossible or false. The originators of capitalism were probably well meaning, intending it to be a palace; it is actually a coffin which we have climbed inside, and now it's nailing itself shut for us.

What I am suggesting is that, aside from a different kind of economy, the territory of the economy should be carefully limited. People will not be able to make free decisions about the economy or anything else unless they can stand outside of it, are not entirely dependent on it and perhaps could even be independent of it if they choose. Almost without a doubt, the only way the economy can be transcended and cut down to size is politically (I mean, of course, the community meeting, not the state). This political system would itself have to be independent of the economy, once established.

It would be possible to organize space, for instance, purely politically through community meetings. The