

anchorage anarchy

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To Each Their Own

I have been an anarchist for an awful long time. I believe that, to paraphrase Proudhon, whoever lays a hand on me to govern me is a usurper and tyrant, and I declare them my enemy. I favor the abolition of the state, completely and at the earliest possible opportunity. This seems to me the basic, essential libertarian idea, founded on the belief that people are capable of living their lives and interacting with others uncoerced, unsupervised, unmanaged, unpoliced, unchaperoned—in other words, ungoverned.

This libertarian opposition to all authority and hierarchy, including those forms so common in social change movements, was what attracted me to the anarchist movement from the very beginning. Coming out of a left riddled with authoritarians, the idea of a leaderless network of like-minded folks pursuing a libertarian form of socialism/communism, as advocated by anarchists like Goldman and Berkman was refreshing. But the more I read, thought, and experienced life, the individualist core of the anarchist critique—the idea that each person should be free to choose and act for themselves, always and everywhere—led me to reconsider my earlier sympathy for collectivist approaches to creating a free society. I became an individualist, in addition to being an anarchist.

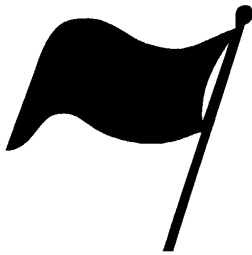
I believe that in order to safeguard individual freedom and autonomy, the unique person must be the center of any critique,

organization, or social/economic arrangement. Focusing on groups, however defined—whether classes, unions, people of shared ethnicity or sex, whatever—leads to an outlook that puts the needs and desires of the larger “community” or organization above those of the individuals of which it is comprised. This creates a situation where domination, hierarchy, and submission inevitably emerge, even when that is not the intention of those involved. Where there is authority, whether that of a minority over a majority, or a majority over a minority, there cannot be individual freedom. In the absence of a formal government there can still be hierarchies and even frank coercion. A focus on the individual is a safeguard against any movement in that direction.

Despite criticism to the contrary, individualists are not anti-social or illiberal. We favor voluntary cooperation while also believing in private property. We oppose racism and sexism without embracing a group-oriented identity politics. We oppose laws, police, taxation, mandatory schooling, warfare and welfare, while supporting any voluntary, non-coercive efforts and arrangements that people come up with to satisfy their needs and wants and assist others unable to fend adequately for themselves. We envision a society where people come together for work, discussion, trade, sex, recreation or other projects when they choose

and do their own thing otherwise. Any necessary organizations will be formed as needed and dissolved as soon as possible—individualists do not envision any permanent structure of groups, councils, assemblies, or syndicates to coordinate people's affairs. The social change individualists seek would create a world of free people with free minds, free trade, and free choices to make about how they want to live, limited only by respect for the equal freedom of others to live unmolested.

Although individualists have long been part of the anarchist movement in many places around the world, we remain in the



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minority. Given that our outlook has so often been misconstrued or ignored in anarchist discussion and debate, it is unfortunate that at present we are less visible or understood than ever. In part this stems from the usual neglect of, or even hostility towards, individualist ideas from the social anarchists of various sorts who dominate the movement. But there is a more recent development that also contributes to the marginalization of individualist thought. That is the reluctance of people who are open to and even identify with the individualist tradition to identify themselves explicitly as individualists, instead preferring to call themselves mutualists or market anarchists. I, for one think it important to be an out individualist, inspired by a tradition that goes back over 150 years. And I will venture in this article to once again bring an individualist perspective to contemporary anarchist discussion.

Occupy That

Since the major topic of discussion in and about the anarchist movement right now is the Occupy movement, I will start there. There has been a lot of coverage, both positive and negative, of this movement in the mainstream press and news media, much of which has at least mentioned the anarchist presence in Occupy. The anarchists themselves have also spent much time and energy promoting and discussing this movement. But despite all the hype, there is little in this movement that gives hope or encouragement to this anarchist.

The original occupation in New York was lively, largely spontaneous, and exciting. But it is still unclear what the point of it all was and is. While portrayed by supporters as an attempt to build an alternative way of living and a model for a new social change movement, it really has constituted little more

than a sustained protest against the abuses of state-supported capitalism. This is not a criticism—I support protest and have even gone to Occupy activities in Anchorage and London. And I oppose state-supported capitalism and its inherent injustice and inequity. The issues raised, primarily that the rich own most of the country's wealth and that the government subsidizes their fortunes, deserve to be brought to the attention of people in this country and elsewhere once again (although it is difficult to understand why this is news to anyone).

But whether simple protest or alternative community, the ideas and practices coming out of the Occupy movement do not herald a new approach to social change. Setting up kitchens and first aid stations at campsites is hardly creative and is something that any number of organizations, from boy scouts to women's music festivals to the rainbow family have been doing for years. Whether a campsite is organized well or badly is certainly important to the participants. But how learning or perfecting these skills enables the participants to experiment with and model new social and economic relationships escapes me.



One aspect of the occupations that is not new in anarchist-associated movements, but appears to have taken on exceptional importance in Occupy is the constant meetings and general assemblies. Such incessant politicking is in line with Bookchin's vision of the libertarian *polis* where running meetings dominate the life of



the community. There is an underlying assumption here that most of life's activities and interactions need to be the business of the larger group, where everyone's interests are always intertwined. This is in contrast to the approach of individualists, who view such a structured approach to relationships between people as an impediment to their ability to mind their own business except where and when it is in their interests to share and interact with others.

Another feature of the Occupy movement that conflicts with an individualist approach to social interaction is the institutionalization of consensus as the preferred method of decision-making. My issue with consensus is, and always has been, that it really is appropriate only to small groups where people know and work (or play) together and already share a common understanding and outlook on most of the business which has brought them together. A small bakery cooperative, for instance, where the participants came together to set up and run a project, have a shared vision of where the project is going, and need to make decisions about certain aspects of how to get there, would be a logical setting in which to use a consensus model of decision-making. But scores of folks camped outside St Paul's cathedral being asked to come to a consensus about whether to endorse

the declaration of the people's assembly of someplace? In such a setting disagreements gets put aside or overwhelmed and people end up going along, so as not to block consensus.

Of course, it really matters not at all in the real world whether some group signs on to some document promulgated by some pretentiously name "people's" assembly in some other city. But the consensus approach is being used to make decisions about most everything in the occupations, and the problem is with the method, not with the matter up for discussion. The Occupiers are striving for unity because they believe that is what will make their movement strong. I value diversity, robust debate, disagreement, people going off to do their own projects if they don't agree with the majority. That makes for strong and independent individuals, who will contribute to even stronger social movements.

Déjà vu all over again

The pursuit of consensus is just one manifestation of the tendency of the Occupiers, and most anarchists, to take a follow-the-leader approach to social movements. This has led the Occupy movement in other cities to mimic the activities of those in New York, as if their tactics were the blueprint for a successful movement. So one sees the tents, the Guy Fawkes masks, the "interesting" hand gestures used in meetings, the chanting repetitions of others' statements as a substitute for amplification, and so on. It strikes me as contradictory for a movement, many of whose supporters and members lays claim to the libertarian tradition of questioning authority, to sheepishly adopt the rituals other groups have used. Where is the independence of

thought and action one would hope for from anarchists?



This is not the first time in recent memory that a social movement has adopted the tactic of trying to formulaically replicate events that were largely spontaneous one-offs resulting from very specific circumstances that created a perfect storm of people, ideas, timing and opportunity, and resulted in a spectacular outpouring. For a number of years the opponents of "neo-liberalism" tried to recreate the Seattle uprising at international trade meetings all over the world. They got people on the streets and created a ruckus, but there was never another Seattle. Activists seem never to get the point that it is impossible to plan a successful uprising in advance. This past experience did not prevent the Occupiers from trying to replay the very impressive November port shutdown in Oakland, not just there but in other west coast cities. While Occupy Oakland considered their December action a success, only a fraction of the thousands who participated in the first action

showed up for the second, and actions in other cities were primarily symbolic protests. All well and good but it certainly did not indicate that the movement is growing in strength or influence, but rather the opposite.

All Cooped Up

In addition to my concerns about the organizational choices made by the Occupiers which tend to stifle individuality and promote a sort of groupthink with a standardized approach to creating a movement, I am also not inspired by the ideas and models for economic change coming out of this movement. Although the Occupy movement avoids “official” demands or policy statements, it is pretty clear that the Occupiers believe in abolishing corporate personhood, taxing the wealthy more heavily, and supporting cooperative economic ventures including credit unions and employee-owned businesses. None of these proposals is anti-government in the least. Of course the Occupy movement itself is not an anarchist movement, despite the large number of libertarians involved in it, so I don’t expect the group(s) as a whole to be advocating anti-statist ideas and actions. What is disappointing, however, is the apparent lack of anarchist critique of the methods of social and economic reform being proposed.

In fact, anarchists seem to be glomming onto the idea of coops and credit unions as if these were new and revolutionary concepts. In fact they are neither. Worker cooperatives of various sorts, whether based on producers, consumers or both, have been part of the statist capitalist, and even fascist, economic landscape for a long time. While there may be advantages to these models over traditional capitalist enterprises, they are not libertarian or liberatory by their nature. A long-standing

and very large coop venture that many anarchists look to sympathetically is the complex of cooperatives centered around Mondragon in Spain. While the worker/consumer members officially run this operation, in fact elected managers supervise the businesses on a day-to-day basis. Mondragon is hierarchical, wages are unequal, and there have been labor disputes there, at least one strike, member expulsions and fines for work actions, and in recent years outsourcing of work to other countries where the workers are simple employees, not members. Smaller cooperatives may be more likely to be egalitarian and collegial, but simply being a coop does not assure fair conditions or true worker control.



Other employee-owned enterprises, such as ESOPs or credit unions are virtually indistinguishable from other sorts of capitalist businesses in practice. While the employees/members may own shares and stock, have the ability to vote now and then, and share in profits, the managers in these companies really run the businesses and make far higher salaries than those of the regular workers. It may make the participants feel better, and these companies may have kinder and gentler HR policies, but for all intents and purposes these companies maintain the



traditional boss-worker relationship. And in addition, these kinds of businesses, like other capitalist enterprises, are hemmed in by government laws, rules, and regulations. Credit unions have survived and thrived next to banks for years. Taking your money out of a capitalist bank and placing it in a capitalist credit union may make ease your conscience, but it doesn't really change anything.

Structure and Function

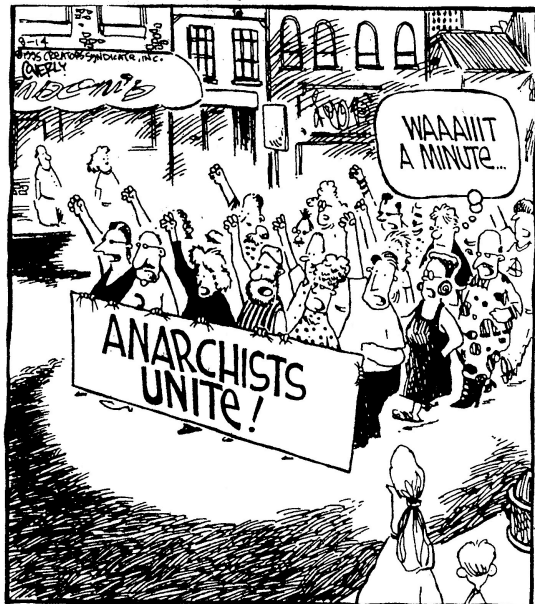
The point of this article is not to beat up on the Occupy movement. Like many social change movements it has good and bad characteristics. Calling out the economic and political powers-that-be for their hypocrisy and exploitation is always a good thing. What bothers me is the anarchist response to Occupy. Once again, the movement *du jour*

is promoted and championed by anarchists, without a real, critical, libertarian look at how the movement functions and what it seeks to achieve. It appears that either a lot of the anarchists are naïve enough to actually believe that tent cities, zombie parades, and government-issued credit unions are the road to freedom, or they feel it would be offensive to their friends in the movement to bring up a libertarian perspective and spoil the party.

I am an advocate of worker control and voluntary exchange. I oppose profit, rent, and interest. I favor neither capitalism nor socialism. Individuals need to choose for themselves how and when to interact with others socially and economically. These exchanges will take many forms—from co-operatives, to mutual banks, to barter networks, to time stores to who knows what. But when the limits and structures of such interactions and arrangements are dictated by the state, as they are and will be in a governmental society, they will never be libertarian enterprises.

I don't propose we wait for the elimination of the state to reform fucked-up social and economic relationships. I want to see workers get higher wages, owners get less profits, workers be treated fairly and humanely at work today. But simply having a cooperative structure under capitalism is no guarantee of this. In fact, workers who are organized may well have better pay and working conditions at a traditional capitalist company than at a worker-owned enterprise that is not controlled directly by the people who do the real work. Worker-owners/shareholders tend to play the same part in a business as other owners and stockholders. For me the underlying hierarchy and system of command and

obedience is as important as who owns an operation.



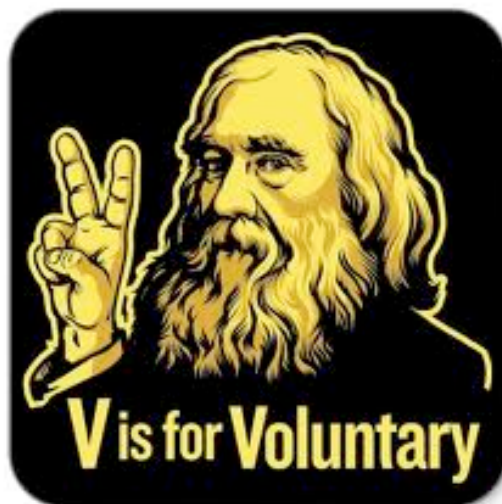
Changing structures is important. An anarchist operation, one without hierarchy and profit, would likely resemble in certain ways some present-day cooperatives, but would differ in important aspects: there would be no managers, no “representative” structures; instead there would be direct control and sharing of the work and decision-making by the participants. What most needs to change to get to a truly libertarian society and anarchist economic arrangements is people’s outlook and ideas. People need to leave behind their reliance on government as a method to accomplish change and to order interactions between people.

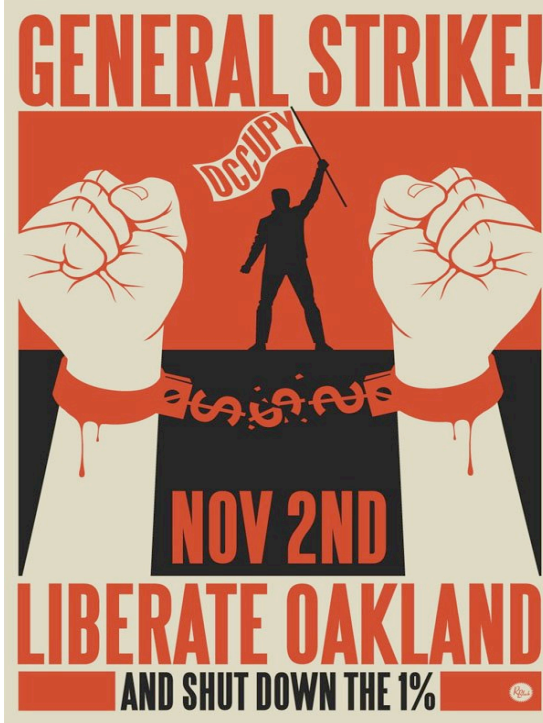
What’s an Anarchist To Do?

Making the argument for abolishing the state and its economic arrangements, whether capitalist or socialist, can be done only by anarchists. But they have largely failed to do

so. Anarchists are often called extremists, but that is usually because they are the ones most likely to fuck shit up and get chased or arrested at protests. We need to be seen as extremists because we advocate, whenever we get the chance, an extreme version of independence from the state and all mechanisms of control. We are extremists because of what we believe, but we need to come out of the closet. Anarchists may not want to piss off their friends or sound like they only see the negative aspects of contemporary social struggles, but it is not libertarian to fawn over reformist social change movements instead of challenging them to go further in their attempts at altering the way society operates.

Anarchy is about freeing the individual, not about socialism, capitalism, mutualism, or markets. Even though it is exceedingly likely that versions of all of these economic models—and combinations of some or all—will be employed by some group of free people somewhere at some time, there will only be free people if we can eliminate





government and authority. It is the state which has the police and the military at its beck and call. It is the authorities who really own the “public” spaces from which Occupiers have been forcibly removed. It is government laws and regulations which protect the ill-gotten gains of capitalists, landlords, corporations, bankers and stockholders and allow them to profit at the expense of the rest of us.

Leftists of assorted flavors can make the case against capitalism. Since only anarchists seek a stateless society, however, only they can advocate for it. We need to make the case for anarchy; we need to be the constant irritants on the edge of the movement pushing or coaxing it in a more radical direction, away from statist solutions and toward libertarian ones. While I favor reforming state capitalism to better the lives of its victims, I

believe a libertarian critique encourages the reformers to go further. The anarchist vision broadens the parameters of debate and discussion, and makes space for more innovative approaches—ones that might be given serious consideration only because the fundamental changes anarchists propose would make all sorts of less extreme reforms seem reasonable.

So if anarchists want to see credit unions that really do function better than capitalist banks because this would be an improvement over current conditions, let’s advocate mutual banks and the elimination of the fed and legal tender laws. This provides a reference point on the extreme libertarian end of the debate, which puts the whole discussion in a new, different context. Discussing the pros and cons of conventional credit unions and banks among ourselves and with occupiers won’t do it. Someone needs to bring a libertarian perspective to the Occupiers and other social change movements. Anarchists should step up to the plate and act like anarchists, since no one else is gonna do it for us.

Common to all Anarchists is the desire to free society of all political and social coercive institutions which stand in the way of development of a free humanity. In this sense Mutualism, Collectivism and Communism are not to be regarded as closed systems permitting no further development, but merely as economic assumption as to the means of safeguarding a free community. There will even probably be in society of the future different forms of economic co-operation operating side by side, since any social progress must be associated with that free experiment and practical testing out for which in a society of free communities there will be afforded every opportunity."

Rudolf Rocker, Anarcho-Syndicalism

Our Demands as Individualist Anarchists

E Armand

Note by John Zube

The following is merely the translation of a translation. It was written in French by E Armand, published 1945 in l'Unique, and reprinted in LA FEUILLE, published by the Association Max Stirner du Quebec, CP 95, Stn Place D'Armes, Montreal. The translation into German for publication in Lernziel Anarchie, No. 4, was done by CR. This German version is here roughly translated into English by John Zube, 30.12.1985. In the comment it is mentioned that Armand's book [L'Initiation Individualiste Anarchiste 1923, 344 pp, ed de L'En Dehors] is out of print. An improved and enlarged edition came out in Italian.



The individualist anarchists in the meaning of the UNIQUE (of Stirner's *The Ego and His Own*) do advocate a “society without coercion.” This implies the following demands, which are unqualified and without reservations. It is self-evident that these demands are to be realized, completely or partly, as far as is possible.

Individualists of our kind recognize every society as a “Society without Coercion” in which the State and any other aggressive power is eliminated, in which there is no longer any domination of man over man or over a sphere of society (and vice versa) and in which an exploitation of man by man or of man through social institutions (and vice versa) is impossible.

Thereupon the following demands arise:

1) FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT to decide for oneself in all respects. This means that every unit in society moves according to

its own discretion, develops itself, gathers experiences in accordance with its own preferences, corresponding to its talents, reasoning and personal resolutions. In short, the individual is responsible only to himself (or to those to whom he has obliged himself) for all his actions. This freedom finds its limits where the equal freedom of others begins and the danger arises that others are harmed.

2) FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT to chose and practise one's profession and to utter one's opinion orally and in writing, publicly and privately.

3) FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT to join any association that has definite and predetermined purposes or any other association of any kind.

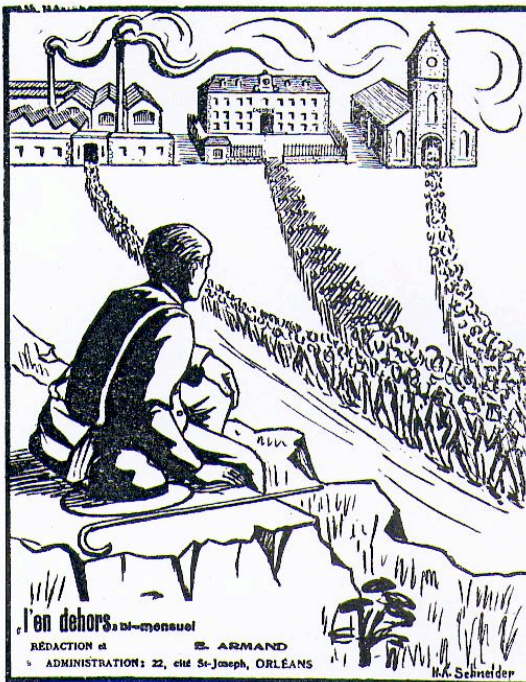
4) FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT to decide for oneself either for or against any expression of solidarity, for and against any contractual obligation of whatever kind and in

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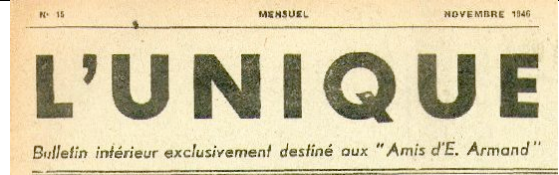


No person may
rule over another

whatever sphere of human activity and without regard to its aims and its duration. Likewise, the right to freely decide upon withdrawal from a contractual situation, within the framework of clearly predetermined contractual conditions. One precondition is that, in case a contract offer is declined or a contract is dissolved, the dissenters are not penalized or maligned. But when a contract is dissolved then neither disadvantages nor any harm must arise for the partner that would be contrary to the form and contents of the contract.



5) FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT for producers and consumers and other partners to negotiate, whether alone or in groups. Full and unrestricted right, regardless of the sphere of activities and their purpose, to select the persons and societies of one's confidence and to authorize them, especially teachers, instructors, physicians, lawyers and

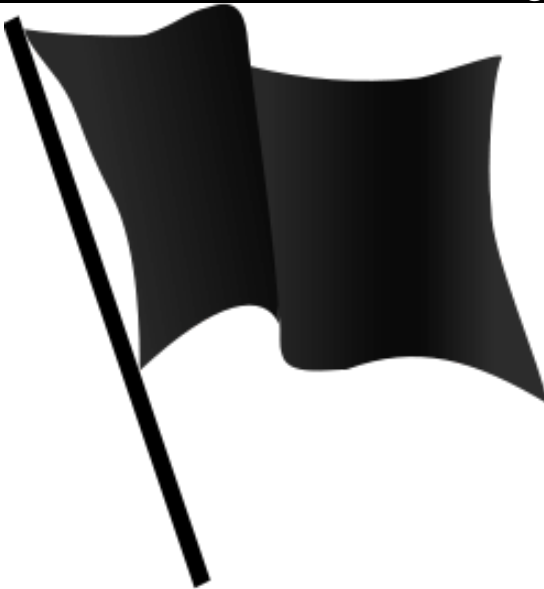


arbitrators.

6) FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT to determine and change the value or price of any goods, their own products or consumer goods, of whatever kind, according to one's own discretion. Likewise untouchable is the right to negotiate in this respect, to use an arbitrator or to do without any determination of values.

7) FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT for every individual and every association or group to use any money that applies as a means of exchange to themselves, for their goods and service exchanges, to issue it themselves or to accept that issued by others, provided that this is always done by agreement and not under any monopolistic coercion. The same applies to the so-called labour bonds and goods warrants and similar certificates, to bills, letters of credit etc, whether they are negotiable or not. Consequently, there is a definite right to utilize any voluntarily recognized means of payment for all economic transactions, as long as it is not subjected to any legal tender. With this is meant the unrestricted right to utilize any other kind of means of exchange, provided that an acceptor is found who decides for it without any coercion.

8) FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT for individuals and groups, to compete for any job or contract, provided that the applicants are not prevented from fully informing and improving themselves. Likewise untouchable are the rights to act creatively in accordance with one's desires, to move and settle freely



and to advertise one's own cause or services.

9) **FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT** to exhibit and realize in any sphere of culture and economics one's opinions or services. There is no other limitation upon this than the condition that nothing may be forced upon others. They may freely decline whatever does not appeal to them. Under this condition the unrestricted right to freedom of expression applies and the right to propagate and teach a theory and to undertake experiments and gather experiences, even when this applies to economic, philosophic, scientific, religious, educational, artistic or any other spheres of activity.

10) **FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT** to live from the returns of one's own services or production, even alone, outside of any group or community or society itself, at one's own risk. Likewise unrestricted is the right to seek to live together with a partner, in a family, in a patriarchal or matriarchal society, in free associations and communes, in close ideological association of whatever kind.

11) **FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT** to decide for oneself to join any association or league whose libertarian aims embrace any kind of human activity or search for knowledge. This applies to associations for any economic, intellectual, ethical, emotional recreational or other purpose and, especially for all spheres of production, consumption, trade, communication, insurance against all possible risks, educational methods and systems, to the utilization of scientific discoveries and of naturally or artificially produced energies.

12) **FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT** to secede from any kind of association, but in accordance with the principles and clauses agreed upon when it was established.

13) **FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT** for any association, league, cooperative etc. to organize itself in a way that suits its members best. This includes the right to order internal affairs at one's own discretion, in accordance with an internal constitution that applies only to the voluntary members.





14) FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT to settle upon and utilize for oneself any non-inhabited and not claimed locality or real estate, provided that thereby the equal right of others is not infringed and no one else is exploited thereby. Under this condition the individual has an incontestable right to possess his means of production (tradesman's tools, instruments, machines, land, minerals, etc). This requires also the freedom to dispose oneself over the returns from or product of one's own labour—to the extent that no domination over or exploitation of others is involved. Moreover, the individual shall be guaranteed the unrestricted right to exchange or dispose of his products upon the market or in any other way, regardless whether he does so for payment or under any other condition. Any association or community has the equal right to apply within their own organization the principles here explained or similar ones.

15) FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT for each individual and, likewise, for any member of an organized society, to dispose freely over his personal property, ie, over the utilization rights and the returns that he

receives in exchange for his personal labour services and which assure him his support, his accommodation (and, especially for the individual, the means of production).

16) FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT to express affection for others and preference for anything, according to one's own discretion, provided that neither any deception or any fraud is associated with this and, most importantly, no one is harmed, restricted or in any way reduced thereby.

17) DEMANDS THAT APPLY ESPECIALLY TO WOMEN AND MOTHERS: FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT for every woman, whether alone or in partnership, to determine for herself her readiness to become a mother. A child shall remain only as long under supervision or custody until it has reached an age in which it can self-responsibly engage in contracts and associations. This applies also to the guardianship for a child. The mother possesses priority in this—which she may completely or partly transfer to another person or institution.

18) DEMANDS APPLYING ESPECIALLY TO CHILDREN: FULL AND UNRESTRICTED RIGHT for the child, boy or girl, to demand an alteration or complete change in its wardship condition. The child may ask for an early declaration that it is of full legal age or for the clarification of any other problem. In this case the child has the right to arbitration and the right to choose the arbitrator or at least one of the arbitrators.

