

*Community  
Economic  
Workshops*

AN EVOLUTIONARY PREPARATION  
FOR SOCIAL REVOLUTION TO  
ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY WITHIN AN  
ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY

LEAGUE FOR  
ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE 1979 EDITION

The pamphlet COMMUNITY ECONOMIC WORKSHOPS arose out of League for Economic Democracy discussions on how citizens and workers can immediately participate in a rapid and conscious evolving of a non-authoritarian and ecologically-sound society. Since our last edition in 1973 the need has intensified for restructuring the ways humans relate to one another and to our planet.

Fortunately, more and more people are actively concerned with environmental questions. But as yet most of the ecology movement has not probed deeply into the social and economic basis of our problems. The anti-authoritarian movement, on the other hand, has had no way of reaching most of the people and very little to offer on how to proceed. Community economic workshops are suggested as a workable approach to combine ecological and anti-authoritarian theory and practice so as to begin solving some of the gigantic problems facing humanity.

In brief, community economic workshops are community organizations that understand the urgent need for a fundamental change to a participatory economic democracy and work toward that end. Certainly at this time community economic workshops may be concerned with immediate issues such as eliminating this or that environmental danger, securing safer and more pleasant working conditions, better housing and health care, more adequate retirement incomes, etc. However, they must always keep the central issue in focus; namely, that of building a completely anti-authoritarian economic democracy. Any such group or organization which loses sight of the major goal will concern itself with effects rather than causes and have its efforts blunted and absorbed with trivia and sops.

The last six years have also seen substantial growth of the feminist movement. Moreover, both it and the environmental movement are becoming potent, constructive social forces which are not to be easily sidetracked until real freedom and an environmentally sensible society exist. We thus see the internationally-organized Friends of the Earth include essays of Murray Bookchin in two of its latest books--"Progress as if Survival Mattered" and "Sun! A handbook for the Solar Decade."

Application of the community economic workshop idea should evolve human beings that live and work in a decentralized, autonomous, self-participatory organizational way. This will mean that both male domination of the human species as well as human domination of other species will cease. In its place will be an equality of peers and a loving caretakership of our planet and its multitude of life forms. No longer will we look to merely a new industrial or economic revolution, but rather to an ecological economic revolution --a quantum step from the civilization we know today. This edition of COMMUNITY ECONOMIC WORKSHOPS has thus been revised keeping in mind the impossibility of unlimited industrial expansion and the need for an eco-society.

LEAGUE FOR ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY  
March, 1979

## COMMUNITY ECONOMIC WORKSHOPS

Humankind faces unprecedented problems and crises. While this is stated in many ways and from widely varying points of view, the conclusions are often essentially the same:

- (1) Human beings must, as never before, use their collective wisdom to solve the problems facing them and our planet if disaster is to be averted.
- (2) Society and technology must be fundamentally reorganized to insure freedom and sufficiency for all while at the same time being rational ecologically. Indeed, the human species must be placed in perspective with other species on our planet.

The League for Economic Democracy is concerned with these all-important questions. The community economic workshop plan, it believes, is worthy of your attention as a first step in reconstructing society, and something which can be initiated now. At all times this approach will keep decision making and thereby the power of society in the only safe place for it: diffused among the people themselves.

Power is dangerous when vested in an individual or a few individuals. When so concentrated, it is almost invariably abused. Now, with weapons of destruction of an entirely new and terrifying magnitude waiting to be used, the question of who controls the power of a society must be solved. Those who control the power, also control these weapons. But it is not weapons alone that threaten our existence. Destruction of our natural environment, depletion of natural resources along with the population explosion at best portend increasing privation and deterioration in the quality of living. At worst they could mean global famine and ecological disaster. These matters demand intelligent planning and action.

In a society composed of classes, the economic, political, military and police power is held by those who own or dominate the means of production, transportation, communication, and services. A power-holding class manages to live well while those who do the useful work usually have to struggle to make ends meet. History has shown that ruling classes will not hesitate to use any means, including the most brutal to their fellow human beings and environmentally the most destructive, in order to preserve their privileges and profits. A movement seeking to give equal economic opportunity and benefits must be prepared for ferocious and ruthless opposition. Community economic workshops can be the start of action and organization to neutralize this opposition and relatively peacefully build a new and better world.

The power of modern society appears to be largely at the disposal of those who own the industries and control the military, police and political state. But there is a latent power possessed by those who do the useful work. It is the labor of the latter that in the last analysis provides the food, clothing, shelter and everything else needed and wanted by society. In other words, all workers--the unskilled, the skilled and the most highly educated--

have a potential economic power available that could easily overcome the power now wielded by those who rule. But this power to be effective must be exerted by workers acting together and in concert with citizens in the community. Isolated or sporadic uprisings can be speedily crushed. Even more futile and indeed usually more hurtful to sound organization are terrorist actions which often alienate many thoughtful and kind people by the brutality involved. Such terrorism, moreover, furnishes an excuse for more police, military, additional repression and further restrictions of civil liberties.

The economic power just mentioned is not that of a general strike but rather that of a general dispossession of those who strangle society by their private ownership of the means of livelihood we need. In a highly technological society, chaos and suffering will very rapidly result if production, transportation and communication are stopped. Shutdowns must also be avoided since the basic economic power possessed by workers can be applied effectively only when necessary production and distribution continue. Furthermore, dictatorship inevitably is offered as the viable answer to chaos.

When we recognize that people must continue their useful activities during and subsequent to a change to economic democracy, the need for organization becomes evident. But this organization should not and cannot be imposed by a revolutionary elite or "vanguard" which will be waiting to seize power in its own interest. It should be a functional organization arising from self-governing individuals in production, distribution, and in the communities. With the multitude of currents and conflicts during a revolutionary crisis, how can those actually doing the work of society enter into those free associations that will be necessary to coordinate activities in an equalitarian social and economic relationship? Certainly this cannot be left to last-minute chance. The long list of revolutions with high aims being turned into despotisms warns against such an approach.

If we want a better society, we must plan and organize for it well in advance of the breakdown of the old order. But how can a relatively few people, at this time, plan and work for a new society particularly in the real seat of power--the means of production itself? This is a pivotal question. The class now enjoying wealth and power will not hesitate at any individual or social crime, no matter how monstrous, to maintain its status. The development of nuclear weapons capable of obliterating all human and highly-developed life many times over is just one example. If necessary, those who control the wealth would seek to abolish any semblance of political freedom and physically exterminate those who threaten their hold on society. Only sound grass roots organization can counter this awesome ruling class power.

Activity naturally arises as consciousness of the need and means for a social change spreads, but it must be organized to be effective. A few people in a given community can work together to educate others. As more people cooperate, organization can begin in the industries and services themselves. Here the early organization will be particularly vulnerable since those on the job who openly

advocate basic social change will be subject to discrimination, reprisals and possible dismissal. Often the present corrupt and bureaucratic unions, as adjuncts to the owners' control, will aid in repression of those who dare think and act in the interests of the useful producers. But the community organization which we call the community economic workshops can serve as the shield to protect the embryonic economic organization within the means of production.

Specifically, members of the community economic workshops can help print and distribute a newsletter in a particular plant that will heighten consciousness. They can give support in strikes and also help in the day-by-day conflict between those who work and those who appropriate much of the fruits of the work by virtue of industrial ownership.

They may well also engage in the environmental struggle to lessen pollution and slow the callous decimation of plant and animal species in the relatively-free western "democracies." But community economic workshops have a much more fundamental task--initiating the movement for a new society. The never-ending economic and ecological battles under a society dominated by the owners of wealth and their agents must not be allowed to obscure the goal of new social organization and economic democracy where autonomy, self-participation, and decentralization will be the guidelines for a new life.

At some point when realization of its need has spread within a productive or service industry, open education, planning and organization of worker-controlled councils can begin. Those in a plant, for example, will decide whether they will completely reconstitute their present union or build a new union based on workers' councils using the new understanding and consciousness. In any event, the workers will now have a bona fide democratic organization with a new outlook and new goals. The concepts of autonomy, decentralization, and self-participation will be studied, discussed and applied.

The day-by-day problems of erosion of wages by inflation and resisting debilitating speedup, improving health conditions will be more effectively dealt with than ever. But a new and important concern will prevail. Planning will begin for the actual social change itself. How can this plant be converted to production which a sane, sound ecological society needs and wants? How can arrangements for a continued supply of raw materials and transportation be made as society is reorganized? How can goods and services be withheld from those forces seeking to physically repress efforts at social change? How can a communications and information network throughout a given nation be set up so that an economic democracy can function efficiently with self-management by the producers and citizens? How can decentralization be implemented to maximize individual and group autonomy and self participation? How can international economic and cultural cooperation be developed and applied? How can councils be used to extend local planning to the needs of all of society?

Meanwhile, as heightened consciousness, planning and activity spread within manufacturing, service, transportation, and communication

industries, parallel community organization will progress. Local as well as far-reaching environmental and population questions will be considered. The needed types of products, housing, transportation, communication, recreation, schools, hospitals, etc., will be discussed and the conclusions reached will be relayed to the industries and services responsible for these needs and wants. Day-by-day planning and participation in the vital aspects of our lives will occupy our attention. We will be deciding for ourselves --not depending upon leaders.

With cooperation and self-management stemming from the level of small self-participatory groups, the old lines dividing people will rapidly disappear. The race, customs, ethnic background, or religion of an individual will no longer fix his or her social or economic standing or ordinarily even intrude upon our consciousness. What will now be important is that we are all striving to be free individuals, free socially and economically, that work, learn, and play together in harmony. The dismal days of rationalizing a miserable life situation by pointing out that others were living even more miserably will be past.

Much stands between us and a new and better world--perhaps disaster if we don't act wisely and promptly. What we do in our generation may well decide the fate of the human race and other species on our planet for thousands of years. If nuclear war is unleashed, the decision may even be irrevocably catastrophic. No longer can it be said that time is necessarily on the side of social progress. The appallingly rapid disappearance of plant and animal species reinforce this conclusion.

Wherever two or more individuals can form a committee or workshop for thought and action towards reconstructing society in line with the ideas advanced above, they should do so. While retaining autonomy and independence of action, these workshops and committees should extend the widest possible cooperation to other such groups.

March, 1979

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Following is a recapitulation and discussion in greater detail of some of the many ramifications of community economic workshops and their relationship to future society. For convenience we have presented this in question and answer format, but we certainly do not mean it as a catechism. Admittedly it is incomplete. The use of community economic workshops, we feel, is a growing and developing idea. We welcome cooperation, suggestions, criticisms, and the exchange of experiences.

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1. What are community economic workshops?

Community economic workshops are autonomous citizen-worker organizations dedicated to the development of a new society--economic democracy within a new ecological society. They consist of groups

of people who cooperate to form a framework for democracy which will permeate all of society. In many cases such groups share similar situations on the job or in the community. The aim of community economic workshops is to unite workers in their industries with citizens in their communities, one industry with another, and community with community.

## 2. Why are community economic workshops needed?

The development of a new society within the shell of the old requires an organization by the people that breaks the barriers of existing social and economic structures--corporate, government and business union. Today for the vast majority, society does not permit the continuous exercise of significant self-management and self-government. Now orders come from the top down, and the citizen-workers are expected to obey with a minimum of questions. With self-management, self-government and self-activity, initiative comes from the individual in concert with his or her fellow workers or fellow citizens.

New forms will have to be consciously organized by men and women who are willing to depend upon themselves as free producers and free human beings. Before the collapse of the old order, it is extremely important that there exist a coordinated but independent self-organization which can give form and permanence to the new, free society that is built. Thus both structure and spontaneity can be united from the beginning.

## 3. What are the activities of community economic workshops?

Workshops are functioning democratic bodies and are not debating societies or mutual admiration clubs. Once clear on the need and means for a thoroughgoing economic and ecological change in society, they would have the responsibility of sparking and nurturing economic democracy within the local industries and communities. A continuing task is the communication of facts and ideas wherever possible among people in the communities and in productive and useful work. For example, a community economic workshop could arrange to distribute a newsletter to workers of a plant or an industry. The newsletter could be set up with one or two reporters from the plant or industry actually on the scene and all readers invited to respond. Facts and ideas about working conditions could be gathered and made known to others. Discussions and plans for improving conditions could sow the seed for worker organization. Hopefully, this could spread as other interested workers form their own workshops and set up their own meetings. Other workshops might have as their primary thrusts environmental matters, health care, food coops, etc.

Each workshop seeks to duplicate itself, not by extending passive membership to the so-called "masses", but by example of its action and ideas. Those who agree are invited not to follow but to initiate their own actions and their own workshops. Experienced community economic workshops will give all possible aid to those newly formed.

4. Since community economic workshops operate on the principle of self-government and self-management, what would take the place of leaders? Why do community economic workshops reject the need for leaders?

The workshop form of organization is based on the principle that our social and economic life is not to be decided by one person or group but it is the responsibility and right of all to guide their own destinies. Decisions that affect everyone must be decided upon by all. To delegate decision-making to someone "above" us is to abdicate our rights as human beings. Each of us must exercise complete control over our own life as individuals and collectively decide upon matters of collective concern.

Initiative, therefore, in a cooperative economic society is the right of every individual and must be allowed to emerge from every individual, group, community, and area. In present society the free flow of initiative and ideas, however, is thwarted by the structures of top-down, hierarchical management. The power of the "leaders" of business and government cannot withstand the exercise of democracy and self-activity by citizen-workers. Formation of workshops will re-establish power where it belongs, in the hands of the people in the industries and communities. Its activities are shaped and guided by the participation and ideas of the workers and citizens themselves. Reliance on authority-figures, old and new, perpetuates the dependence and enslavement of the human species. The community economic workshop approach attempts to overcome authoritarian character structure inculcated by centuries of class domination and create an environment for independent thought and action by cooperating individuals.

5. Shouldn't workers and citizens also form an armed militia to protect themselves and counter the military and police power of those who rule and exploit?

Of course people at all times have the right to use whatever forms that, in the words of the United States Declaration of Independence, "seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness." However, there are a number of serious pitfalls in any dependence on military action to protect a social and economic revolution. For one thing, even if workers and citizens could gather some arms, ordinarily they would be no match for a force backed by the sophisticated armaments available to trained troops. Furthermore, the gathering and storage would present an open invitation for agents provocateurs to present the ruling class with all sorts of pretexts for harassment and repressive measures. It is in the interests of citizens and workers to insist upon the civilized, peaceful approach whenever possible and for as long as possible. Constitutional guarantees of free speech and assembly, while at present precarious, should not be abandoned as meaningless since these are not granted rights but are fundamental human rights.

Those who romantically dream of urban guerilla action should recall that when class society really decides to go all out to overcome opposition, small-scale armed resistance does not change the out-



come. One must remember that totalitarian societies are still class societies. The grim lessons from both Czarist and Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Chile of 1974 show how efficient repression can be for even very long periods.

But assume for the moment that deterioration of class society makes it possible that a determined party such as the Bolsheviks of 1917 will be able to organize workers and revolting soldiers and sailors so that power can be seized militarily. The very nature of such force is anti-democratic with essentially blind obedience to leaders. The net result is the transfer of power from one oppressing class to a new oppressing class. The tragic events following the 1917 Russian Revolution as well as every other revolution since then substantiates this conclusion.

But another consideration is just as important. Occupation with thoughts of armed insurrection turns citizen-worker action from much more essential organization where its power is infinitely greater; that is, right in the means of production, communication and transportation themselves as well as in the communities. No military or police force could operate for any significant length of time against determined and well-organized citizens and workers who control the food, clothing, electricity, water, telephones, fuel, manufactured goods, radio, TV, newspapers, schools, hospitals, etc. In other words, a successful change to a non-exploitative society depends upon complete industrial and community organization, not upon any military prowess.

6. What is the role of individual workshops in the overall birth of a new society?

The new organizations which community economic workshops generate almost immediately will find it necessary to coordinate their efforts. In each industry and community, coalitions and federations would form to more effectively render mutual aid and cooperation. It is these new links, forged against a competitive, commodity-oriented economy, with workshops, industrial councils, and community councils helping each other, that form the foundation of any overall change in society. The workshops themselves are a prototype for the type of relationships and organization that will exist later, and must at all time emulate that which they advocate. Workshops also, as coalitions of individuals from many differing situations and areas, would dissolve into functioning workers' and citizen councils as soon as possible.

7. How would various community economic workshops coordinate their efforts?

A community economic workshop cannot do its work if it remains isolated. Its main function is to stimulate and communicate ideas from one group to another, and thus to act as a matrix in the broader citizen-worker council movement. By exchanging ideas and forming communication links, community economic workshops are precursors to more permanent worker and citizen councils. In areas

of common identity, such as in a specific large industry, they would form close working ties to coordinate an overall grass roots movement and strategy. Unity and integration of workshops would be essential in certain production industries, where the power of the old society is centralized and consolidated. In other sectors of the economy, however, workshops and councils will be the decentralized force to counteract the centralized society of today.

8. Will community economic workshops cooperate with other organizations?

There should be the widest possible cooperation between the community economic workshop movement and all voluntary organizations which serve human needs. Particularly those organizations which emphasize concern for all of humanity and the concepts of ecology will find the workshops eager to develop concrete links. While open to working with any humanitarian organization, community economic workshops differ from them. Community economic workshops both serve people's present needs and seek to change society as a whole. They use any gains to further development of people into completely self-active beings in a fully human society. Community economic workshops, being organized on the principles of self-participation of individuals, autonomy of both individuals and groups, and decentralized organizational structure, would seek to develop these ideas in other groups.

Community economic workshops as embryonic councils are not formed to remake any existing institutions within the old governmental structure. They particularly should not be considered "dual unions" since they do not aspire to become a business-type union, but seek to develop a new type of workers' organization which coordinates both industrial and community action.

The workshop-council movement seeks to extend rights and freedoms of all individuals. Freedom of religion, of publication, and of voluntary activity must be guaranteed by the workshop-council movement. In addition, the broadest extension of cultural and education activities is an essential part of the council movement. New forms and new ways for the education and development of people in all stages of life will emerge from it.

9. What type of administration and coordination will be needed for economic democracy?

As much as possible the nature of community economic workshops should be determined by the character of the future society they seek to engender rather than by present society. To organize our future economic and cultural life in an economic democracy, we need instead of vertical, top-down administration, a horizontal or lateral coordination among all sectors along with grass-roots representation as needed. On the local level direct participation will be used rather than representation whenever possible. Citizens and workers' councils must have a complete, open and widespread communication based on daily democracy in both production and consumption. A need in one area or industry can be communicated in a direct way to those who can fill it.

With the free flow of information, democratic planning accompanied by a consideration of all the life forms on the planet will, for the first time, be possible. Now information is fed up a pyramid to the ruler-executive-boss who then has to make a decision apart from the citizen-worker and apart from the community context of his/her actions. In contrast, lateral coordination would allow equal exchange of information and considered agreement by all parties concerned. Since most major economic decisions have ramifications and effects upon all of us and our environment, it is essential to promote full public discussion of all important issues involved: ecology, health, human relations, etc.

Decisions, in order to be democratic, sound and effective, must be made by those who work and live in this society. Those politicians and executives who merely sit and plan, or those who grow wealthy through ownership of the means of production or land have concern only for themselves and not for the majority of people or the environmental effects and consequences of what they do.

10. Are community economic workshops needed only in the United States?

The problems of power that we face here exist throughout the world, particularly in those countries that are ruled by a bureaucratic despotism that calls itself "socialist". The movement for economic democracy, which is founded on decentralized, autonomous, self-participatory councils or groups, seeks to extend itself throughout the world wherever men and women are politically enslaved and economically exploited. The achievement of an economic democracy in our society could set the example and spark the movement of worker-citizens throughout the world who live and work in various degrees of political, social, and economic enslavement.

11. Can self-governing citizen-workers collectively and democratically manage production and distribution and coordinate society as a whole?

We must first keep in mind that the rulers and administrators of the system as it is today cannot manage this. Society has become so complex and interconnected that private rule and bureaucratic neo-feudalism is unable to keep it going in any humanly satisfying way. It is our historic responsibility, then, and not just a utopian dream, that we govern our own affairs and collectively manage society. We can do this because we are the people who do the useful work and who actually live in society, and who thus must know the needs and requirements of its functioning. Our basic needs are not complicated: food, clothing, shelter, recreation, transportation, tools. All can be produced in ample supply by known methods and procedures.

A rational economic organization for the future will have no reason to maintain the present prodigious rate of production increase and ever-expanding glut of commodities, gadgets, and buildings. It is clear now, however, that a leveling off of industrial production and an overall economic and ecological equilibrium is a necessity

for survival of humans as well as other species on earth. With democratic planning we will be able to move forward in further technological development as it is needed and as we gauge its environmental impact upon the planet.

12. How can we be sure that power won't be seized and a new despotism established?

The only guarantee of liberty is the retention of decision making by the people. In keeping all decision making in the hands of the citizen-workers in their various community and industrial councils, we will be insuring against usurpation by any force, including that of a new political party which may seek to rule in the "name" of the workers or of society. We want not benevolent rulers but self-rule. Only by creating a daily democracy where decisions are made by all through their own councils on a day-to-day, continuous basis can self-government be preserved. The principle of recall and of rotation of anyone elected will be another bulwark against tyranny or elitism.

13. What can be done now to set up community economic workshops?

If there is one thing we can be sure of, it is that community economic workshops and the democratic councils flowing from them will not (and inherently cannot) be set up for us by others. Furthermore, they will not appear automatically on the scene, even if there is a political and economic crisis. We will have to initiate their formation ourselves, wherever we can. Talk to the citizen-workers you come in contact with each day in the community and the workplace and find those who are interested in building a new society. Establish workshops in your home, or in a nearby church or school, where an environment can be produced for the free flow of information and a free association of ideas. Communicate with all people, groups, and organizations interested in humanistic social change and emphasize the need to begin the formation of workers' and citizens' councils.

14. Why do the movements for economic democracy and an ecological society complement each other?

Economic democracy takes into consideration human beings, their technologies and the social relations needed for human survival. An ecological society embraces not only economic democracy with its human communities and industries, but also the totality of species on the planet and the ecological relationships on which all life itself is dependent. The eco-society realizes that humans with their tools must live in harmony with nature or become extinct. This harmonious relationship can begin with community economic workshops and in turn evolve into the citizen-worker councils of economic democracy and finally find its fulfillment in the ecological society.

15. What is the relationship of citizen-worker councils developing from community economic workshops to other plans for transforming or replacing the state?

Historically the existing governmental apparatus, the state, no matter over what social forms it has presided, has been used as a means of overcoming any spontaneous action of the people for constructive social change. Military capture of the state only replaces old despots with new despots--previous force and violence with new force and violence. The other tactic of capturing political power in the state by an electoral process when successful merely creates nothing more than a new bureaucratic despotism--sometimes better, sometimes worse than the old.

In the United States one proposal termed socialist industrial unionism calls for people to unite politically behind a revolutionary working class party and elect it into office. Along with this workers would also organize industrially to seize and operate all the means of production, transportation, communication, etc. The political party having thus captured political power, would, it is promised, adjourn the state apparatus. The governmental functions would thereupon be assumed by the industrial organization of the workers.

This plan, while it recognizes that the state should disappear, should be questioned on several counts. In the first place, state power when seized, in all past instances, has never been surrendered willingly. The new holders of this power succumb to rationalizations such as: "People are really not ready to manage all aspects of their lives, so we will continue the present governmental setup just a little longer. Of course, we will do this in an enlightened manner." Or, "Other nations threaten us and we need the state to protect us." It must be recalled that before holding state power, Lenin and his fellow bolsheviks spoke of the withering away of the state.

Still further, even if the existing political state were abolished as presumably planned, there is grave danger that an industrial state would assume the state functions. Representative democracy can soon become no democracy at all. Information travelling up and down a series of representative bodies can be withheld or distorted so as to manipulate the response of the majority in a manner desired by a new crop of aspiring leaders. Considering how all people now living have been conditioned socially, this will be a serious danger for at least a few generations after abolishing class-ruled society.

Our competency in making technical decisions is limited to the relatively narrow fields in which we happen to work. However, the decisions with which we should be most concerned are the interactions of the totality of production on our lives and the environment. Such broad determinations should be made by every person considered to be an adult member of society rather than productive workers only. As citizens of local, regional, national or international communities we will want to consider and decide the really fundamental questions rather than as workers in a particular productive unit. In future society we will be productive workers only

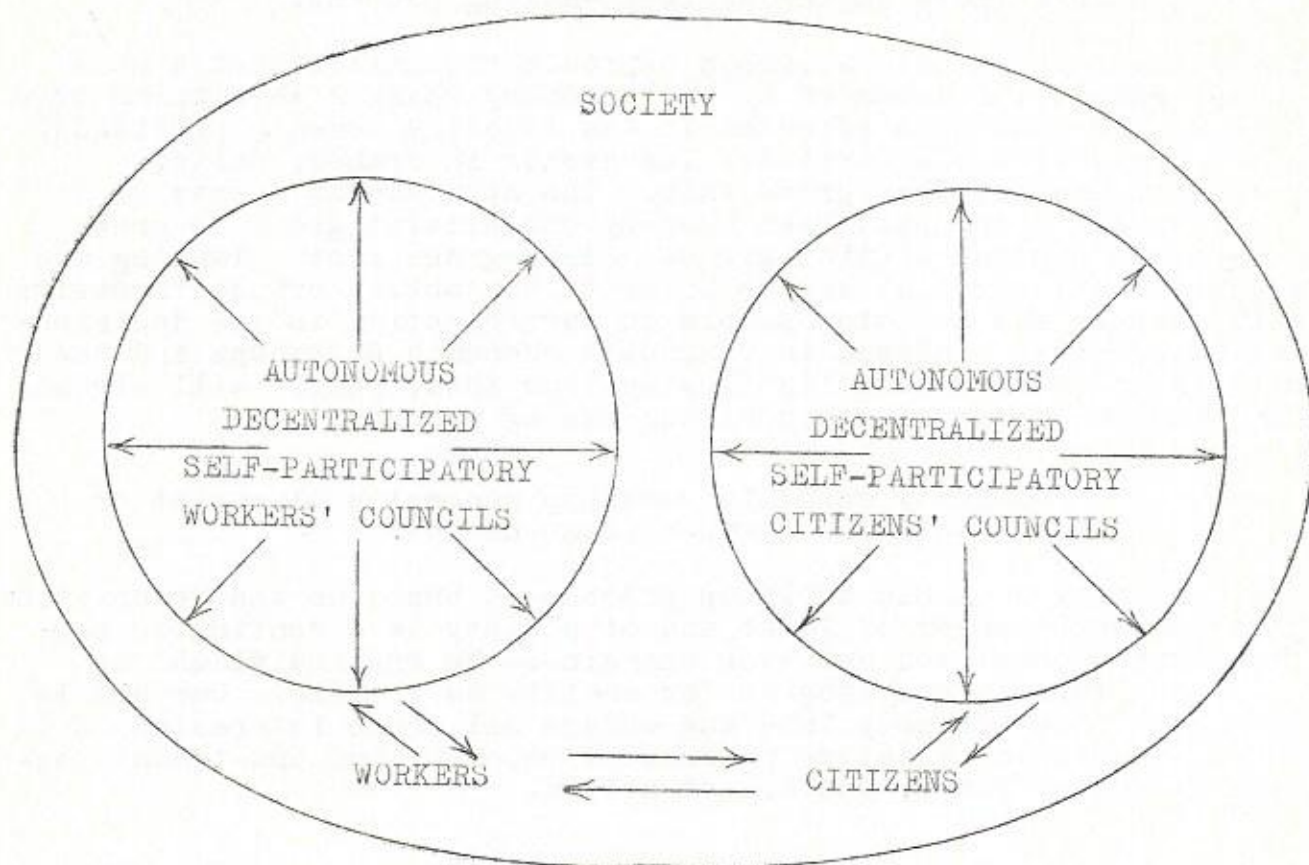
a minor fraction of our lives, but we will be participating and voting citizens of our communities, large and small, every waking moment of our adult lives. Indeed, it is most probable that even before we reach whatever age is adjudged to be an adult, we will actively participate in the decision-making process.

The community economic workshop approach recognizes that a sane social revolution demanded by evolutionary changes developing over a long time cannot be effected in the fleeting moments provided by an economic or social crisis. The events in France, Chile, Portugal, and now Iran prove this. The spontaneous events of a crisis have in the past been used by one elitist group to grab power from another elitist group. Basic grass roots planning and preparation for social change prior to the actual crises themselves will prepare and accustom people to participation in the decision-making process. Indeed, in community economic workshops and the citizen and worker councils flowing from them, people will already have become a part of the decision-making process.

16. Is the community economic workshop concept a blueprint or perfected plan? Are further ideas needed?

The community economic workshop program is based on the recognition that the development of ideas and of society is a continuous process, never completed and ever changing. No one individual or group can formulate a program for society as a whole. Our aim is to further the workshop idea and engage all those interested in it in the continuing creative process of redefinition and transformation of ideas, plans, goals, and action.

ORGANIZATION, COMMUNICATION, AND COOPERATION  
WITHIN AN ECOLOGICAL ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY



Even if we knew all the details, it would not be easy to show the functioning of future society by a diagram. The above sketch attempts to show, by arrows, the free flow of information, ideas, coordination and cooperation in an economic democracy within an ecological society. All of this would be in marked contrast with centralized institutions that exist today such as government, corporations, and labor unions in which there is principally a vertical transmission of information up and of orders down, both through a hierarchical chain of command.

In an economic democracy there would be a vertical flow of data and recommendations in the interests of preventing waste of effort and resources. Decisions, if any, would be from the autonomous workers and citizen councils--not from the top down. But what we consider the new and most important feature of an economic democracy would be the decentralization and horizontal or lateral exchange of information, requests, and recommendations among all segments of society. Aside from other considerations, we believe that this will be an important factor in keeping the decision making process and thereby the power of society in a safe repository--in the hands of the people themselves.

Within a local industry, using the term in its broadest sense to indicate any collective activity needed by society, workers would form councils to handle the coordination of their work and any problems that might arise. These workers' councils would arrange the integration of the tasks performed with any other relevant industries and coordinate and work with the citizen councils concerning the needs of both individuals and communities. As much as possible decisions should be made in the local citizen-worker councils themselves. When technical and ecological considerations necessitate, representatives both from industries and communities could be elected to more general councils to aid in the coordination of overall effort and the necessary gathering and assimilation of information. All representatives would receive instructions from those who elected them. Election rather than appointment, short terms, rotation and immediate recall if necessary, would be insurance that representatives would carry out the instructions of their constituencies.

Many problems will have to be solved with the change to an ecologically-based economic democracy. Centralization now dominates essentially all our collective activities--manufacture, agriculture, transportation, communication, distribution, education, entertainment, and almost everything else. Some of this cannot be avoided, but much can. In any event, we should decentralize the society we inherit as rapidly and as completely as possible.

In a self-participatory economic democracy every person could express himself or herself as to what he or she needs, wants, and thinks. All members of society would automatically belong to a community or citizens' council. When engaged in work, they would also be a part of a workers' or industrial council. In either council or in both councils an individual could call for action which, when approved by the rest of the council members, could initiate the accomplishing of some desired social end. For example, from individuals as workers or citizens proposals could mean: a new product developed or produced, a harmful product removed from production, a new transportation system planned and made available, housing improved, extension and improvement of education, starting research into some important aspect of health, enlarging certain recreational facilities, improving some aspects of the environment, etc., etc.

The League for Economic Democracy hopes that it has made constructive suggestions for social reorganization and it has been able to state its ideas with reasonable clarity. However, we know that it is important that many people and organizations give thought as to how a better and freer world can be built and then preserved. We invite response from those who read this pamphlet.

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