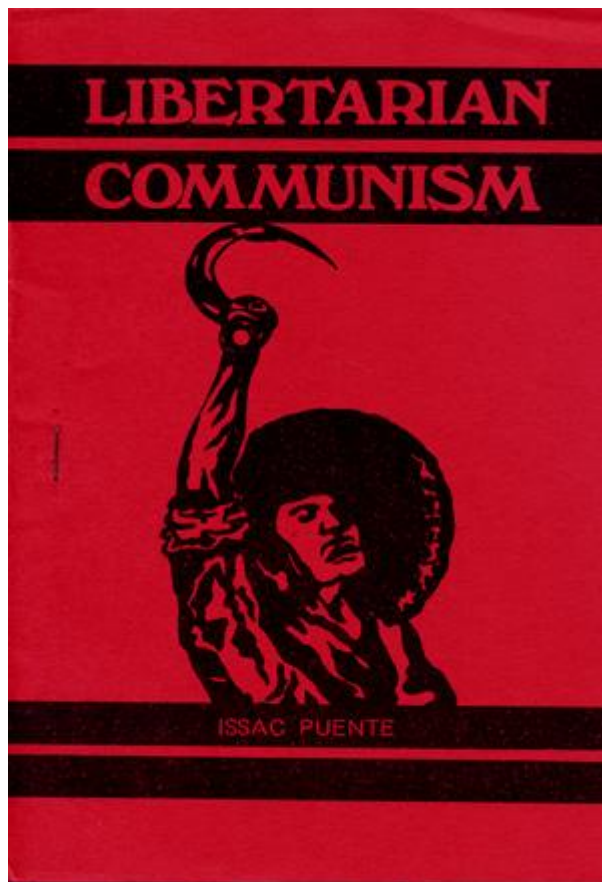


Libertarian communism - Isaac Puente



Classic pamphlet on libertarian communism by Spanish anarcho-syndicalist Isaac Puente.

Issac Puente was one of the very few members of the non-labouring classes to wield any influence within the pre-war CNT of Spain. According to Jose Peirats, in *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, he was a 'Basque doctor and socialist, propagandist for libertarian communism. He collaborated on the syndicalist and anarchist press...' However there is nothing in this pamphlet, the first edition of which appeared in 1932, to suggest he was committed to anything but anarchism.

Libertarian communism is not a blueprint for a future society. It is, rather, a set of principles to be applied by the working class, and all others who are prepared to work alongside them, for taking over and running the economic base of society so as to refashion it in accordance with social justice. While it is collective in spirit and method, libertarian communism gives the fullest possible scope to individual needs and aspirations. It is no utopian scheme, though it is the means by which to reach the utopia of anarchy.

In December 1933, Puente, Cipriano Mera and Durruti constituted the committee that organised the uprising in Aragon. A comrade who took part, Miguel Foz, has described events succinctly:

'Comrades carried out their task of burning the property archives, the church and municipal records, etc... A public announcement abolished thenceforth the circulation of money... We lived for five days under libertarian communism, relying on the loyalty of the village and the apprehensiveness of the enemy. Some of our opponents came before the unions to ask, in full assembly, for explanations of the meaning of libertarian communism, and some of them came over spontaneously.'

The Aragon rising was put down with considerable ferocity by the authorities. Puente was among those arrested and tortured by the police. After five months he and the other main organisers were finally released thanks to enormous popular pressure; the legal case against the mass of the insurgents had collapsed following a daring raid on the prosecution offices carried out from within the prison.

Puente's pamphlet was widely read. It inspired the historic platform formulated by the CNT at its May 1936 congress at Saragossa. This city had been the centre of the December 1933 rising. It was on the basis of this platform that the libertarian workers of Spain, in their struggle against fascism that began only weeks later, pushed social liberation to unprecedented heights. Unfortunately, Puente was one of the first victims of the fascists, being caught behind their lines and shot in July 1936.

Between the reformist labour movements of most of the world today, with their reactionary leaders (and their authoritarian middle class would be leaders), and the kind of revolutionary unions described by Puente, the differences are many and vast. Yet if all the fulltime officials, all the union contracts, all the glittering pension funds and all the rest of the apparatus of mirage and blackmail with which the wage slave of today is kept chained physically and mentally to the treadmill- if all this were to vanish overnight, the workers would not wake up the next morning suddenly defenceless before the merciless greed of the employers. On the contrary, they would be organised still in their places of work, but with the difference now that they would be able to unite as never before, conscious at last of their real interests.

As their struggle became more and more confident and coordinated, turning inevitably towards the abolition of their own slavery, ie of capitalism and the state, the organisational principles adopted would inevitably be those described here by the humanitarian healer and libertarian militant Issac Puente.

M.H.

Libertarian Communism

The National Confederation of Labour (CNT) is, so to speak, the channel for all the revolutionary strivings that the working class makes towards the realisation of one specific goal: the installation of Libertarian Communism. This is a system of human co-existence that attempts to find a way to solve the economic problem without using the state or politics, in accordance with the well-known formula: From each according to his/her abilities, to each according to her/his needs.

The freedom movement of the working class progresses through suffering the bitter lessons of experience. From each setback it emerges rejuvenated and with fresh vigour. It is a force in the making, the moulder of the future. It bears within itself a seed of social perfectability, and it bespeaks the presence of a striving that comes from deep within the human being, a striving because of which it cannot perish even were it to lose its way another hundred times.

The workers' movement has come through barbaric repressions. For a long time it allowed itself to be seduced by the false-voices of reformism and by the siren songs of politics, which lead only to the emancipation of leaders and redeemers, who from being brothers turn abruptly into enemies.

The workers have been the target of too much preaching. Some have told them they need calm, others that they need culture, others training. According to the notions of those who would be their shepherds, the workers have never been mature enough to liberate themselves. If the situation is to continue, preparations will go on for all eternity: the only way the

workers can shrug off the ignorance and cultural deprivation that the capitalist regime and the state assign them to is by means of revolution. Every partial freedom must cost just as much effort as total emancipation, if it is to be won collectively and not just by individuals.

If we look for ways of doing this without attacking the system, no resolution of the social problem is possible. It is like Columbus's egg. If we keep on and on trying to balance the egg on one end, we will only waste a lot of time. We must resolve to flatten one of the ends by knocking it on the table, and so attack the actual shape of the egg itself.

The National Confederation of Labour acts as interpreter to the workers' freedom movement, warning of reformist flannel and giving the blind alley of politics a wide birth. It has found a straight road, that of direct action, which leads directly to the installation of libertarian communism, the only path to freedom. There is no point in building up a powerful movement that will win the admiration both of its members and of outsiders, unless it achieves its goal of liberation. This is no vague ideal to cherish: it is a battlefield. The ideal is in the form of anarchism, which supplies the guidance and the motivating force.

Libertarian Communism is a society organised without the state and without private ownership. And there is no need to invent anything or conjure up some new organization for the purpose. The centres about which life in the future will be organised are already with us in the society of today: the free union and the free municipality.

The union: in it combine spontaneously the workers from factories and all places of collective exploitation.

And the free municipality: an assembly with roots stretching back into the past where, again in spontaneity, inhabitants of village and hamlet combine together, and which points the way to the solution of problems in social life in the countryside. (By "village" the author means a rural settlement of up to several thousand inhabitants. - Ed.)

Both kinds of organisation, run on federal and democratic principles, will be sovereign in their decision making, without being beholden to any higher body, their only obligation being to federate one with another as dictated by the economic requirement for liaison and communications bodies organised in industrial federations.

The union and the free municipality will assume the collective or common ownership of everything which is under private ownership at present and will regulate production and consumption (in a word, the economy) in each locality.

The very bringing together of the two terms (communism and libertarian) is indicative in itself of the fusion of two ideas: one of them is collectivist, tending to bring about harmony in the whole through the contributions and cooperation of individuals, without undermining their independence in any way; while the other is individualist, seeking to reassure the individual that his independence will be respected.

Since by himself he can achieve nothing, the factory worker, railway worker or labourer needs to join forces with his colleagues, both to carry out his work and to protect his interests as an individual. In contrast, the artisan and the farm worker can live independently and can even be self-sufficient, as a result of which the spirit of individualism is deeply ingrained in them. Thus, the union meets the need for a collectivist organization, while the free municipality is better suited to the individualistic feelings of the peasant.

Poverty is the symptom and slavery the disease. If we went only by appearances, we would all agree that poverty ought to be singled out as the worst feature of present-day society. The worst affliction, however, is slavery, which obliges man to lie down under poverty and prevents him from rebelling against it. The greatest of evils is not capital, which exploits the

worker, enriching itself at his expense, but rather the state which keeps the worker naked and undefended, maintaining him in subjection by armed force and by imprisonment.

Every ill that we deplore in society today (and it would be out of place to list them all here) is rooted in the institution of power, that is, in the state and the institution of private ownership, accumulation of which produces capital. Man is at the mercy of these two social afflictions which escape his control: they make him petty, stingy and lacking solidarity when he is rich and cruelly insensitive to human suffering when he wields power. Poverty degrades, but wealth perverts. Obedience consigns man to a state of prostration, while the authority deforms his sensibilities. Nothing has ever been the cause of greater tears or bloodshed than capital, with its fathomless appetite for profit. The whole of history is crammed with the crimes and tortures carried out by authority.

Accumulation of wealth, like accumulation of power by the few, can only be achieved at the cost of depriving others. To destroy poverty, and likewise to end slavery, the accumulation of property and of power must be resisted, so that no one takes more than s/he needs and no one is allowed to boss all the others.

Two fundamental drives. By our very nature and because of the way we live, people have two strivings that cannot be suppressed: to bread, which is everything we need to meet our economic needs (such as food, clothing, housing, education, medical assistance and means of communication), and to freedom, or control over our own actions. External pressures of themselves do not hold any repugnance for us, since we bow to those exerted by nature herself. What does repel and revolt us is that such pressure should be arbitrary pressure, a whim of others. We do not mind a restriction if we believe it to be just, and provided that it is left up to us to be the judge of that. We do reject it, however, with all the force we can muster, if it is something imposed upon us without our having a say in the matter.

So lively and intense is this feeling for freedom (this ambition to be our own masters) that there is an old folk tale in which a nobleman forsakes the board, lodging and warmth of an inn and takes to the open road; he does this so as to conserve his freedom, for the price of his keep and comfort in the inn was to conform to its barrack-like discipline.

Libertarian communism must make it possible to satisfy economic need as well as respecting this wish to be free. Out of love for freedom, we reject any monastic or barrack-style communism, the communism of ant-heap and beehive, and the shepherd-and-flock type communism of Russia.

Prejudices: To anyone reading this in a prejudiced way with their hackles up, all this must seem nonsensical. Let us examine the prejudices involved so that we help those who suffer from them to overcome them.

Prejudice number one: The belief that the crisis is merely temporary.

Capital and state are two age-old institutions; they are in a worldwide crisis that is progressive and incurable. These are two organisms which, like everything in the natural world, bear within their own decomposing selves the seeds of those organisms which are to take their place. In the world of nature there is no creation and no destruction- only transformation in everything. Capital is drowning in its own filth. Unemployment is constantly on the increase because consumption cannot match the rate at which production is expanded by machinery. The unemployed are the troops of revolution. Hunger makes a coward of the isolated individual but when that hunger is generally felt it becomes a source of rage and audacity. Subversive ideas are growing up among the working class and they are making headway. The state, too, suffocating amid its own machinations of strength. It finds itself compelled to set up ever more repressive forces and greater bureaucracy, heaping the

deadweight of parasitism on to the taxes stolen from the taxpayers. One buttresses a building because it is threatening to collapse. The individual consciousness which grows more acute with each passing moment is openly at odds with the limits set by the state. The imminence of collapse has induced the state to reverse its historical evolution towards more democratic forms, in order to don the cloak of fascism in Italy and dictatorship elsewhere, including dictatorship of the working class in Russia. What has set the growing demands of Working class against the old institution of capital are make-or-break crises; the state, that old, old institution, now confronts the libertarian aspirations of the people. They will overwhelm it.

It is futile to cling to the old systems and to try to find palliatives or reforms, or to paper over the cracks, even should the palliatives be as seductive as Henry George's "single tax", for they come too late to breathe new life into a decrepit organism. Instead, the thought must be of what it is that is striving to be born, that seeks to replace what has to disappear, of those seminal forces trying to find a place in the life of society.

Prejudice number two: The Supposition that libertarian communism is a product of ignorance.

Because libertarian communion is championed by folk who are reputed to be uneducated and uncultivated, people who have no university diplomas, it is supposed that it is a simplistic solution that fails to take account of the complexities of life and the problems inherent in change on so vast a scale.

Collectively, the workers know more about sociology than the intellectuals; they are much more farsighted when it comes to solutions. Thus when we take the problem of the excessive numbers of professional people about, the only solution which occurs or suggests itself to, say, doctors or lawyers, is to restrict entry to the faculties, which is to say, 'The vacancies have been filled. There is no room for anyone else.' In so saying they consign the emergent generations who are making for the lecture halls in increasing numbers to other careers or else to stormy protests. And that solution is an absurd, a simplistic, a harmful one- hardly fitting for people who pride themselves on their superiority over others.

The workers, on the other hand, in accordance with their (buffetting in) the sociology books, dare to put forward a solution which is not confined to a single class, nor to a single generation of one class, but one that applies to all classes in society. A solution that qualified sociologists have already broached at scientific and philosophical level and one that today can hold its own against any theoretical solution to the social question, on the basis of ensuring bread and culture for all people.

If it is the 'ignorant' who enunciate that solution, it is precisely because for all their reputed learning, the intellectuals know nothing about it. And if the workers adopt it as their banner, the reason is that collectively the working class has a much more precise vision of the future and a greater breadth of spirit than all the intellectual classes put together.

Prejudice number three: The intellectual aristocracy.

This is the attitude that the people are not equipped to live a life of freedom and consequently are in need of supervision. Intellectuals seek to enjoy the same aristocratic privilege over the people as the nobility has had until now. They aspire to be the leaders and instructors of the people.

All that glitters is not gold. Nor is the intellectual standing of all whose fate it is to be deprived of education to be disdained. Many intellectuals fail to rise above the common herd, even on the wings afforded them by their diplomas. And, conversely, lots of working class people are the equals of the intellectuals in terms of talent.

University training for a profession in no way implies superiority, since such training is not won through open competition but rather under the protection of economic privilege.

What we call common sense, a quick grasp of things, intuitive ability, initiative and originality are not things that can be bought or sold in the universities. They may be found in illiterates and in intellectuals in equal measure.

For all its ferocious ignorance, an uncultivated mentality is preferable to minds that have been poisoned by privilege and eroded by the routine grind of learning.

Cultured they may be, but our intellectuals are nonetheless uncultivated in their sense of dignity, a sense that sometimes shines far brighter in folk who are supposed to be uncultured.

A clean job does not imply superiority any more than being in a profession does and it is simplistic and puerile to pretend that people in that sort of employment should direct and instruct those who are not.

Prejudice number four: The claim that we feel only contempt for art, science or culture.

Our position is that we cannot understand why it is that for these three activities to shine they have to rest upon poverty or human slavery. In our view they ought to be incompatible with such unnecessary evils. If, in order to shine, they needed the contrast with ugliness, with ignorance and with lack of culture, then we would declare here and now that we want none of them and we would have no qualms about uttering a heresy by saying so.

Art, science or culture cannot be bought with money or taken by power. On the contrary, if they have any value, they repudiate all subjection and defy subordination. They are born of artistic dedication, of talent, the drive to enquire and a taste for perfection as such. They are not conjured up by any Maecenas or Caesars. They flourish anywhere in spontaneous fashion and what they require is that no obstacle stands in their path. They are the fruits of what is human and it is naive to believe that anything is added to them by setting up, governmentally, any patents office or prizes for culture.

When the worker asks for bread and presses for justice and tries to emancipate herself, only to be met with the charge that she is going to destroy art, science or culture, it is only natural that she should be an iconoclast and cast down with one swipe that untouchable idol that is used to fix her in her slavery and in her poverty. And who said that art, science or culture would be in any way diminished by the advent of well-being and the enjoyment of freedom?

Prejudice number five: That we are not equipped to build a new life.

The new economic order needs technical assistance, such as exists between the specialist and the unskilled labourer. Just as today even the revolutionary forces co-operate in production, so tomorrow everyone will have to. That is, the new life is not to be judged by the abilities that exist now in society as a whole. It is not love of the bourgeoisie that induces the technician to work, but economic necessity. Tomorrow, what will induce everyone to co-operate in production will also be economic necessity, but an economic necessity that will be felt by all who are able-bodied citizens. We do not trust only in those who work out of devotion or virtue.

So we need not dazzle the world with our talents, nor our extraordinary gifts, which would be every whit as phoney as the gifts of politicians. We do not offer to redeem anyone. We do advocate a regime where it will not be necessary for people to be slaves in order to get them to produce nor will there be any call for poverty to make them succumb to the greed of capital where it will not be caprice or private and individual expediency that govern or direct, but where all of us will contribute to the harmony of the whole, each with their labour, in proportion to their strengths and their talents.

Prejudice number six: The belief in the need for a social architect.

This belief, that society needs a power to maintain order, or that a mass will dissolve in chaos unless there is a police force to prevent it, is a prejudice, that has been fostered by politics. What holds human societies together is not compulsion by the powers that be, nor the intelligent foresight of those in government, who always falsely imagine themselves to be possessed of this quality. What holds societies together is the instinct of sociability and the need for mutual aid. Furthermore, societies tend to assume ever more perfect forms not because their leaders so choose, but because there is a spontaneous tendency towards improvement among those who compose them, an inborn aspiration of this kind in any group of human beings.

By the same wrongheaded idea we credit the growth and development of a child to the care of the parent as if growth and maturity were due to some external cause. But growth and development are ever present in any child without anyone needing to induce them. The important thing is that no one should impede or obstruct them.

The child is taught and educated in the same fashion: by natural inclination. The teacher may take the credit for the child's gift of being able to assimilate and be formed, but the fact of the matter is that the child learns and is educated even without anyone to direct him, or her, provided that no obstacles are placed in his or her way. And in rational pedagogics (That is, "child centred education" -Ed.), the primary role of teachers is to immerse themselves in the biologically humble task of clearing the path and removing the obstacles that stand in the way of the child's inclination to assimilate information and to form itself. Self-educated people provides ample evidence that the teacher is not an indispensable partner in the process of learning.

We might say the same about medicine. The doctor can claim the credit for curing a patient and the public at large may believe them. But what is really responsible for the cure is the spontaneous tendency of the body to restore its own balance, and the body's own defence mechanisms. The doctor best does the job when, again with biological humility, they merely remove the obstacles and impediments that stand in the way of the restorative defences. And on not a few occasions the patient has recovered in spite of the doctor.

For human societies to organise, and to perfect that organisation, there is no need for anyone to instigate. It is enough that no one obstructs or hinders. Again, it is naive to want to improve on the human and to seek to replace natural human tendencies with the contrivances of power or the waving of the conductors baton. With biological humility we anarchists ask that these organising tendencies and instincts be given free rein.

Prejudice number seven: Placing knowledge before experience.

This is like wanting dexterity to precede training: skill to precede apprenticeship: practical experience to precede attempts or calluses to come before hard work.

We are asked from the outset to come up with a flawless system, to guarantee that things will work this way and not that, without mishap or error. If learning to live had to be done this way, then our apprenticeship would never end. Nor would the child ever learn to walk, nor the youngster to ride a bicycle. On the contrary, in real life things happen the other way around. Once begins by making a decision to work and through that work one learns. The doctor begins to practice while not yet master of this art, which is acquired through confrontation, error, and many failures. Without prior training in domestic economy, a housekeeper can keep her/his family's heads above water through good management of an inadequate wage. One becomes a specialist by emerging from dullness little by little.

Living in libertarian communism will be like learning to live. Its weak points and its failings will be shown up when it is introduced. If we were politicians we would paint a paradise brimful of perfections. Being human and being aware what human nature can be like, we trust that people will learn to walk the only way it is possible for them to learn: by walking.

Prejudice number eight: Politicians as intermediaries.

The worst of all prejudices is the belief that an ideal can be brought into being through the intercession of a few, even though those few may not wish to be known as politicians. Politicians content themselves with placing an inscription on the outward face of a regime and penning the new guidelines in the constitutional documents. Thus, it has been possible to pass off the Russian system as communism; and it has been possible to present Spain as a Workers' Republic where the number of workers of all classes is eleven million (Out of a population of 24 millions. - Ed.) If it were up to the politicians to bring libertarian communism into being we would have to make do with a regime which would in no way qualify as either communist or libertarian.

As against the juggling and swindling of political action, we advocate direct action which is nothing other than the immediate realisation of the idea in mind, the making of it a tangible, real fact and not some abstract written fiction or remote promise. It is the implementation by the whole itself of an agreement made by the whole, without putting itself in the hands of messiahs and without putting any trust in any intermediary.

The more we have recourse to the use of direct action and steer clear of intermediaries, the more likely will be the realization of libertarian communism.

The economic organisation of society

Libertarian communism is based on the economic organisation of society, economic interest being the only common bond sought between individuals in that it is the only bond on which all are agreed. The social organisation of libertarian communism has no aim other than to bring into common ownership everything that goes to make up the wealth of society, namely, the means and tools of production and the products themselves and also to make it a common obligation that each contribute to that production according to their energies and their talents and then to see to it that the products are distributed among everyone in accordance with individual needs.

Anything that does not qualify as an economic function or an economic activity falls outside the competence of the organisation and beyond its control. And, consequently, is open to private initiative and individual activity.

The contrast between organisation based on politics, which is a feature common to all regimes based on the state, and organisation based on economics, in a regime which shuns the state, could not be more radical nor more thorough. So as to bring that contrast out fully we have set out the following comparative scheme.

Political Organisation

- 1 Treats the people as a juvenile, incapable of organising or governing itself without supervision.
- 2 All powers reside in the state: in the economy, in education, in administration of justice, in the interpretation of law, in the creation of wealth and in the organisation of all functions.
- 3 The state is sovereign, all force (army, police, courts, jails) being centred in its grasp. The people are undefended, unarmed- which does not stop them being dubbed "sovereign" in the democracies.

4 People are grouped according to their political, religious or social beliefs, which is to say to a minimum degree insofar as these are the issues upon which people differ and vary most.

5 The state, which is a tiny minority, claims to have a greater acumen, ability and wisdom than the various social groupings. "One head knows better than all the rest put together."

6 In laying down a fixed norm for all time (its constitution or code) the state deforms the future and mutilates life, which is many-sided and constantly changing.

Union Organisation

1 Regards each professional collectivity as fit to to organise its own affairs. Regards supervision as unnecessary and the state as redundant.

2 Initiative passes to the professional organisations. Control of education to the teachers. Control of health services to workers in those services. Control of communications to technicians and workers meeting in assembly, while control of production belongs to the Federation of Unions.

3 Power returns to whence it came in that each group will give it to its members; and it no longer being accumulated, each individual will have their share and the assembly will have whatever everyone grants it.

4 People are brought together by common occupation and by common needs in the union, and, so far as the free municipality is concerned, by locality and shared interests. This way, things in common are maximised.

5 With its own profession, the assembly comprises the maximum acumen, ability and wisdom. Everyone together knows better than a single person, however learned.

6 Under union organisation the guidelines to be followed will be reviewed continually in the light of circumstances.

Political Organisation

7 The state abrogates everything to itself. The people have nothing to do, except to pay up, be obedient, produce and kow-tow to the supreme will of the person in control. The state says: "Give me power and I will make you happy."

8 Society is divided into two antagonistic castes: those who issue orders, and those who obey.

9 Only fictional, paper rights are granted: freedom, sovereignty, autonomy etc. in order to feed the sacred flame of political illusion.

10 The progress and evolution of society leads the state through despotic and absolutist forms towards its collapse. Fascism is a belated solution, as is socialism. The state disguises and conceals its privileges only to end up losing them little by little as individual and class consciousness develops.

11 Where organisation is politically based, hierarchy becomes accentuated towards the apex. Above the people one has-the town council: above that, the county council: higher still, the governor and even further up, the government.

Union Organisation

7 In the absence of the intermediaries and redeemers each individual has to see to their own affairs and get used to managing without go-betweens, thereby ridding themselves of a habit acquired through a century after century of political education.

8 Every citizen refuses to be just a producer and nothing more. Administrative posts will be temporary, with no exemption from productive labour. Such posts would be constantly dependent upon the decisions reached by the Assemblies.

9 The basic freedom, which is economic freedom, is put into practice. Democracy, that is, government of the people by the people, will be a reality. Federalism will be real, with recognition given to the utmost autonomy and independence of municipality and every productive entity.

10 The evolution of professional collectivities leads them to ever greater perfection and growth. They have moved on from defending the selfish economic interests of the individual to training that will equip them to accept responsibility for their role in society.

11 Where organisation has an economic basis, hierarchy works from the bottom upwards. The decisions of a committee may be over-ruled by a plenum; a plenum's decisions by the assembly and the assembly's decisions may be over-ruled by the people.

Wealth and labour

There are two things to be shared out among the population of a nation: the wealth, or produce for the consumption of the entire populace, and the labour required to produce it. That would be a fair, equitable solution. And a rational one, too. But in capitalist society the wealth goes to one sector, a sector which does not labour, while the work is heaped upon another whose needs, in matters of consumption, are not met. That is, we have a situation precisely the reverse of what one finds in nature, which always supplies more sustenance and more blood to the member or organ which does the work.

The wealth is estimated to stand at an annual yield of some 25,000 million pesetas annually [1935]. Were it distributed properly it would mean that Spain's entire population, some 24 million inhabitants, would be comfortably off, with a little over 1,000 pesetas each per annum. Thus, a family of five would have an annual income of 5,000 pesetas- a situation which would leave everyone in comparative comfort, economically speaking.

But since, under the capitalist system, capital is expected to yield interest at the rate of six per cent per annum, and authority has to be matched by income, so that some individuals have an income of some millions of pesetas a year, there have to be whole families whose income is less than half of the sum due to each individual as their share.

The issue of pesetas and how to share them out would not arise under a libertarian communist set-up. Only products would be dealt with and these would no longer be changeable into pesetas, could not be accumulated, and would be shared out among everyone in proportion to their needs.

The other thing needing to be shared out is the work. And here again one can see the same unfair and rebellion-making inequality today. In order for some to spend their lives lazing around, others have to sweat eight hours of the day, if not ten or fourteen.

Now since some seven million workers are engaged in producing the wealth and this means they have to work an average of eight hours a day, if the fourteen million able-bodied citizens were to work it would mean a mere four hours' work each day by each person.

This is the clear and simple object lesson which can be deduced from a good and fair distribution. This is the utopia that the anarchist wishes to bring about.

The economic potential of our country

As one might expect, the introduction of libertarian communism in our country, alone of the nations of Europe, will bring with it the hostility of the capitalist nations. Using the defence of its subjects' interests as its pretext, bourgeois imperialism will attempt to intervene by force of arms to crush our system at its birth. Armed intervention on the part of one single or several isolated powers would mean the unleashing of a world war. So as to avert the threat of social revolution in their own countries, the capitalist nations would prefer the underhand ploy of financing a mercenary army as they did in Russia, which would reply upon whatever redoubts of reaction may survive.

The memory of similar struggles and kindred situations in our people's history gives us confidence in the battle for our independence, and the topographical conditions supplied by our land. If the people do make the most of the resources of our countryside, and thereby arrive at a more comfortable standard of living, then they will be in the staunchest defender of libertarian communism.

Another threat is the danger of blockade of our coast by the warships of the capitalist nations as a result of which we would be forced to rely on our own resources alone. Given the length of our coastline such a blockade would be easily evaded. But the possibility remains, so we have to pose this question in advance.

Do we produce enough ourselves to be in a position to manage completely without imports.

Let us see. Present figures will not be wholly applicable to the future situation, for they bear not so much on our import needs as on what is profitable to import, not always the same thing. Thus coal, for instance, could be mined from the abundant seams in our own subsoil, yet we import it from England because compared with our own, English coal is competitively priced. And this year Argentinian wheat was imported even though there was no need for this, since there was wheat aplenty in Andalusia.

Statistics show that we are self-sufficient where agricultural produce is concerned: we export large quantities of olive oil, oranges, rice, vegetables, potatoes, almonds, wines and fruits. We are self-sufficient in cereals, regardless of the fact that we import maize. And we have more than enough metal to meet our needs.

But we are dependent upon imports for petroleum and its by products (gasoline, heavy oils, lubricants, etc.), for rubber, cotton and wood-pulp. Given that it is crucial to transportation, the lack of petroleum might prove a serious handicap to the furtherance of our economy. Consequently, in the event of a blockade being imposed, it would be vital that we pour all our energies into sinking new wells in search of petroleum, which have yet to be located, though it is believed to be present. Petroleum may be obtained by distilling soft coal and lignite, both of which we have in abundance in this country. This industry already exists and would have to be intensified so as to meet our needs. We could eke out our gasoline supply by mixing it with 30% to 50% of alcohol, a mixture which gives excellent results in all motors. The alcohol supply would be inexhaustible, for it may be obtained from rice, wheat, potatoes, molasses, grapes, wood, etc.

As for rubber, it would have to be produced synthetically, as its being done in Germany already.

Cotton is already harvested in our country, especially in Andalusia, with huge success and, judging by its steady rise in output it will soon be enough to meet our requirements as a nation. It might be planted instead of vines and olives, two products whose yields are surplus to our needs.

The timber industry could be expanded to meet our needs in that line, with a corresponding intensification of our reforestation programme.

The eucalyptus and the timber pine are the best sources of wood-pulp.

But aside from production as it stands at present there are grounds for optimism when one remembers the potential Spain has for production. It is what one might consider a country yet to be colonized, a country which has not even brought forth a tenth part of its total resources.

We have incalculable supplies of electricity, in which we are second only to Switzerland. And the building of reservoirs and irrigation canals is virtually virgin territory. We do not even cultivate one half of our arable land, estimated at 50 million hectares. Our arable land needs to be improved: our cultivation must be intensified and farm machinery must be introduced throughout. A system whereby everyone works together would allow production to be increased once the farm machinery, that at present is available only to the heirs of the wealthy landowner, is made available to all the holdings in a municipality.

Matching production to consumption is something that has yet to be attempted. We have more than enough land. But apart from land we have more human energy than we need, which means production potential.

Far from being a problem for the libertarian communist system, the surplus of human energy will, instead, be the guarantee of its success. If there is a surplus of workers it follows logically that this means that less work is demanded of us and we have two courses open to us. Either we cut the working day or we increase production.

The surplus labour power means it may be possible for us to reduce the individual's working day, meet the increase in work (construction of reservoirs and canals, reforestation work, increased cultivation, an increase in metal production and exploitation of hydroelectric power and the step up production in a given industry).

Thanks to the organisation of shift work it will be easier to make the best use of staff to increase production from a factory or to double its daily production figures without increasing the amount of machinery. The present employees already looked upon as skilful will be split into two shifts, one working after the other with each shift taking on so many apprentices.

In this manner even in the most inadequate industries production can be doubled without any need to give a thought to the establishment of new factories and without any need to improve or increase machinery.

Consequently, it can be shown that our country can be self-sufficient and thereby withstand the rigours of several years of blockade. Once we are beset by real necessity, then the solutions which we, no specialists, have been able to improvise in an impromptu way, will be improved upon, as adversity stimulates our creative urges and ingenuity.

One cannot leave everything to improvisation but neither can its help in critical circumstances be dismissed out of hand, for it is precisely at such times that we are at our most resourceful.

Implementation

Libertarian communism is based on organisations that already exist, thanks to which economic life in the cities and villages can be carried on in the light of the particular needs of each locality. Those organisms are the union and the free municipality. The union brings individuals together, grouping them according to the nature of their work or daily contact through the same. First, it groups the workers of a factory, workshop or firm together, this being the smallest cell enjoying autonomy with regard to whatever concerns it alone. Along with kindred cells, these make up a section within the industrial or departmental union. There is a general trades union to cope with those workers who have not sufficient numbers to

constitute a union of their own. The local unions federate with one another, forming the local federation, composed of the committee elected by the unions, of the plenum of all the committees, and of the general assembly that, in the last analysis, holds supreme sovereignty.

The free municipality is the assembly of the workers in a very small locality, village or hamlet, enjoying sovereign powers with regard to all local issues. As an institution with ancient origins it can, despite dilution by political institutions, recover its ancient sovereignty and take charge of the organisation of local life.

The national economy is the result of the coordination of the various localities that go to make up the nation. When each locality has its economy in good order and well administered, the whole has to be a harmonious arrangement and the nation perfectly at peace with itself. The thing is not that perfection should be superimposed from on high, but that it should flourish at grassroots level, so that it is a spontaneous growth and not a forced bloom. Just as agreement between individuals can be reached through contact between them, harmony between the localities will be achieved in similar fashion; through the circumstantial, periodic contacts in plenums and congresses and the lasting, ongoing contact set up by the industrial federations whose special brief this will be.

Let us take a separate look at organisation in the countryside, in the cities, and the organisation of the economy as a whole.

In the countryside

It is in the countryside that the implementation of libertarian communism present fewest complications, for it merely requires the activation of the free municipality.

The free municipality, or *communie*, is all the residents of a village or hamlet meeting in an assembly (council) with full powers to administer and order local affairs, primarily production and distribution.

Today the council is not a free agent, being regarded as a minor entity, and its decisions can be overruled by the corporation, county council or government, three parasitic institutions which live off its back.

In the free municipality the entire territory within its jurisdiction will be under common ownership and not just part of the municipal territory as is the case today; the hills, trees and meadows; arable land; working animals and animals reared for meat, buildings, machinery and farm implements; and the surplus materials, and produce accumulated or placed in storage by the inhabitants.

Consequently the only private property that will exist will be in those things which are necessary to each individual- such as accommodation, clothing, furniture, tools of the trades, the allotment set aside for each inhabitant and minor livestock or farmyard poultry which they may wish to keep for their consumption or as a hobby.

Everything surplus to requirements can be collected at any time by the municipality, with the prior agreement of the assembly, since everything we accumulate without needing it does not belong to us, for otherwise we are depriving everyone else of it. Nature gives us the right of property over what we need, but we cannot lay claim to anything beyond what we need without committing theft, without usurping the property rights of the collective.

All residents will be equal:

They will produce and contribute equally towards the maintenance of the commune, with no differentiation other than on the basis of aptitude (such as age, trade training, etc.).

They will take equal part in administrative decision making in the assemblies, and

They will have equal rights of consumption in accordance with their needs or, where it is unavoidable, rationing.

Whosoever refuses to work for the community (aside from the children, the sick and the old) will be stripped of their other rights: to deliberate and to consume.

The free municipality will federate with its counterparts in other localities and with the national industrial federations. Each locality will put its surplus produce up for exchange, in return for those things it requires. It will make its own contribution towards works of general interest, such as railroads, highways, reservoirs, waterfalls, reforestation, and so on.

In return for this co-operation in the general interest in the region or the nation, the members of the free municipality will be able to reap the benefit of public services such as posts, telegraphs, telephones railways and transport; electricity supply grid system with its off-shoots; asylums, hospitals, sanitariums and spas; higher and university education; and articles and products not manufactured in their locality.

The human energy surplus will be taken up by new work and new productions such as benefit the locality, and by sharing out the work among everyone, and reducing the number of hours of work and the length of each worker's working day.

The villager should not be too bothered by the free municipality, for their ancestors lived in a very similar style. In every village one can find work in common, and communal property to a greater or lesser degree and shared activities (such as collection of fuel or grazing). Also in rural customs there are procedures, ways and means by which a solution may be found to every possible difficulty, and in these procedures the decision is never made by one individual, even should they be elected for the purpose by the others, but through the agreement of everyone.

In the city

In the city, the part of the free municipality is played by local federation. In large centres of population such great organisations may exist in each district. Ultimate sovereignty in the local federation of industrial unions lies with the general assembly of all local producers.

Their mission is to order the economic life of their locality, but especially production and distribution, in the light of the requirements of their own locality and, likewise, the demands of other localities.

In time of revolution, the unions will take collective possession of factories, workshops and workrooms; of lodgings, buildings and lands; of public services and materials and raw materials and raw materials kept in storage.

The producers' unions will organise distribution, making use of co-operatives or shop and market premises.

A producer's pass-book, issued by the appropriate union will be indispensable if anyone wishes to enjoy all their rights; in addition to the detailed information concerning consumption such as, for instance, size of family, the number of days and hours worked will also be noted in these pass-books. The only persons exempted from this requirement will be children, the aged and the infirm.

The producer's pass-book confers a right to all these things:

To consume, in accordance either with rationing or with their needs, all products distributed in that locality.

To possess, for one's own use, a suitable home, necessary furniture, a chicken run on the outskirts, or an allotment, or a garden should the collective so decide.

To use public services.

To take part in the voting on the decisions made in one's factory, workshop firm, one's section, union and local federation.

The local federation will attend to the needs of its locality and see to it that the particular industry is developed that it is best suited to, or which the nation has the most urgent need of.

In the General assembly, work will be allocated to the various unions, who will further allocate to their sections, just as the sections will to workplaces with the constant aim of averting unemployment, of increasing the daily output of a shift of workers in an industry, or of cutting by the amount required the length of the working day.

All pursuits that are not purely economic should be left open to the private initiatives of individuals or groups.

Each union should try to engage in activities that bring benefits to all, especially those activities concerned with protecting the health of the producer and making work more agreeable.

The general economic order

Economic pressures compel the individual to co-operate in the economic life of the locality. These same economic pressures ought to be felt by the collectives, obliging them to co-operate in the economic life of the nation. But to accomplish this needs no central council or supreme committee, which carry the seeds of authoritarianism and are the focal points of dictatorship, as well as being nests of bureaucracy. We said that we have no need of an architect or any ordaining authority beyond the mutual agreement between localities. As soon as each and every locality (city, village, or hamlet) has placed its internal life in order, the organisation of the nation will be complete. And there is something else we might add concerning the localities. Once all its individual members are assured that their needs will be met, then the economic life of the municipality or of the federation will also be perfected.

In biology, for an organism to achieve its proper physiology and normality, each of its cells has to fulfil its function and that requires just one thing: that the blood supply and nervous relationship be assured. We might say the same about a nation. The nation's life is assured and normal when each locality plays its part and the blood supply which brings it what it lacks and carries away what hampers it has been assured (or, to put it another way, transport is assured) and when localities are in contact with each other and communicating their mutual needs and potentials.

And this is where the national industrial federations came into play, being just the bodies for the elaboration of collectivised services that need to be governed by a nation-wide scheme, such as communications (posts, telephones, telegraphs) and transport (railways, ships, highways, and aircraft).

Above the local organisation, there should be no superstructure aside from those local organisations whose special function cannot be performed locally. The sole interpreters of the national will are the congresses and where circumstances demand they shall, temporarily, exercise such sovereignty as may be vested in them by the plebiscite decisions of the assemblies.

Aside from the national federations of transport and communications there may be regional or county federations, such as hydrographical, forestry or electricity federations.

The national federations will hold as common property the roads, railroads, buildings, equipment, machinery and workshops. They will freely offer their services to the localities or to the individuals who co-operate with their particular effort in the national economy;

offering their products or their surplus output; striving to produce, as far as possible, more than the needs of the national demand, and making their personal contribution to such labours as those services may have need of.

The mission of the national federations of communications and transport is to bring the localities into touch with one another, building up transport services between producing regions and consuming ones; giving priority to perishables which have to be consumed quickly, goods such as fish, milk, fruit and meat.

Upon the right organisation of transport hinge reliable supplies to areas of need and the non-congestion of areas where surpluses are produced.

No single brain nor any bureau of brains can see to this organisation. Individuals reach understanding through meeting one another and localities do the same by keeping in touch with one another. A guide or handbook, showing the produce in which each area specialises, will simplify the procurement of supplies, indicating just what may be requested of a given area and just what it has to offer.

Let necessity force individuals to combine their efforts in contributing to the economic life of their locality. And let necessity likewise force collectives to regulate their activities through nationwide interchange; and let the circulatory system (transport) and the nervous system (communications) play their part in the establishment of liaisons between the localities.

Neither the running of the economy nor the freedom of the individual require further complications.

Conclusion

Libertarian communism is an open channel through which society may organise freely and of its own accord, and through which the evolution of society may follow its course without artificial deviations.

It is the most rational of all solutions to the economic question in that it corresponds to an equitable sharing out of production and labour required to achieve a solution. No one must shirk this necessity to join in the comparative effort of production, for it is nature itself which imposes this harsh law of labour upon us in climates where our nourishment does not grow spontaneously.

Economic compulsion is the bond of society. But it is, and must be, the only compulsion which the whole should exercise over the individual. All other activities - cultural, artistic, and scientific - should remain beyond the control of the collective and stay in the hands of those groups keen upon pursuing and encouraging them.

Just as the obligatory working day (i.e. the working day actually necessary given existing technology - Ed.) would not, exhaust the individual's capacity for work- there will, alongside controlled production, be other, free, spontaneous production - a production inspired by keenness and enthusiasm, a production which will be its own satisfaction; its own reward. In this production will be sown and will germinate the seeds of another society, the new society exalted and propagated by anarchism, and, so far as it meets the needs of society, the economic supervision of individuals by organisations will have been made redundant.

A thousand objections will be raised, most of them so devoid of sense as not to merit refutation. One objection that is often repeated is laziness. Now laziness is the natural product of a particularly favourable climate, for it is there that nature justifies laziness, making the individual indolent.

We recognise the right to be lazy provided that those who seek to exercise that right agree to get along without help from others. We live in a society where the lazy person, the

incompetent and the antisocial being are types who prosper and enjoy plenty, power and honours. If such persons agree to renounce all this, there is no obstacle to their remaining, as exhibits in museums or galleries, just as fossilised animals are placed on display today.

Isaac Puente