

be free to take whatever he or she thought necessary. But the anarchist communism which emerged in the 1870s faced serious challenges both from statist socialists and anarchists who saw political organization as necessary to launch revolution.

In 1881, Kropotkin laid out his view of revolutionary tactics in *L'Esprit de Revolte*, which "involved a strong commitment to both collective and individual forms of action linked to a program of open and clandestine propaganda and oriented primarily towards popular expropriation" (p.160). Anarchists, he thought, must engage in a broad range of activity to inspire the masses to revolutionary action. Anarchists must not become preoccupied, he thought, with dynamite and political terrorism. While Kropotkin's pamphlet attained great popularity, its ideas had only marginal influence on the Congress of London in 1881, and the larger anarchist movement.

In contemplating the dilemma of Kropotkin and the anarchists in the late nineteenth century, one is reminded of James Madison's statement that if men were angels, no government would be necessary. Kropotkin put great, perhaps unwarranted, faith in the people to establish a non-violent, nonstatist form of socialism. But this moral potential of the people has yet to overcome the darker urges toward the underwriting of greed and exploitation with political repression. With the demise of authoritarian socialism in Eastern Europe, the dilemma is yet with us. The last century seems to have brought us full circle, but to a heightened state of crisis. The bankruptcy of the present age has yet to shatter the powerful myth of the state.

Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872-1886 by Caroline Cahm. 372 pp. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989. \$49.50 cloth.

Reviewer: Richard Evanoff

Joyce Rothschild and J. Allen Whitt
The Cooperative Workplace: Potentials
and Dilemmas of Organizational Democracy
and Participation

There are two opposite approaches which any book dealing with worker cooperatives should avoid: extolling the virtues of co-ops to such an extent that anyone with a bit of real experience in co-ops can quickly dismiss the book as overly idealistic; and narrowing in on the problems of co-ops so much that anyone who might be even slightly interested in getting involved with a co-op is going to be discouraged. *The Cooperative Workplace* manages to walk the tightrope between these two extremes, fully discussing, as the subtitle suggests, both the *potentials* and the *dilemmas* of worker cooperatives.

First, some of the potentials. The authors have done a good job of placing worker co-ops in both historical and ideological perspective. In a brief history of the cooperative movement in the United States the book notes that more than 700 worker cooperatives are documented as having been formed between 1790 and 1940. In the latest wave, which started in the 1960s and 70s, it is estimated that at least 1,000 producer cooperatives have been formed, along with 1,200 alternative schools, as many as 10,000 food co-ops, and several thousand communes. Co-ops may still comprise a relatively insignificant sector of the overall economy, but their number is growing--a fact which should make us optimistic about their potential as real alternatives to capitalist enterprises in the future. Co-ops, as the book points out, have several advantages over capitalist enterprises in that they ultimately create more jobs, sustain higher overall levels of productivity, and realize increased profits (which are either reinvested in the cooperative or given to the workers in the form of higher salaries). All this in addition to providing a democratic atmosphere for people to work in.

Ideologically, Rothschild and Whitt show that co-ops are grounded not only in the West's long tradition of participatory democracy, but also in anarchism and Marxism. The authors argue that participatory democracy, which they trace back to the classic views of Rousseau, J. S.

Mill, and G. D. H. Cole, requires direct participation at all levels of society, not only in political institutions but also in the workplace--representative democracy is an inadequate substitute for direct democracy in the political sphere and corporate hierarchies result in no democracy at all for workers. Democracy stops at the factory gate, as the saying goes.

Unfortunately, as the authors note, many contemporary cooperatives trace their intellectual debt back to Marxism rather than to anarchism, which not only distorts the actual historical contribution of anarchism, but also reinforces the stereotype, all too common in the United States, that any alternative form of social organization which is not capitalist-oriented must be part of a commie plot. Rothschild and Whitt set the record straight by giving a brief but adequate outline of the contributions of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin to cooperative thinking. Influenced by the ideas of these anarchists, contemporary co-ops have attempted to create small, decentralized organizations which are based on voluntary participation rather than on hierarchical authority and which replace centralized bureaucratization with community and worker control. Co-ops thus become "working models" for the new social order. By learning to work together cooperatively in small-scale organizations first, the entire society can eventually be transformed (building the new society in the shell of the old, as the old IWW slogan has it). While the contribution of Marx to the critique of capitalism is acknowledged, the book rightly concludes that co-ops ultimately have more to learn from participatory democracy and anarchism than from Marxism. By arguing that the government must be taken over rather than dismantled, Marxism simply perpetuates central, bureaucratic control at all levels of society, including the workplace. The anarchist view is that the new society cannot be created from bureaucracies down, but only from the grassroots up. Co-ops can play a key role in this social transformation.

Rothschild and Whitt show that bureaucracies, whether corporate or governmental, are indeed the main impediment to a cooperative society. Co-ops are thus a direct affront to Max Weber's theory that bureaucracies, because of their superior "rationalization," must indefinitely dominate all aspects of society. Cooperative organizations also buck Robert Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy," which holds that every organization, no matter how democratically conceived, inevitably degenerates into oligarchy. Rothschild and Whitt attempt to construct an ideal model for cooperative organizations which will displace the bureaucratic, authoritarian models of organizations proposed by these theorists. Their model clearly distinguishes bureaucratic organizations from collectivist-democratic ones in eight key areas, two of which the authors feel are particularly important: (1) authority in cooperative or-

ganizations resides in the collective as a whole, and (2) there is a minimal division of labor. Unlike bureaucratic organizations, which invest authority in individuals who stand in hierarchical relationship to each other, everyone who participates in a cooperative has an equal voice in the decision-making process. And unlike the highly specialized division of labor one finds in bureaucratic organizations, there is no split between administrative and performance functions or between intellectual and manual work. Responsibilities are fully shared by rotating jobs and by trying to educate participants in all aspects of the organization's operations.

Rothschild and Whitt back up their model with some impressive scholarship. It's obvious they've done their homework (literally, since research for the book grew out of a dissertation project), and they provide an extensive bibliography which gives a good overview of the academic work currently being done in the field. The authors further ground their theoretical model in extensive field work done at five cooperatively organized workplaces: an alternative high school, a free clinic, a community newspaper, a food co-op, and a law collective. Since these organizations have intentionally tried to establish themselves *as cooperatives*, they serve as better models for how cooperatives function than organizations which start out as capitalistic enterprises and later try to move in more democratic directions. Rothschild and Whitt clearly point out the limitations of half-measures such as Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs), which provide for worker ownership but not worker control, or Quality of Work Life (QWL) programs, which try to increase the democratic participation of workers without addressing the issue of ownership. Studies which use these latter projects as models predictably reach pessimistic conclusions about the future of workplace democracy--it is vastly more difficult to transform a capitalistic enterprise into a cooperative one than it is to start a co-op from scratch. *The Cooperative Workplace*, which focuses exclusively on intentional cooperatives, can, again quite predictably, be much more optimistic.

Not that dilemmas do not exist. These dilemmas pop up throughout the book, but are specifically addressed in three sections: one devoted to constraints on organizational democracy, one to internal conditions which facilitate democracy, and one to the external conditions. The section on constraints points out, for example, that cooperatives require a great deal of time if people are to fully participate in the decision-making process. Less efficiency may be a necessary trade-off if the democratic process is to be maintained. Individual differences in ability levels can also make it difficult for organizations to remain completely

egalitarian. People with more skills may ipso facto end up exercising more control in the organization.

The sections on the internal and external conditions facilitating democracy are specifically written to show that democratic organizational forms are neither impossible (as pessimistic conservatives would have it) nor inevitable (as superidealists might believe), but conditional. Internally, for example, co-ops which deliberately limit their size in order to preserve face-to-face democracy have greater chances for success than co-ops which grow too large too fast—the latter inevitably tend to become bureaucratic and oligarchical. Externally, co-ops which maintain a broad social movement orientation stand a better chance than co-ops which become self-absorbed in their own little projects. Ultimately it's the idealism, not sheer utility, that in fact pays off for co-ops.

The chapter on external conditions made important points about the need for co-ops to maintain an alternative stance vis-a-vis mainstream society while simultaneously gaining the support of professionals who are sympathetic to their values. The chapter on internal conditions, however, seemed to get more into the really nitty-gritty problems co-ops face. The examples used to illustrate specific points offered more food for thought than the authors perhaps intended, and I found myself taking sides in some of the disputes on which they reported. At a meeting of the food co-op, for example, one of the founding members attempted to deal with the problem of member apathy by proposing that if enough members didn't show up to make a quorum at three general meetings in a row, the co-op should be dissolved. When another member objected that the co-op still provided a useful service even if member participation was low, the founder defended his proposal by saying that the co-op had been founded as a community-based organization; if members didn't support it by coming to meetings, control would naturally fall into the hands of a few people. Another member, who had just recently been elected to the board, objected that implementing the proposal would be "coercive" because it would force people to comply to the founder's particular ideals of participation. "You can't make people come to meetings if they don't want to," he argued.

This incident is discussed in the context of the relative permanence of cooperatives (pp. 76-84), but it raises the much larger question of how apathy should be dealt with in co-ops and points out how attempts to achieve full democracy can, quite paradoxically, appear "coercive" from the point of view of people who are new to cooperatives—one of the problems I myself have repeatedly encountered in working with cooperatives. The food co-op here eventually decided to do more to publicize their meetings and encourage attendance—a happy compromise—but I ended up agreeing entirely with the founder's contention that a co-op

which doesn't have broad member support should dissolve rather than become an oligarchy of the truly dedicated.

Another case involved a photographer who eventually quit her job at the newspaper cooperative when, in accordance with the co-op's policy, she was rotated to a job in the advertising department. In their efforts to remain egalitarian, co-ops often deal with differences in ability levels by rotating job positions, as the authors frequently point out. Job rotation not only spreads the dirty work around, but also educates members in the various facets of the organization, thus preventing any one person or group from having a monopoly on expertise and using it to increase control over the organization. The photographer agreed to the rotation plan in principle, but shortly after starting her new job in advertising described herself as "a casualty of the rotation system" and said she was planning to look for another job. Photography was what she really enjoyed and was good at; advertising left her miserable.

The authors remained fairly neutral in their appraisal of the situation: the photographer obviously couldn't find fulfillment in advertising and the co-op ended up losing a good photographer. I found myself agreeing with the view of one of her former colleagues, however, who said, "A switch could be worked out if she would show some willingness to learn another task. But she can't ask for special privileges . . . She has to be willing to rotate and to do the more fun jobs as well as some of the more tedious jobs, like everyone else" (p.110). This incident was discussed in the context of the diffusion of knowledge in co-ops, but as with the previous example, it raises larger questions: Why is it that people whose skills are deficient in a particular area are often simply unwilling to put in the time and energy necessary to learn those skills, even when the result would be more democratic participation for themselves in the organization? How can co-ops effectively deal with the tendency of people to do only the jobs they *like* rather than the jobs that *really need to be done*?

The issue of "leadership" in co-ops really deserved a separate and more detailed treatment in the book, but the entire topic is subsumed under a section on the need for mutual and self-criticism in co-ops, which contends that criticism can help prevent the formation of elites. The section usefully points out the ambivalent attitude co-op members have toward their "leaders": on the one hand, they need leaders to "take up the slack," that is, to do the jobs the members themselves aren't doing for one reason or another; yet, as soon as leaders become prominent in an organization, they often come to be perceived by the membership as forming an elite which threatens the egalitarian nature of the group. However, Rothschild and Whitt are so concerned with pointing out the dangers of cooptation at this juncture that they fail to see the opposite

danger that "leaders" can in fact come to be exploited by a passive and apathetic membership which is either unable or unwilling to share the responsibilities with them. It seems much more common, in my own experience at least, for cooperative endeavors to dissolve because too few people end up taking on too much of the responsibility and then suffer burnout—not, as the authors seem to fear most, because a group of self-appointed "leaders" tries to take over the organization. The "leaders" in a co-op become "leaders" precisely because they are the only ones taking real responsibility for the organization. It's incongruous for a passive membership to then *criticize* these "leaders" for taking too much control. Rather than encourage such criticism as a means of keeping elites in check, as the book does, a much more effective means of preventing cooptation is for the people doing the criticizing to simply get up off their butts and start sharing some of the responsibility. As a member of the newspaper co-op said, "There *is* a need for leadership. But that leadership must come from everyone; it must be mass leadership" (p.88). I take leadership here as meaning a willingness to share in both the decision making *and* the responsibilities of a cooperative organization.

Perhaps it is unfair, though, to expect *The Cooperative Workplace* to also solve the multifarious dilemmas it poses, especially since the authors intentionally see the book as more an empirical study than a practical guide. The book's most suggestive insight, I feel, is that our present society actually encourages nondemocratic habits and values to such an extent that people have almost completely lost their ability to work together in a cooperative and democratic fashion. People are used to taking orders from their bosses rather than taking initiative on their own. They have developed an unhealthy dependency on authority which makes it difficult for them to take real responsibility for collectively run enterprises. They are too used to working in specialized occupations to have much of a holistic sense of how the organizations they work in actually operate. When the owner of a small firm tried to implement democratic management at his company, the workers responded by saying that they "didn't want to be held accountable for any failures or take on other management responsibilities" (p.67). Even if the problem of authoritarian control is solved, a further impediment to democracy in the workplace is this very denial of responsibility on the part of the people who would benefit most. Until these kinds of attitudes change, co-ops will find it difficult to make the horses drink even after they've been led to the water. Nonetheless, co-ops are precisely the places where such attitudes can be directly confronted and where consciousness-raising can begin to occur. The book concludes that once people get a taste of democracy, they'll want more. Attitudes will naturally change in the process.

After reading this book, I had the feeling that the chief dilemma facing co-ops is not whether they can be made to work—the book amply shows that they can, both in principle and in fact—but whether the attitudes of ordinary workers can change fast enough to put a stop to the growing concentration of power in both corporations and the government. Despite encouraging statistics cited in *The Cooperative Workplace* which show that a majority of Americans are in favor of more democracy in their workplaces, I have a gut feeling that some of these aspirations may be a bit one-sided. Undoubtedly, people want the freedoms that co-ops offer, but are they also willing to take on the responsibilities co-ops demand? Co-ops remain alternative institutions precisely because there are so few people who really understand the nuts and bolts of how they work and the values which underlie them. Moreover, the values of co-ops are not only in opposition to mainstream values, as might be expected, but they also call into question certain fashionable "alternative" values which could probably use a bit of dialectical reassessment.

For example, the book notes that co-ops are often comprised of upper middle-class young people who are looking for more "fulfilling" work. The personal search for fulfillment, while worthy in itself, can easily become elitist, however, if accompanied by a disdain for menial labor. For better or worse, work at a co-op is still, well--work. Not all of it is fulfilling; a lot of it is menial. And in a co-op *both* the fulfilling and the menial tasks have to be equally shared. Not only can the overconcern for one's personal sense of fulfillment appear "privileged" to people from a working-class background who don't have as many options, as the book points out, but it also helps to perpetuate class divisions if it means leaving the dirty work to others. Think again of the photographer who was enthusiastic about the newspaper co-op as long as it permitted her to indulge her interest in photography, but who quit as soon as she was rotated to a more "menial" job in advertising. Think too of the workers in the advertising department who had been supporting her financially while she was out doing her creative work. Why was the photographer so unwilling to return the favor by doing her fair share of the drudgery, giving the others their own chance to develop their creative talents?

There were similar value discrepancies which *The Cooperative Workplace* hinted at but never fully developed. The book notes, for example, that co-ops require a high degree of homogeneity--workers need to have shared values and shared goals in order to avoid debilitating amounts of conflict. But this value seems to be in conflict with the currently fashionable view which equates homogeneity with blind conformity and argues in favor of more diversity. How in fact do people get together and work cooperatively when everybody's doing their own

thing? How exactly does consensus decision making work when everyone in the co-op has a different opinion (and everyone agrees that they're entitled to it)? How can we reconcile the necessity for *collective* authority in organizations with the view current in some quarters that *all* authority, no matter what its source or intention, is bad? How do we include structures of accountability in cooperative organizations when people narrowly equate freedom with "doing what you want to do and not doing what you don't want to do"? How can alternative organizations be created if the view that "every organizational structure is an extension of capitalist domination into our relations" (currently being propagated by the Autonomie in Germany) is taken seriously? How do we reconcile co-ops' need for entrepreneurial skills with the attitude "I'm a photographer—I'm not into the business side of things"?

These were the dilemmas I was left with *after* reading *The Cooperative Workplace*. The book could have hit a bit harder on these issues and tried to explicate them more fully, even if it didn't want to deeply involve itself in a search for solutions. I think, however, that the authors have done a very useful service by redirecting our attention away from a purely oppositional stance, which views all the problems co-ops face as "external," to a more balanced approach which focuses equally on the "internal" problems of co-ops. The situation is not only that the government, corporations, and the entire capitalist system impede the development of co-ops, but also that a higher level of political consciousness will have to be developed within co-ops themselves if they are to achieve their goal of transforming society at large. *The Cooperative Workplace*, then, challenges those of us who are committed to cooperative forms of organization to start looking for solutions to the dilemmas and to begin turning the potentials of cooperatives into realities.

The Cooperative Workplace: Potentials and Dilemmas of Organizational Democracy and Participation by Joyce Rothschild and J. Allen Whitt. 221 pp. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. \$32.50 cloth.

Reviewer: David Bouchier

Murray Bookchin
***The Rise of Urbanization and
the Decline of Citizenship***

Murray Bookchin has been a relentless and prolific advocate of communitarian anarchism for more than thirty years. In ten substantial books, he has argued variations on the themes of community, power, and the balance between human beings and their environment. If there was an award for the heroic defence of anarchist ideals, Bookchin would be among the select group of qualifiers.

For his regular readers, *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* contains no surprises. But his focus here on the relationship between urbanization and political power does generate many interesting ideas. Bookchin draws a sharp and useful distinction between the classic city and the urbanized megalopolis of our sad *fin de siècle*. The city, he argues, is a perfect setting for citizenship and democracy to flourish. It is compact, densely populated, and its people inevitably have some awareness of their common identity and common interests as citizens.

The modern urban sprawl has no such positive qualities. Vast and centerless--except perhaps for the decaying remnants of a city somewhere at its heart--the urbanized area offers no source of personal identity or political pride, and therefore no possible basis for the exercise of citizenship. Bookchin is certainly right about this. The area where I live, Long Island, is a perfect example. I say "area" and not "place" because there is no place--only some 1,200 square miles of uniformly hideous suburbs, commercial strips, choked highways, and run-down industries. In a parody of community consciousness, this mess is arbitrarily divided up into dozens of "towns" and even "villages" and "hamlets," none of them distinguishable from any other. The tax district, the school district, and the fire district are more meaningful here than any sense of place based on familiarity and affection.

America is full of such areas, and will soon consist of nothing else. Nine out of ten Americans already live in these urban settings, which Bookchin regards as a malignant disease. Urbanization on this scale not