



Occupy Wall Street Entreaty & Spanish Anarchists Interview Albert

Below we include an extensive interview of Michael Albert by various members of Spain's Anarchist Labor Federation, the CNT, preparatory to an upcoming [visit to the UK and Spain](#) by Albert. We also include a blog post from Albert, celebrating the Wall Street Occupation and commenting on its progress.

But first we want to let you know that ZSocial, a social networking system mentioned many weeks back, and also the project to establish a new organizational online system, IOPS, likewise mentioned many weeks back, are both nearing public release. It has been more difficult than anticipated for three programmers and a few folks aiding in conception and testing, to create a system able to compete with billion dollar behemoths like Facebook, and to do it without commercial intrusion, privacy incursion, and nuggetizing imposition, not to mention making it left embedded rather than corporate embedded - but it is now nearly done. There will be more news of it, soon.

As many of you likely know, a number of folks in New York City began a kind of occupation on Wall Street about a week ago. It has grown and begun to attract wide attention and emulation. Here is a blog post message regarding the occupation, followed by the CNT interview.

Celebrating Wall Street

By Michael Albert

Due to work and travel, I have been unable to visit Wall Street. I admit, I also doubted the occupiers' wherewithal to keep on occupying and growing.

But it appears I was wrong about the event's staying power. Activists who went to Wall Street to initiate action have done their job. The event has legs. It is lumbering along quite nicely, and it even seems poised to start running. Further success depends more on other people joining than on the tenacity of initiators - which has been established beyond any doubt.

Commentators have disparagingly noted that not everyone is focused and there is a lot of frivolity. But why is this bad? In a society that smothers creativity and annihilates spontaneous play, having a lot of each is a good thing.

From what I hear, perhaps the occupation could benefit from having more diverse options for people, in spontaneity and play and also in its task dispersal, particularly for people with jobs, kids, and other pressures. But more diversity will come - right along with the arrival of unionists, for example.

As to communications, I hate Twitter. It is a corporate giant and not a friend of the left. Ditto for Facebook. But making good use of these otherwise vile institutions is like making good use of any alienated, profit seeking, vile aspect of society. It is just doing the best we can. And the one-liners emerging from Wall Street put to shame what typical movement stalwarts generate when they slap the keys. You know who I mean: we activists who have been around the political block so many times that we think we own it - we around-the-blockers.

On the other hand, we really could use some longer communications from Wall Street. Why leave telling the story of the events and teasing out its lessons to mainstream pundits who have their eyes in their pockets and their noses on the ground? Some occupiers who breathe the air of the events and know their byways, should find time to provide in depth accounts - especially regarding insights, problems, and solutions which people elsewhere eager to initiate their own efforts can benefit from.

What about other imperfections mainstream pundits are pointing at? Not everyone occupying Wall Street is clear about what they are doing, and perhaps even why they are doing it. Occupy Wall Street is vague. The occupation is muddled, say the pundits. True, but these too, are not debits. Who knows, precisely, what we who resist and rebel are doing and why we are doing it? More, while those who do know, or who think they know, the around-the-blockers, should be present, and should very patiently add their beliefs to the Wall Street mix, those who don't know, and who know that they don't know, but who want to know, are the far more important participants. The occupation having room for and being congenial to folks who are first getting going - including welcoming their views and giving space for their expression - is a real and pivotal achievement. Around-the-blockers lecturing is not going to help. People talking, exploring, debating, and carefully considering, is central. And yes, some of those people will be "around the blockers," and if we add our voices and it resonates, great. If we add our voices and no one listens, or worse, everyone is bored or even made angry or inclined to leave,

then we around-the-blockers need to shut up and pay attention. Experience is worth very little if we cannot convey its lessons congenially.

At the risk of plopping myself not only into the around-the-blockers camp but into its “talking without hearing” subgroup, I do want to tentatively offer a few suggestions to an audience that I can reach - those who read ZNet regularly.

For ZNet readers who are in New York: If you didn't turn out on day one, no problem. And the same holds for day two through five, say. After all, it is likely you are busy. You have classes, jobs, kids. You have other political and social commitments. Fair enough. But now it is time. Relying on news reports, even on alternative media news reports, is insufficient for you to know what is happening. So why not take your body, and those you hang out with, down to the corner. And if you do, bring something nice for someone to eat, and hang out for a bit, and then, if you determine that the occupation isn't for you and you can't carve out a space there that is for you, leave. That can be that. Fair enough. But if you go to Wall Street and when you are there you feel admiration for the occupiers, don't just go back home and read the reports more knowledgeably. Return whenever you can. Bring others. And if you have misgivings about some aspects, great, bring those too.

For ZNet readers in other U.S. cities: Don't go to New York to join the occupiers. New York is a really big place. They have enough people locally to organize into ever growing crowds. But if you want to go to survey the scene and to learn whatever lessons you can take home, great. Because what people in other cities who get a jolt of inspiration and excitement from the Wall Street Occupation and who hope it will grow should do - is replicate it elsewhere. What we need is not only a bigger Wall Street Occupation, but Two, Three, Many Occupations.

Finally, to the Wall Street occupiers or soon to be occupiers who read ZNet, here are some obvious observations: Take your time. Energy, desire, and urgency, are great, but so is patience. Patience. Whatever else you do, keep prioritizing new people. And talking about outreach, tweets are okay, emails with substance are better, but the heart of organizing is still face to face. How many occupiers are at Wall Street at any moment? Whatever that number is, half, at least, could very usefully be out agitating for new arrivals. Joe and Sue at the occupation for some hours is not actually as good as Joe and Sue going around town getting others to go to the occupation. And once you have been involved an ample time, don't let your growing sophistication split you off from the newcomers. Keep talking plainly. Keep being receptive and hearing. Move forward in bulk, without leaving new folks behind. That said, part of moving forward is injecting/discovering in the mass

of participants a basis for shared and coherent continuation. Maybe it will be demands like full employment, a shorter work week, end today's wars and cut back military spending, tax the rich, and so on. Maybe it will be hammering out or discovering new ideas about how to create lasting organization. Imagine people becoming part of lasting locally based chapters of a new organization all around New York - and elsewhere - able to occupy and resist again and again, growing, diversifying, and paying attention to multi issues while employing multi tactics.

If enough people are involved and able to express their desires and join in the evolution of occupation ideas, demands will surely emerge. A coherent basis for lasting ties and new organization will surely emerge. The task that needs most attention, first, however, is people being welcomed in and having the room they need to express and grow at their own pace, imbibing lessons and insights from those who have gone before, but also adding new lessons and insights of their own.

I am off this weekend to Lexington, Kentucky for a talk to a gathering of local organizers. Then I go to London and Dublin, for talks to conference attendees and gatherings, and to Barcelona, Madrid, and Valencia, for talks at events, popular assemblies, etc. The main topic I have been asked to speak on throughout is *parecon* and associated strategy, but I will also bring what news I can of what you on Wall Street - and increasingly elsewhere in the U.S. - are up to. I will seek British, Irish, and Spanish solidarity. And I expect the Spaniards, in particular, will have many lessons to convey, so I will try to hear those and bring them back to share. I hope to see you on Wall Street, in late October, and then in other cities, as well.

Parecon and Spain's CNT

By [Michael Albert](#) and [Spanish CNT](#)

Friday, September 30, 2011

Due to work and travel, I have been unable to visit Wall Street. I admit, I also doubted the occupiers' wherewithal to keep on occupying and growing.

But it appears I was wrong about the event's staying power. Activists who went to Wall Street to initiate action have done their job. The event has legs. It is lumbering along quite nicely, and it even seems poised to start running. Further success

depends more on other people joining than on the tenacity of initiators - which has been established beyond any doubt.

Commentators have disparagingly noted that not everyone is focused and there is a lot of frivolity. But why is this bad? In a society that smothers creativity and annihilates spontaneous play, having a lot of each is a good thing.

From what I hear, perhaps the occupation could benefit from having more diverse options for people, in spontaneity and play and also in its task dispersal, particularly for people with jobs, kids, and other pressures. But more diversity will come - right along with the arrival of unionists, for example.

As to communications, I hate Twitter. It is a corporate giant and not a friend of the left. Ditto for Facebook. But making good use of these otherwise vile institutions is like making good use of any alienated, profit seeking, vile aspect of society. It is just doing the best we can. And the one-liners emerging from Wall Street put to shame what typical movement stalwarts generate when they slap the keys. You know who I mean: we activists who have been around the political block so many times that we think we own it - we around-the-blockers.

On the other hand, we really could use some longer communications from Wall Street. Why leave telling the story of the events and teasing out its lessons to mainstream pundits who have their eyes in their pockets and their noses on the ground? Some occupiers who breathe the air of the events and know their byways, should find time to provide in depth accounts - especially regarding insights, problems, and solutions which people elsewhere eager to initiate their own efforts can benefit from.

What about other imperfections mainstream pundits are pointing at? Not everyone occupying Wall Street is clear about what they are doing, and perhaps even why they are doing it. Occupy Wall Street is vague. The occupation is muddled, say the pundits. True, but these too, are not debits. Who knows, precisely, what we who resist and rebel are doing and why we are doing it? More, while those who do know, or who think they know, the around-the-blockers, should be present, and should very patiently add their beliefs to the Wall Street mix, those who don't know, and who know that they don't know, but who want to know, are the far more important participants. The occupation having room for and being congenial to folks who are first getting going - including welcoming their views and giving space for their expression - is a real and pivotal achievement. Around-the-blockers lecturing is not going to help. People talking, exploring, debating, and carefully considering, is central. And yes, some of those people will be "around the

blockers,” and if we add our voices and it resonates, great. If we add our voices and no one listens, or worse, everyone is bored or even made angry or inclined to leave, then we around-the-blockers need to shut up and pay attention. Experience is worth very little if we cannot convey its lessons congenially.

At the risk of plopping myself not only into the around-the-blockers camp but into its “talking without hearing” subgroup, I do want to tentatively offer a few suggestions to an audience that I can reach - those who read ZNet regularly.

For ZNet readers who are in New York: If you didn't turn out on day one, no problem. And the same holds for day two through five, say. After all, it is likely you are busy. You have classes, jobs, kids. You have other political and social commitments. Fair enough. But now it is time. Relying on news reports, even on alternative media news reports, is insufficient for you to know what is happening. So why not take your body, and those you hang out with, down to the corner. And if you do, bring something nice for someone to eat, and hang out for a bit, and then, if you determine that the occupation isn't for you and you can't carve out a space there that is for you, leave. That can be that. Fair enough. But if you go to Wall Street and when you are there you feel admiration for the occupiers, don't just go back home and read the reports more knowledgeably. Return whenever you can. Bring others. And if you have misgivings about some aspects, great, bring those too.

For ZNet readers in other U.S. cities: Don't go to New York to join the occupiers. New York is a really big place. They have enough people locally to organize into ever growing crowds. But if you want to go to survey the scene and to learn whatever lessons you can take home, great. Because what people in other cities who get a jolt of inspiration and excitement from the Wall Street Occupation and who hope it will grow should do - is replicate it elsewhere. What we need is not only a bigger Wall Street Occupation, but Two, Three, Many Occupations.

Finally, to the Wall Street occupiers or soon to be occupiers who read ZNet, here are some obvious observations: Take your time. Energy, desire, and urgency, are great, but so is patience. Patience. Whatever else you do, keep prioritizing new people. And talking about outreach, tweets are okay, emails with substance are better, but the heart of organizing is still face to face. How many occupiers are at Wall Street at any moment? Whatever that number is, half, at least, could very usefully be out agitating for new arrivals. Joe and Sue at the occupation for some hours is not actually as good as Joe and Sue going around town getting others to go to the occupation. And once you have been involved an ample time, don't let your growing sophistication split you off from the newcomers. Keep talking plainly.

Keep being receptive and hearing. Move forward in bulk, without leaving new folks behind. That said, part of moving forward is injecting/discovering in the mass of participants a basis for shared and coherent continuation. Maybe it will be demands like full employment, a shorter work week, end today's wars and cut back military spending, tax the rich, and so on. Maybe it will be hammering out or discovering new ideas about how to create lasting organization. Imagine people becoming part of lasting locally based chapters of a new organization all around New York - and elsewhere - able to occupy and resist again and again, growing, diversifying, and paying attention to multi issues while employing multi tactics.

If enough people are involved and able to express their desires and join in the evolution of occupation ideas, demands will surely emerge. A coherent basis for lasting ties and new organization will surely emerge. The task that needs most attention, first, however, is people being welcomed in and having the room they need to express and grow at their own pace, imbibing lessons and insights from those who have gone before, but also adding new lessons and insights of their own.

I am off this weekend to Lexington, Kentucky for a talk to a gathering of local organizers. Then I go to London and Dublin, for talks to conference attendees and gatherings, and to Barcelona, Madrid, and Valencia, for talks at events, popular assemblies, etc. The main topic I have been asked to speak on throughout is parecon and associated strategy, but I will also bring what news I can of what you on Wall Street - and increasingly elsewhere in the U.S. - are up to. I will seek British, Irish, and Spanish solidarity. And I expect the Spaniards, in particular, will have many lessons to convey, so I will try to hear those and bring them back to share. I hope to see you on Wall Street, in late October, and then in other cities, as well.

Parecon and Spain's CNT



By [Michael Albert](#) and [Spanish CNT](#)

Friday, September 30, 2011

This interview was conducted by email in preparation for a trip to Spain by Michael Albert. CNT is Spain's Anarchist Labor Federation and Periodico is CNT's Journal. The questions come from an array of Periodico writers.

1. Historically, only a few anarchist authors have analyzed the economic features of society. According to your view, what are the most relevant contributions from anarchists to economic thinking?

The primary anarchist economic contribution, I think, is its desire to reduce hierarchy to a minimum and to enlarge informed participation and self management in its place. These aims should inform any sensible thought about the economy, or any other social phenomena.

A second anarchist awareness has been its attention to the role of non property sources of class division. Bakunin and others were pivotal, I think, in the emergence of an understanding that a division of labor that gives a minority a monopoly on work that conveys influence, social skills, initiative, and confidence, while the majority does only disempowering work that requires mainly obedience while diminishing social skills and confidence, causes the former group, whom I call the coordinator class, to dominate the latter, the working class. To understand class interests as a motive force in economic change requires that one highlight not only two classes - capital and labor - but three, capital, labor, and, between them, the coordinator class, not least because the coordinators can become the ruling class in what has been called market or centrally planned socialism but what should have been called coordinatorism.

Finally, I think the work of Kropotkin on mutual aid and also regarding the intrinsic virtues of work can help us understand how markets produce anti-sociality and what it will require for allocation to instead foster mutual aid, as well as to understand the impact of contemporary divisions of labor and illuminate what it will require to have equitable economic relations and sensible economic incentives.

2. From your point of view, how is the analysis of capitalism that stems from applied economics connected with anarchist proposals towards the creation of a new society? Do any connections exist between Radical Political Economics as a way of analyzing capitalism and the role of the state, and the anarchist approach to participatory economics as a proposal for a future society? If they do, what are they?

If the phrase "applied economics" refers to mainstream economic theory, as I suspect and will assume, I think there is very little connection. Mainstream theory pays little attention to classes per se, and almost no attention to what I call the coordinator class and gives no attention to anarchist or pretty much any other desires for a new society. Instead, mainstream economic theory overwhelmingly exists to say reasonably intelligent things about economic phenomena but only within the crippling constraint that what is said justifies the inevitability and permanence of such structures as markets, corporate divisions of labor, private ownership, and harshly hierarchical decision making. None of this has anything to do with anarchist aspirations, other than by negation.

I should say, however, that there are certain insights, even within the mainstream profession's crippling reactionary constraint, that anarchists should attend to, for example bearing on such matters as the interconnectivity of all economic choices and the associated reality of what are called opportunity costs - which is that when x is done, it means various other things that could have been done with the same labor and resources, etc., were not. The cost of doing x is not doing y. This insight is a useful check on the utopian thinking of some segments of the left who assume people can simply have whatever they want at no cost.

But, that said, most of economics is not only reactionary, but also nonsense - as in, for example, widely held notions about incentives, the impact of markets, what constitutes efficiency, and so on.

As to radical political economy, that is a different matter. I suspect it varies around the world, but in my own country, the U.S., there is actually a Union of Radical Political Economists. This has been primarily but not entirely marxist and has had many worthy and important insights, but also has been hampered, at least in my view, by failing to highlight the third class mentioned above. Radical political economy's greater attention to issues of power, the daily indignities of class, many of the ills of markets, and other matters are relevant, however, to any attempt at attaining an anarchistic economy and society, including participatory economics and a participatory society. I should note, as well, that radical economics' inattentiveness to there being three classes may be fading and even disappearing, hopefully leading to a far closer relation between it and anarchism, including, in particular, participatory economics.

3. What economic and social policies can workers seek to avoid suffering from the current economic crisis? Do other feasible policies, apart from public expenditure, exist to mitigate massive unemployment?

First, I would be remiss if I didn't say at least a few words about this concept - crisis. What makes a crisis? Before the crisis we are currently enduring, tens of millions of people died each year of preventable diseases and starvation. Many more were bombed into oblivion to defend the circumstances generating all that disease and hunger. Billions of people were denied fulfilling work and mired in undignified subservience. Why was all that not a crisis?

Then something happened, some bubbles burst, and suddenly there was a crisis. One might think it was because what happened made things worse for most people. But no, that was not the reason. The reason media proclaimed a crisis was because what happened affected or threatened to affect not only the poorest and weakest, not only those immediately above, the bottom - but those at the top. What became a crisis was a situation that hurt elites, and particularly a situation that could lead to massive dissent in turn causing further losses to elites.

What then is the elite response, other than to call our current situation a crisis while calling tens of millions of yearly corpses and billions of yearly harshly diminished lives business as usual? It is to try to remove or end the crisis, but in ways that cause there to be, once the crisis is over, even more

power and wealth flowing to those at the top and away from those at the bottom.

So, in that context, what can workers do? To say we can dissent, rebel, and resist, is obviously true - but to what end? To say, we can do it with the aim of creating a new society is again obviously true, but given that that will take time, what can alleviate the pain now? And, more, what can alleviate the pain now but also move us toward further gains and eventually a new economy and new society?

Some general insights point to some feasible policies. The general insights are: make the rich pay, not the poor; and have the poor come away better organized and stronger, the rich the opposite, if possible.

One kind of worthy activity, then, is the daily practice of sincere and militant mutual aid. This could include communities protecting against evictions, communities protecting against dumping waste, movements protecting against price gouging, unions fighting against people being fired or wage cuts, etc.

A second kind of worthy activity is demands for changes such as increased minimum wages, a cap on high end income, highly progressive taxes that redistribute wealth, and reallocation of national spending from pursuits that are destructive or control oriented to pursuits that serve real needs of communities of working people.

But let's consider unemployment, since it is at the heart of current crisis. Is there anything that working people could seek to mitigate massive unemployment other than public spending? Yes, there certainly is.

Let's consider a particular workplace with a thousand employees. Suppose it is going to lay off 250 workers, or 25%, which is, I think, a typical current figure for many places in Spain and in the midwest in the U.S. Suppose also that diminished demand for the factory's product is the true reason for the proximate decision to fire 250 workers.

What is to be done? Well, if we want to deal with the situation while maintaining or increasing profits at the moment and over time, fine, we should fire the 250. This will weaken all workers by increasing unemployment and fear, and it will maintain at least the rate of profit, likely also leading to reduced wages, and then, when employment climbs back up, a lower wage bill. So in this way owners address the difficult situation of diminished demand in ways suited to their own interests. But what if we instead want to ensure that our choices keep the situation from worsening, or even improve it?

The answer then shouts at us. Instead of firing 250 people, keep all the employees. Due to reduced need for output, reduce the duration of work each week by 25%. Everyone still has a job, but works fewer hours. But, don't stop there. The fault for the disruption of the economy rests with the rich. And, more relevant, they have long gotten infinitely more income than they deserve - so, okay, keep workers salaries as they were. Thus, if I previously worked forty hours, and earned x , now I work 30 hours, but I still

take home x as my pay. My hourly rate is up. My decline in hours worked is a benefit, not a disaster.

Who suffers the losses in revenues without a reduction in wages paid? Owners. They indeed lose dramatically compared to before. Note, that workers gain not only in hourly wage rate, but also in leisure - which is no small benefit, since it allows time for organizing and winning still more gains.

We therefore address unemployment in a way that benefits workers, not just in one plant, but across the whole economy, at the expense of owners and paves the way for further benefits, as well. But what if owners literally can't afford the giant hit that is paying wages at a much increased rate?

Well, some who aren't owners also currently earn way more than their share. I refer to coordinators including high level lawyers, doctors, managers, financial officers, and so on. So, we refine our demand again. For all those who earn less than some amount each year - let's say less than \$80,000 - they continue to earn the same total as before though working 25% fewer hours. For those who were earning more than the cutoff amount, they do take a 25% pay cut for working 25% fewer hours. So not only the owners pay for the economic crisis, so do those I call the coordinator class - leading, again, to greater equity and justice.

If, by the way, this approach were in place across the country, you could of course wager with tremendous confidence that governments would quickly discover the stupidity of budget chopping policies and the wisdom of new

taxes and social expenditures and waste budget reduction to get the economy right again at a lesser cost to elites.

4. From an anarchist perspective, what proposals do you consider necessary to pursue to address the current economic crisis?

A demand for no firing, work week reduction, and redistributive income policies, is a good example, I think. Any proposal that places greater burden on those with higher wealth and income and that creates new social conditions that increase the organization, consciousness, and options of working people so that they are likely to continue to seek still greater gains, is worthy. This would also include cutting military budgets and utilizing the gains for rebuilding infrastructure, creating better schools, housing, health care, etc.

5. What opportunities do you think this situation creates to build an anarchist economy (if any)?

Crisis does not by itself automatically push toward anarchism or any progressive outcome. When things get worse than the familiar norm, indeed, a very natural desire is to want to return to a past condition, not to attain revolutionized conditions, much less anarchist aims.

Worse, the rich and powerful want not only to get back to the pre crisis condition, but to wind up better off than they were before. The poor and

weak should also want to escape the new pains, but by attaining new relations in which they are better off than before, and also in better position to continue advancing.

So the issue of the relation of business as usual (which is perpetual crisis) or chaotic disruption (which is current crisis) to building an anarchist economy is not written in some law of society or nature, but resides instead in the character of organized response. Do we, in a crisis situation, effectively increase our numbers, enlarge our awareness, and expand our means of developing and expressing our desires, even as we transfer costs to the rich and powerful? If yes, that is good. If no, then crisis can spell disaster not just for the moment, but for a long period.

6. Which specific tasks do you consider essential so that workers can self-manage an economy? Do you find anarchosyndicalism a useful tool to enable the working class to self-manage means of production? How is it possible to link unionist revolutionary work with the construction of economic alternatives?

I think self management requires a venue where workers and consumers can develop their preferences and determine outcomes for the economy in a self managing way. This is why I think we must create and maintain workers and consumers self managing councils.

I also think that within those councils, unless workers and consumers are all comparably confident and ready to participate, at least on average, in

discussions and decisions that affect them, a few will dominate the many. Workers and consumers need to be comparably prepared, comparably empowered by their backgrounds and circumstances, to participate. In my view, that means we must attain and maintain a new division of labor with what I call balanced job complexes.

I also think you also can't have wide disparities in income and wealth that can be parlayed into power differentials if you want real self management for all. So that means we must attain and maintain equitable remuneration, which is income for duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially valuable labor.

Finally, markets and central planning both generate class difference by imposing a coordinator class, again, above workers. So those modes of allocation must be rejected, and in their place I, and participatory economics, favor attaining and maintaining what we call participatory planning, or cooperative negotiation by the workers and consumers councils of economic inputs and outputs.

If anarchosyndicalism refers to anarchism with an emphasis on worker's self organization and self management, including attaining classless economy and a participatory democratic polity, then obviously in those respects it is part and parcel of participatory economics and participatory society. If it sees society as only an outgrowth of worker views and actions - and doesn't also seek neighborhood political assemblies, and consumer councils - that would be a real difference, still to be addressed. Similarly, if for some it precludes comparable attention to issues of gender, sexuality,

race, and culture, as to class, then that too would be a difference, at least in breadth of focus.

The last part of your question is incredibly important. We need to create alternatives to learn from them, to provide hope, to orient our efforts more widely, etc. We also need to fight within existing structures in unions, neighborhoods, and so on, to win gains, to remain connected, to develop mutual aid, to enlarge support, etc. Either approach without the other is flawed, the former potentially disconnected and aloof, the latter potentially reformist - so removing the antipathy of each for the other, and indeed connecting the two priorities is paramount. As to how to do this, I don't think there is any general or single answer. I suspect answers depend entirely on the types of situation we encounter and develop.

7. Can you tell us a few words about the origins of the Participatory Economics model and the theoretical and practical foundations inspiring the model?

The model that Robin Hahnel and I happened to write up could arguably be said to have origins only in things affecting us. That is the way many people answer when asked, well, what was the origin of something you said or did. But I think that would be wrong. The actual origins of participatory economic vision, or parecon, are in the heritage of seeking classlessness - and I sometimes trace it back to the first recorded workers strike in Egypt, during the Pharaohs' time. At any rate, parecon is certainly massively influenced

by the emergence of socialist thought, and then anarchist and councilist thought.

We learned lessons, for example, not only from Marxism and then a critique of various aspects of marxism, but from Bakunin, Kropotkin, and then Anton Pannekoek, for example. But the proximate influences were, I think, mainly the ethos and practice of the Sixties New Left that both Robin and I were part of and, Noam Chomsky, who I was particularly close with and learned much from.

I think the main theoretical foundations were a rejection of a narrow conception of economics, deciding, instead, to pay close attention not only to material but also to personal, social, and ecological inputs and outputs of economic activity; an understanding of class that included attention to ownership but added attention to division of labor and highlighted, as well, matters of consciousness and habits; a comprehensive rejection of both markets and central planning for allocation; and a carefully and comprehensively formulated commitment to solidarity and, in particular, to self management - meaning to people having a say in decisions in proportion as they are affected by them.

I think the practical foundations of parecon were an extensive review of the history of the self named socialist experiences in Russia, China, Yugoslavia, and Cuba, and of related endeavors including by anarchist movements here in Spain, as well as the lessons of our own personal experiences both in the New Left and, in my case, in a worker's self managed publishing project called South End Press.

8. During the years before the Spanish Civil War, different anarchist proposals were discussed on how to organize a society, including its economic sphere. This was called libertarian communism. Is Participatory Economics a libertarian communist proposal?

The models from that period, as best I have been able to discern, had wonderful values but were still pretty much attached to markets for allocation, and were only implicitly, not explicitly, clear about division of labor and norms of remuneration. So, if you are asking whether parecon is the same as those models, then, no - parecon isn't the same. But if you are asking is parecon, all these decades later, trying to incorporate old and new lessons in accord with the aspirations of those models, then I think the answer is yes, very much so.

Indeed, while we can't know, I think that the rank and file and most of the more ideologically organized actors in those days would be largely or entirely favorable to the defining features of participatory economics including workers and consumers self managing councils or assemblies as the venues of self management; remuneration for duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially valued labor as the implementation of equity; balanced job complexes as a vehicle of informed participation and to eliminate class division between workers and coordinators; and participatory planning or cooperative negotiation of inputs and outputs by workers and consumers assemblies to replace central planning and markets. This set of four institutional aims is, I believe, a minimalist list of

institutional features which can, and very likely will, vary in their specific forms beyond their main defining features, in different industries, countries, etc. - and can, and will, accomplish the maximalist aim of a classless, self managing, solidaritous, and equitable economy of the sort that all sincerely anti capitalist and pro classlessness activists have always wanted.

9. What transitional strategies does participatory economics favor? Which social agents should promote them?

I think strategy is overwhelmingly contextual, by which I mean it depends on place and time and indeed on all circumstances. There are, however, at least a few general advisories that I think are virtually universal.

When we seek classless economics, parecon, do so only as part of seeking participatory society and thus alongside seeking, with equal priority, feminist, anti racist or what I call intercommunalist, and anti authoritarian or anarchist aims. Embody the seeds of the future in the present. Seek worthy reforms but in non reformist ways that point toward comprehensive change and that organizationally, conceptually, and emotionally move towards it.

Develop movement organization that utilizes self management, that protects and even welcomes dissent and seeks diversity in thought and deed, that serves members by making their lives more pleasant and fulfilling on the road to change so that the movement grows rather than continually losing support. Create neighborhood and workplace councils or assemblies and federate them into regions and industries.

Handle wealth and circumstances as one would in a parecon, equitably and with balanced job complexes. Attend to additional class issues and create a movement that celebrates and manifests the culture and preferences of workers, not of coordinators. Determine the shape of participatory polity, if you will, and handle disputes, legislation, etc., consistently with that set of aims. Do likewise for kinship vision and cultural vision. One could go on, but I think the real proof is in the special conditions we will encounter and how we address them, learning as we proceed.

As to social agents - a presumption should be that leading roles in struggle go to those at the bottom of social hierarchies, thus, to working people and the poor, to women, gays, those who are culturally repressed and oppressed, to order takers, etc. But, ultimately, the even larger recognition is that those who are committed to movement aims, clear on their role, and working effectively toward success, are those who will contribute most.

10. Is it feasible to have a local and regional development model including anarchist unions within capitalist companies as organizations that gather a majority of workers, production and consumption cooperatives, time banks, and labour exchanges for unemployed workers, connected to anarchist unions, with the aim of establishing self-managed systems of intervention in the local labour markets? How could this praxis be connected to the idea of Participatory Economics towards the abolition of capitalism and the State?

I not only think it is feasible, I think it is highly desirable and even centrally important. To be successful, movements for change must steadily and

unceasingly grow in size, and members must also become steadily more committed and more able to participate effectively, knowing their goals, strategy, etc. Many types of activity can aid in such a scenario but two broad types are immediately obvious.

First, we have activities that essentially involve building institutions consistent with our aims, but operating now, in the present. This is partly building our own movement structures, but it can and should also be building our own self managed communities and workplaces, federated together, etc. Second, we have activities that seek to win improvements in people's lives in their present institutions and neighborhoods. This is working to win changes - which are by definition reforms - but hopefully doing it in non reformist ways that point to a steadily enlarging array of victories and prepare the means and wherewithal for larger and larger campaigns, until finally, we not so much abolish capitalism and the state as we replace capitalism and current political structures with a new participatory economy and a new participatory polity of our choosing.

The possibilities mentioned in the question include a mix of the first and second type of activity, and in doing so point out the essential priority that not only should both types be centrally pursued, but that they should be, as much as possible, entwined.

The creation of immediate alternatives without struggle within existing institutions runs a severe risk of being disconnected, peripheral, and even callous toward most citizens. But struggles for improvements in people's neighborhoods and workplaces, and in national economic policies, that are

unconnected to seeking visionary new arrangements, run the risk of losing sight of long term aims and becoming merely reformist. However, link the two, and both can be dramatically reinforced and strengthened. How we do that, again, is a case by case matter, but mainly I think the answer resides in constantly seeing each as an aspect of the other, talking about both whichever we are focused on, and putting our energies and mutual aid capacities at the service of the other, whenever doing so will help it.

11. Within the strategies of transition towards an anarchist society, how do you think that we could face the problems related to the division of labour, namely, those concerning the strategic role of technicians and managers (lawyers, doctors, highly skilled workers, etc.), such as economists who are strong defenders of capitalism? How can we convince our fellow economists to pursue social change? What would be the role of an economist within Parecon?

The first part of this question raises, again, the issue of the role of the coordinator class, and the issue of how to relate to it, and to the structures that generate it, during our battles in the present. I think this question is paramount. I think the answer is that we must always be honest about the reality of the existence of this class difference, we must develop working class consciousness and practice rather than appealing to coordinator class consciousness and practice, we must dissect and oppose coordinator class assumptions and habits whenever they are elitist and arrogant, we must incorporate in our own institutions balanced job complexes, and we must fight for changes in mainstream institutions that move toward that same

new division of labor. When I say this is paramount, it is because to my thinking Leninism, despite the aspirations of most rank and file Leninists who undeniably want classlessness, is in fact the program of the coordinator class, not the working class. What is needed is not paternalism toward workers, not beneficence toward workers, but working class self management, and that means the ultimate dissolution of the coordinator class via the dispersion of its activities among all workers, rather than just a few.

How to do all this is a big question. But arguments that say, as an example, the best speakers should do all the speaking, the best decision makers should make all the decisions, the best writers should do all the writing, are horribly misconceived, and whether inadvertently or intentionally, serve coordinator interests. They are wrong on two counts. First, those who are best at something today - overwhelmingly by virtue of training and knowledge advantages - need not be tomorrow, with training and knowledge spread more widely. Second, those who think they are better, usually are not. They may have more confidence, and more fluid vocabularies, but most often all that comes with baggage of coordinatorist assumptions that horribly limit the benefits. And second, the sole criterion of worthiness is not being best at something, there is also the matter of equity, of participation, of eliminating unjust hierarchy, and these are no small matters.

As to convincing economists to switch their views, I suppose it is like arguing different values and views with anyone who has serious vested interests obstructing their clear thinking. You have to try to overcome that

obstacle, with examples and evidence that jolts recognition and appeals to higher virtues. Not easy, particularly with coordinator class types who have imbibed - as schooling is designed to accomplish - notions of their own superiority. As to economists under a functioning participatory economy - no one has ever asked that, and I have never thought about it. I am not sure. The actual technical work that occurs - like the technical work that happens in a hospital, or the cockpit of an airplane, or in a lab, or design studio - is done by people with balanced job complexes and associated training. Is there even such a thing as an economist in a participatory economy? I guess so, but I am really not at all sure what they would do, or study, and to what ends. Unless it was, perhaps, to find a still higher stage of human organization of economic life, beyond parecon and classlessness. I think the work of facilitation boards and the like, isn't really dependent on what we would probably mean by economic theory.

Anyway, I agree that this and related questions are, or should be, at the center of anarchist and Leninist differences. They are, or should be, at the center of critique of twentieth century socialist economics. And they are, or should be, at the core of thought about strategies for change, just as you implicitly indicate.

12. Which are some of the strategies that could help us redirect uncontrolled technological development which promotes the hierarchicalization and stratification of society, towards the self-managed practices that Parecon postulates?

I have to say, I don't think technological development is uncontrolled. And from your question, I think you probably agree. When I was in college, for example, at a technical institution, I realized that while it was considered fine for folks there to try to figure out how to have bombs that could find their targets (this was first achieved in around 1970 and was first used, in fledgling shape, against dams in Vietnam) and that there was plenty of money to pursue this "technical task," it was not fine to try to figure out how to shoot down a B-52 bomber with a hand held gun. There was no money to pursue that "technical task." The tasks were technically equally interesting and demanding. The difference was that the first task was in the interests of elite power. The second was contrary to those interests. And it therefore became graphically clear that the technological curiosity and pursuits of engineers and scientists were channelled - controlled - at least in their applications, by surrounding elite institutions. The same holds more generally. There is no support for technical investigation of how to organize work places and create tools for work so that workers wind up more empowered and more in touch with one another due to using them. There is plenty of support for how to do the opposite - have tools and workplaces that fragment and thereby weaken workers. Again, what technologies are even thought about is controlled. We could continue, but once the issue is put this way, the point is blindingly obvious. Build in obsolescence, great. Media manipulation, great. Bigger more effective bombs, great. Long lasting cheap goods, not so much. Media truth, forget about it. Better tools for collective self defense by the weak and poor - you have got to be kidding.

Okay, that said, we get technology that promotes hierarchy precisely because technological research and implementation are under the purview

of capital and the state. So the only real route to getting better technology is like the only real route to getting better anything. First, we must build movements that are capable of winning improvements. This means they must be able to marshal enough people, and enough commitment, to force results we demand. And this means they must confront elites with a situation in which not giving in to our demands is even worse - because of how much further it will provoke us - than giving in. That is how struggle is won. Second, in planting the seeds of the future in the present, including building our own institutions, we can try to introduce new technologies of our own. In some domains this is precluded, at least for now, by costs. But in others, regarding issues of organization and simple tools, it is, I suspect, already quite possible, if we made it one of our aims.

For example, though I know many leftists don't just use but also celebrate Twitter and Facebook - and social networking technology as those two operations elaborate it - in fact those corporations and their technologies are a fine current example of what your question focuses on. They are taking a social possibility that has enormous positive potential - very inexpensive two-way and multi-way online communications and networking - and horribly perverting it. This is of course predictable. These are immense corporations with corporate structure, corporate consciousness, and corporate priorities, so what else would one expect? And it is a matter not only of violations of privacy and intense enlargements of commercialization, but also of subtle and actually rather aggressive bias toward a kind of compulsive and quite competitive mentality of communication that reduces content to nuggets, cripples attention span, prostitutes the idea of friendship, etc. There is much to say, as with possible

elaborations of all these answers. But the point here is that this is an unusual case where even though these firms have gargantuan resources at their disposal and spend unimaginably large sums on their technical infrastructures and research, still, it is quite possible that well meaning and anarchistic folks, if we stopped being in thrall to Facebook and Twitter, could generate social networking tools that reverse the negative trends these companies impose and provide. Instead, technology more consistent with seeking Parecon and, more generally, with healthy and substance filled communication could be created. Indeed, we at ZCommunications are working hard at just this task.

13. In an economy where the means of production have a social property status, how much are the workers who rule over the self-managed business responsible for the successes and failures of their company? Should any penalizing or positive incentives be applied based on how well workers have performed, assuming the productive process has not been influenced by external facts?

The question points to the need to have the economy not waste resources, energy, and human effort on dysfunctional activity, whether making things that aren't needed, or making things poorly when it could be done much better. An economy needs to elicit excellence - not at profit making, but at meeting needs and developing potentials.

One approach is to reward producing outputs well and punish doing it poorly. But parecon says that people should be remunerated for the

duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially valued labor. And that isn't about rewards or punishments per se, but about equitable and just allocation. So, what do we do?

Well, in capitalism, or in twentieth century socialism, if we close a workplace down, it afflicts those working at it with unemployment. At the other end of this spectrum, if we allow workplaces to pocket surpluses they can amass from having high sales and low costs, it rewards a kind of success, which, however, is not success at meeting needs and developing potentials but at generating surpluses.

Parecon is different. First, work must be socially valuable to be remunerated. I cannot be the goalie for a Spanish football team because my work would be worthless, actually, worse than worthless, and so therefore wouldn't deserve income. To that extent there is a strong correlation between workplaces doing well - which means applying their resources and energies and actually generating desired outputs - and their workers being remunerated. But, returning to the football example, if I was a great goalie, I could have that job. But I wouldn't get massive income because I am so good - I would just get remuneration for how long, how hard, and the onerousness of the conditions under which I worked - and I would have a balanced job complex. So there is pressure to meet needs, but not excessive rewards for doing so.

But what about if my team stinks, or my workplace is producing something people no longer want, or is producing something that is desired but in an ineffective manner that is wasting energy and labor, etc. Clearly, there

needs to be a change. Perhaps innovations can correct the situation. Perhaps the workplace, or even the team, needs to change its product. Or perhaps the whole thing needs to be closed down, and people need to work at new pursuits. What tends to prevent these steps in some systems, or to make them difficult, is that they would hurt people, and one doesn't want to hurt people, and people, as well, don't want to be hurt. But in a parecon, if what I produce is no longer valued, actually, my continuing to produce it hurts society - wasting productive capacity - and doesn't do me any good, either. Better that I switch to producing something desired, my income doesn't drop in this transition. There is always full employment of those who wish to work, as that is in everyone's interest due to the institutions of parecon which make each person's well being dependent on that of all other people.

14. Self-management and social property over the means of production have an inherent problem, the conflict between individual freedom and the well being of the collective. A good example would be the case in which a company that has been functioning well would be forced, against the will of the company assembly, to employ newly unemployed workers, reducing the welfare of the workers that were initially working there. The principle of self-management might be compromised to pursue the principle of solidarity. Do you consider that assemblies are the best institution to deal with such problems? Should new kinds of institutions be created to deal with them?

There are times when the plight of some, if it is to be addressed, demands that the well being of others drop a little. But I think the case you offer is not

a good example of that. So, a workplace that is socially beneficial with N hours of work is not going to be asked to up it to more than N hours by hiring new workers. That makes no sense - N hours is what is needed. More hours would not be socially useful, and thus would not warrant remuneration. Now, as in an earlier answer, if there are 10% unemployed in society for some reason, then yes, all workplaces would hire another 10% employees, but everyone would work fewer hours so the total work from all workers was roughly unchanged, unless the population chose to seek more output. This spreads the total social product in the form of income among the whole population, rather than among 90% of the population, so in that sense, the question is correct. I think the means of handling this is the norms of social life, mainly - and then, yes, society's institutions, its planning process, its assemblies, etc.

But if we are talking about something more local, then the situation is different. There is no point having more people work more hours, to produce the same output. There is a point, if some people are unemployed due to declining demand for what they were producing, say, to having them switch to produce something else - but the other things they produce should wind up being other things people want. So wherever they work, their joining the firm doesn't lead to lower incomes for those who work there, or other harmful changes, it just means more output of a desired type.

15. Related to the work that the "Iteration Facilitation Boards" should exert when distributing resources in a participatory economy, which economic

and mathematical instruments would be useful? Could linear programming and game theory be practical and useful tools?

Your prior question reveals one purpose of these "boards," along with collating and delivering information relevant to each actor judging their desires, etc. Certainly input output analysis and linear programming are relevant to extracting implications and data from evolving plan preferences, yes. Game theory is a bit less obvious, but yes, in some sense, maybe. We will see. Statistical analyses, however, would certainly be highly relevant. Projections of how desires for some overarching type of output - say shirts - breaks down into types, for example, would be important. So would projections of likely weather patterns, or matters of birth and death, and especially any surges in any such phenomena, or climate, say, or health, as these bear on planning matters. And so on.

16. In the Yugoslavian socialist economy the state, as well as many regional banks, provided enormous amounts of credit so that big national industries that employed many workers could persist and unemployment wouldn't grow, creating big black holes that absorbed a relevant part of the wealth of the country. Do you consider that in a participatory society inefficient companies should be maintained so that jobs wouldn't be destroyed?

Yugoslavia was a coordinator market economy, which meant it had many harmful features. No, firms that were wasting valuable assets would not be maintained, but - of course jobs would be ensured. Imagine an economy with 1000, products, as purely a thought experiment. Ten of the products

employ way more workers, the others, less, say. Suppose tastes change, or production technologies alter, and one of the high employment workplaces no longer makes sense as a place to expend labor, energy, and resources. The question is saying, more or less, can we afford to close down that production, given that so many people work in it, or should we preserve it, and the jobs, even though it no longer makes sense in light of people's desires for other goods, in light of other techniques, etc.?

The answer is that we should shut it down, of course. People working on stuff no one wants, wasting energy and resources, etc., is idiocy. But those employed should wind up with new work - either by retooling their workplaces, or if the prior workplaces literally need to be closed, or transformed into playgrounds, or whatever, then in new or other workplaces. This is what sensible planning does.

But, you might say, what if while the good that was being produced is now no longer wanted, no new desire has taken its place. People are fine with not having it, and with not having any more of anything else. In other words, people are fine with a lower total consumption level. Well fine. In that case, everyone works somewhat less. And those who were in the closed industry work that amount too, like everyone else, and because everyone is satisfied with less stuff, then the sum total labor declines. If people want more stuff, hours of labor rise. This is the same issue as dealt with earlier - unemployment due to lowered demand. This is not a bad thing, when it happens. It just means people prefer, overall, more leisure to more stuff - a choice people should be free to make, but which should impact people similarly, rather than some being made poor by unemployment.

In fact, mainstream economists have had, to my knowledge, only one criticism of participatory economics. They say, parecon has no built in drive to accumulate. It does not compel long hours and high intensity, regardless of people's desires. They point out that this means a parecon is likely to opt for less output and more leisure, and they claim this is a damning criticism. It is highly entertaining when the main professional criticism of that which you favor is actually a complement, not a flaw. Yes, in a parecon people can choose to work less, with no pressure forcing more work, instead. But that is a virtue, not a failing.

17. How could regional or national economies that are Parecon interact with other economies ruled under the mechanisms of the market system? Wouldn't international prices be a threat to the internal system of the Parecon, forcing it to adapt itself to the international competition? Do you believe it is possible for a Parecon to coexist with other capitalist regions or countries?

Imagine Spain was a participatory economy. This is a mental leap, not merely because it would entail that the Spanish population revolutionize the Spanish economy, polity, and whole society, but because it would entail that Spain's agenda not be subverted by a violent reaction from without, most likely largely at the behest of and organized and carried out by way of the American military. So, okay, let's assume it happens, and American movements are strong enough to prevent American intervention, and ditto for German movements, and British movements, etc.

Or, if you prefer, you can think about what would happen if such a transformation happened in the U.S., but not most other places. Or if it happened in a poorer and weaker country which, by some means, was able to hold off, with international solidarity, external violence.

In any such case the newly participatory society with a participatory economy also interacts on the international stage, including wanting to export some of its product, and to import some product from other countries. Such exchanges occur because there are benefits to be had. One country has climate, or history, or whatever, that facilitates producing x, another country produces, instead, y - both countries need some of what the other has, and they trade. The transfer has benefits. Currently the country that has great bargaining power (this is true in domestic and in international market transactions) reaps most of the benefits which typically, therefore, widens wealth and power gaps between the two. Indeed, corporate globalization is about systematically altering the rules of exchange so the relative benefits of the stronger parties go even higher, and those of the weaker parties drop even lower. Internationalism should have the opposite agenda.

A participatory economy, in contrast to those with market allocation, would want to exchange at rates governed by cooperative negotiation of inputs and outputs in light of full and true social and ecological costs and benefits. Assuming we do not yet have parecon world wide, this can't be done perfectly. But one could approximate. One could try to discern equitable

exchange rates that would reduce gaps in wealth and power, rather than enlarge them.

Then, if a parecon is exchanging with a poorer and weaker country, even though market prices would benefit the parecon more, it should, out of solidarity and in accord with its values, exchange at parecon rates, as best they could be approximated, instead, thus giving the weaker trade partner more of the gains due to the transaction. If a parecon was exchanging with a richer and more powerful country, while it would prefer to utilize parecon prices - in this case to its own advantage - you are right it would typically have to instead use market prices, or not exchange at all. Of course there is room for much discussion and exploration of options, but I think that is the overall picture.