

PARTICIPATORY ECONOMICS OVERVIEW: WHAT, WHY, HOW

by Alexandria Shaner & Michael Albert

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Participatory Economics Overview: What, Why, How

Alexandria Shaner & Michael Albert

SERIES

Towards (a Better) Postcapitalism: A Handy How-To Guide

méta Working Papers' series 'Towards (a Better) Postcapitalism: A Handy How-To Guide' publishes solicited policy papers on aspects of how would a non-dystopian postcapitalism look like. The series focuses on three 'pillars':

Production | Allocation | Decision Making

i.e., how could/would postcapitalist *production* be like (and who would own the means of production), what shape would the *allocation* of goods take (and which alternatives to the market economy may be explored), and what would be the main tenets of postcapitalist *decision making* and *democracy*.

In this paper, **Alexandria Shaner & Michael Albert** provide an overview of PARECON ('participatory economics') as a viable postcapitalist model.

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There may be one thing in the world that most of humanity agrees on. When considering the state of present-day institutions of economy, polity, community, and kinship relations, people broadly agree that most everything: is in crisis, does not serve the majority of humanity, and is destructive to the conditions for sustaining life on Earth as we know it. This is no longer a radical position. We live in a time where this knowledge is simply part of our consciousness. Why then, do we tend to lack vision? We know what we don't want, but what do we want?

Perhaps, those of us who seek a better world are merely heeding the cautions of our intellectual lamas, resisting overprescribed blueprints for future society as unknowable at best, and authoritarian at worst. But perhaps, we are also using this wisdom as a crutch because we are afraid to look ahead into the void and even contemplate that we can fundamentally change the world.

We call out society's wrongs, respond to the urgent and dire issues of now, survive and fight in the present. To be fair, keeping heads above water, struggling against a rough sea of suffering, can be a task that leaves little untapped. Even those who would support the struggle for a better world often succumb to mental and emotional exhaustion

before they ever lend their voice or lift a finger, let alone allow hope to set fire to their hearts so that inaction is no longer possible. The scope of it all suffocates initiative. Without vision, real, viable, attainable, inspiring vision, a trajectory that offers escape from capitalism's suicide march, we mistake tactics for strategy, fight from one battle to the next, and too often fail to see a clear path ahead. We wither from fatigue, squabble, and generally fail to inspire massively and deeply for our cause.

Anti-capitalists sorely need to conceive and share a worthy post-capitalist vision to overcome cynicism, to share strategic orientation, to guide practice and experimentation, and to retain commitment against serious opposition. We need to engage in discussion about where we want to go, why we want to get there, and how we might carve a path. Vision is for running towards something when it is insufficient to just run away.

The following essay is a brief introduction to Participatory Economics: what it is, why it matters, and how it is attainable. A useful first step to envision features of life beyond capitalism is to share some guiding values. Here, we propose five: self-management, equity, solidarity, diversity, and sustainability. To institutionalize these values, we propose five features that establish a framework, or scaffolding, for a post capitalist economy: a commons of productive resources, self-management via participatory councils, equitable remuneration, balanced work, and allocation via participatory planning. We touch upon wider implications, and propose strategy to help align practice with theory and context. We hope this highly summarized presentation will help engender further interest and questions about the merits and attainability of participatory economics, while it also

demonstrates that a worthy vision is necessary, urgent, and deserving of attention and action.

Self-Management

For decision making, we propose all people should have a say over decisions in proportion to the degree in which they are affected. Sometimes majority rule can do an excellent job. Other times consensus can do better. Sometimes we may need more deliberation, other times less. Sometimes a single person should overwhelmingly decide. Other times a highly affected group should decide, though respecting encompassing decisions made by larger groups.

The point is, while different deliberation and voting methods may best approximate self-management in different situations, the overarching norm always applies. No person deserves more say due to being male, female, trans, gay, straight, or having a different economic position, cultural affiliation, or political role. We all deserve to have proportionate say about what affects us.

The most typical criticism of advocating proportionate say emphasizes that some people can make better decisions. It claims that to benefit from their greater insights we should give them greater say.

But is that wise? Self-management itself has social and personal benefits, including mutual respect, solidarity, and participation. These exist even in cases where self-management might yield less insightful choices than allotting greater say to better decision makers. The consistent act of participatory self-management across society benefits society's development.

Second, for each of us to express our own personal preference is warranted by the simple fact that we each know best what we want. Self-management doesn't eliminate expert insights. I should decide whether I will undergo a medical treatment, but only after a doctor tells me my condition and the treatment's implications. Medical expertise should inform my decision. But my doctor shouldn't decide for me. My preferences matter. My will matters.

Self-management should respect and utilize all expert knowledge, but we should not elevate experts to have disproportionate say in choices that affect others. With that in mind, as our first guiding value, we propose that economic institutions should deliver decision making input to each actor in proportion as they are affected.

But can the way we produce, consume, and allocate actually accomplish all that, and still arrive at excellent decisions? Can economic decision making avoid elevating a few to rule? Must it consign most to obey? To attain self-management, we must answer these questions.

Equity

What is fair regarding benefits and costs? Philosophers debate. Constituencies battle. Let's strip it down and consider the situation anew. We know that society produces outputs which require effort and convey benefits. The equity question becomes: how to apportion society's social product among its population?

Suppose we could tally up all the benefits and debits from producing and consuming that each person enjoys or endures, individually and socially. We might then ask, why should one person have a better mix of benefits minus debits than other people? Why shouldn't all

people have a fair share of burdens to shoulder and in turn, enjoy a fair share of benefits?

For economic involvement, this inclination implies that we should each receive consumption rights to enjoy a share of the social product in accord with the duration we work, the intensity of our work, and the onerousness we endure, while doing socially valued labour—unless, of course, we can't work. In that case, this view implies that we should nonetheless get a full share, plus socially supported medical care and other similarly regarded collective benefits.

Remunerating this way treats everyone the same. If you work productively longer, harder, or in worse conditions, you get more. If you work productively less long, less hard, or in better conditions, you get less. Neither race, gender, talent, nor birth right, much less bargaining power or property ownership, enters the calculation.

Everyone who works contributes to producing social benefits. Everyone who consumes receives items from the social product. Taken together, shouldn't our total of production and consumption comparably reward us all?

One might complain that inequity—wherein some get more income and some get less due to having (or not having) property, bargaining power, inborn talents, more knowledge, or better equipment—is necessary to create motivation to excel, without which the total product would severely shrink. While this claim is much believed and constantly repeated, it is false. Ethically sound incentives do not benefit from allowing (much less from imposing) inequity. We need incentives to work longer, harder, or at worse conditions. That is true.

And equitable remuneration enables us to receive more for precisely those reasons and for no others.

Equity as we propose it means we get income for our effort and sacrifice in doing socially valued work. We do not get income for the luck of being genetically better endowed, or because we happen to produce something more valued, or because we happen to use better equipment, much less because we own property, or have greater bargaining power. All are treated the same. None benefit from genetic luck, or luck in having better tools, or due to denying others, and so on.

But can economic institutions incorporate and facilitate equity instead of providing income for property, power, or even output? Can the way we produce, consume, and allocate not only convey income solely for the duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially valued labour, but also simultaneously yield desired outputs and prevent unwanted waste? To attain economic equity, we must answer these questions.

Solidarity

Another value we propose in light of the fact that economy affects how people relate to one another is that people should feel solidarity throughout economic life. Economic circumstances and options should not produce a zero sum rat race where our workmates', our neighbours', or even distant peoples' loss becomes our gain. Instead, my wellbeing and your wellbeing should be intertwined so that we each benefit in tandem. We enjoy feelings of empathy. We celebrate mutual aid. Who would instead prefer an economy to produce anti-sociality in which 'nice guys finish last'?

Solidarity means people have a stake in, respect for, and room and reasons to enhance one another's wellbeing. It is an uncontroversial aspiration, but can the way we produce, consume, and allocate actually convey to all those involved mutual regard, respect, and even empathy, instead of imposing a hostile environment in which to be greedy at others' expense yields social advance and esteem? To attain economic solidarity, we must answer that question.

Diversity

Diversity is another largely uncontroversial value. We should not narrow but should instead expand options. We should not put all our eggs in one homogenized basket, but instead keep diverse alternative possibilities in play. We want expanded options and paths available to insure against losing our way when one path proves flawed and an alternative is needed quickly. It is strategic to encourage a diversity of thought and to preserve a diversity of options.

Further, while we can each do only what we can ourselves do, we can all vicariously benefit from others doing a wide range of things that we do not do. Variety spices life. Conformity entombs life. Indeed, who would prefer social homogeneity to social diversity? To value diversity, economic institutions should generate and preserve options, not narrow and stifle them.

But can the way we produce, consume, and allocate convey to all a wide range of truly diverse options, instead of commercialized and commodified collective conformity? To attain economic diversity, we must answer that question.

Ecological Wisdom

As a last value, we have what is arguably the least intellectually and emotionally controversial of the bunch, sustainability. We should live in the world but not defile the world. To account if something is worthwhile, we should also assess its implications for the environment, both in the present and the future. Who would favour, instead, to ignore ecological implications and provoke unsustainability? Who would prefer social suicide to ecological wisdom? An economy should reject killing itself. An economy should seek sustainability.

But can the way we produce, consume, and allocate account for impact on the environment? To attain ecological wisdom, we must answer that question.

Participatory Institutions

Suppose we adopt, or perhaps even just contemplate, the above values as a possible guide to proposing new institutions. In that case, we must ask what core defining institutions can foster self-management, equity, solidarity, diversity, and sustainability in people's economic lives?

Participatory economics proposes five core features for organizing the economy: a commons of productive resources, self-managed workers and consumers councils, balanced job complexes, equitable remuneration, and participatory economic planning. These institutions elevate and reproduce the values we seek for society. They provide a framework within which future people will determine further detail and diverse iterations, in the changing contexts of their lives.

Worker and Consumer Self Managing Councils

Private ownership of productive assets violates all our proposed values by guaranteeing immensely unwarranted power and wealth to owners. But if resources and workplaces are not owned by private individuals, who will replace the owners to decide workplace actions? Our proposed values suggest that each person participates in decision making in proportion as they are affected, which requires new decision-making venues and procedures.

For workplaces, we propose workers councils and at a lower level within workplaces, we propose work teams. At a more encompassing level, we propose industry federations of councils. Thus, each local workplace council is part of an industry council, and the sum of industry councils is the workforce of a whole economy.

For consumption, on the other hand, each person consumes as an individual, but also typically in a family, a living unit, and a neighbourhood, region, and state, and so would also be a member of a council, or a federation of councils, for each.

The structure and logic of every council is similar. Actors at the appropriate level deliberate, debate, express preferences, and finally tally their preferences to achieve, as well as possible, collective, cooperative, self-management. Sometimes, this is one person one vote. Other times, it involves different tallying procedures. Sometimes it includes greater, and other times lesser, time for and structuring of presenting and assessing options. But with such self-management, a new issue arises. What ensures that council based self-managed decisions are wise?

Balanced Job Complexes

How can we organize and apportion tasks to ensure wise workplace decisions. We want the work that people do to be fair and we want people to do things they can do well. But for workers to wisely self-manage outcomes, a profoundly important issue arises.

What we do affects how we feel, who we are, and what else we are able to do. If we spend much of our time doing acts that convey confidence, knowledge, skills, social connections, and access to decisions, our activity will prepare us to create and initiate. If we spend most of our time doing acts that deskill us, bore us, reduce our knowledge, isolate us, and diminish our confidence, our activity will prepare us to follow orders.

If we do various disempowering economic tasks over and over each day, then when we are both on and off the job, we will be prepared for little more than obeying orders. Our prior education and life circumstances will likewise have needed to prepare us to endure boredom and obey orders, lest we reject our position. On the other hand, if we do tasks that are overwhelmingly empowering, we will be prepared to take initiative and exert influence while at work and off work. Our prior education and life circumstances will likewise have needed to prepare us to employ our talents and give orders, lest we fail at our position and place.

In current economies, suppose we call employees who do overwhelmingly empowering work coordinators, and suppose we call employees who do very nearly entirely disempowering work, workers. We can confidently predict that not only will the coordinator class dominate the working class by conceiving options, setting agendas,

and deliberating—but, strikingly, most workers will, by virtue of what they daily see and experience, tend to feel that their situation is unavoidable and even appropriate. Coordinators will appear prepared, able, confident, and initiating. Workers will appear narrow, timid, and passive. It will appear natural, or at any rate inevitable, that coordinators rule and workers obey. Appearances will hide that such a pecking order is actually a product of contingent social relations that make some people more confident and prepared, and make other people less confident and prepared.

This reveals that economic class differences that establish and even seem to justify harsh hierarchies, can arise not only from ownership relations, but also from the kinds of tasks we do for the greater part of our waking days. Owning or not owning the means of production relegates some people to rule over other people who obey. But monopolizing empowering tasks, or conversely, doing mostly rote and obedient tasks, also relegates some people to rule over others who obey.

Capitalist economies have a coordinator class situated between owners above and workers below. Twentieth century socialism, state socialism, or state capitalism, despite eliminating private ownership of productive assets, still has an empowered coordinator class ruling a disempowered working class.

So far, we have proposed a post capitalist economy without owners and that workers self-manage. But how do we ensure that all employees have appropriate knowledge, skill, and confidence to make good decisions? We can't have a hierarchical division of labour relegate four out of five employees to be subservient, and one out of five to dominate. How can we transcend this familiar class division?

The participatory economic vision claims that if we want all workers empowered to be effective decision makers, we will have to redefine jobs so that everyone does a fair share of empowering and disempowering tasks. To get rid of capitalists bossing all others, we take away the basis for their rule. No more private ownership of productive property. With owners gone, to get rid of coordinators bossing, we have to take away the basis for their rule. No more monopolizing empowering tasks. The hierarchical division of labour must give way to balanced work.

We should acknowledge, however, that some will say those who can make good decisions deserve to be doctors, lawyers, engineers, managers, and decision makers—while others who cannot make good decisions, and who would even be oppressed by being required to do so, deserve to follow orders. Sexists and racists claim the same things about women and minorities. Seventy years ago, it was widely believed that the roles women and people of colour occupied were theirs by lack of capacity, not by relegation and denial. That was nonsense, society now agrees, but once even those relegated and denied thought it was true. Dominators universally claim the dominated are subordinate due to being inferior. Dominators self-servingly mistake the effects of oppressive structures for the cause of those structures.

In short, while some will say that having balanced job complexes violates nature, they ought to be ashamed to harbour such classist views. We cannot all do everything, that much is certainly true. And each of us has many things we cannot do. Also true. But, certainly, we can all, with rare exceptions, shoulder a fair share of creative and decision-making responsibilities, suited to and amenable to us. If we want classlessness—and who on the left will admit to not wanting

classlessness—balanced job complexes are essential. The hierarchical alternative inexorably creates rule by those who are structurally empowered. Even if we eliminate private ownership and institute democratic or better yet, self-managing councils, if the employees in such changed firms are organized into hierarchical jobs, roughly twenty percent will dominate. Regardless of initial desires, the corporate division of labour will in time distort desires and undo other innovations. Simply put, in considering who owns what, who earns what, and who decides what, we must not omit considering who does what. The implication of these claims is that desirable economic institutions need to include and sustain balanced job complexes.

Equitable Distribution of Benefits and Debts

The value espoused earlier for how to distribute benefits, which we called equity, when writ into institutions, entails that society apportion its responsibilities and offerings in such ways that each member gets a fair overall package. Considering the economy, this implies we should each receive a claim on consumption in proportion to the duration and intensity of our socially valued work, as well as accounting for the onerousness of the conditions under which we work.

Critics of this approach typically claim that it would cripple output. Who would want to be a doctor, they ask, if there was no large reward for doing so? Let's examine the situation. If a doctor's income was less, would you really prefer to skip college, skip medical school, skip being an intern, and then skip being a doctor (or similar choices prerequisite to some other empowering career) to go straight from high school directly into, say, a coal mine or into tending a fryer at McDonalds? The

widespread claim on behalf of society needing inequity implies that you would jump to McDonalds instead of being a doctor, were the doctor's wage much less. But would you, in fact, prefer flipping burgers to being in college so much that you would have to be paid ten or even fifty times as much for forty years, every year, to get you to undergo the so-called hardship of college, and then of empowering work? Would you opt for entirely rote repetitive labour, over some empowered role that you were suited for and desired, if the pay for being a rote worker were half of the pay for doing some more empowering work? What about if the income was the same? What if it was more for rote work? The truth is, pay the doctor a good living wage, and people wouldn't instead do only rote work even for a whole lot higher pay than doctoring, lawyering, engineering, or whatever.

It is also important to consider that with the institutions we are proposing, the situation addressed above doesn't even arise. Everyone works at a balanced job. We all do some empowering tasks and some rote tasks. We all receive an equitable income for the combination. More, everyone has an incentive to work capably and well at a useful activity. We all work as long and as intensely as we prefer, based on personal preference for consumption versus leisure time. The implication is that economic institutions, and indeed all institutions, should apportion rewards and costs equitably. For economic income, in particular, in the participatory economic view, this implies remuneration for the duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially valued labour—not to mention free education, of course.

Participatory Planning

The idea behind the final core institutional innovation that underpins the participatory economic vision is that the apportionment of energies, resources, and labour, and of the benefits that derive from their utilization, should be decided consistent with collective, cooperative self-management, in a way that gets the tasks done insightfully, and in tune with people's needs and desires.

In current economies, the allocation function occurs by way of markets and/or central planning. These institutions are, however, horrendously flawed, even when there is no private ownership of productive assets. Their normal operation generates harsh and irrational competition, authoritarianism, ecological calamity, fiscal crises, anti-social motivations, and class division. Economies utilize markets and central planning despite these flaws due to the benefits they convey to the most powerful and wealthy. To instead propel the values we have settled on, we need new structures of allocation, like we need new structures of decision making, remuneration, and division of labour. Indeed, if we were to employ markets and central planning, they would, by their operations, each subvert our earlier advocated institutional choices and values.

Work happens. Consumption happens. The allocation task is that each workplace must arrive at an agenda regarding intermediate goods, resources, tools, and labour, as well as regarding the outputs generated for whoever wishes to receive them. Likewise, each individual consumer, neighbourhood, city, state, etc., must arrive at an agenda regarding what it will receive, that others will produce or provide. To be viable and worthy, the decisions of each participating

workplace, of each individual consumer, and of each collective consumer, must in sum sensibly match up, minimizing shortages or leftovers. We want economic choices to account for personal, social, and ecological costs and benefits, so that we pursue options which are overall positive, and avoid options which are overall negative. We want to attain what we desire, without wasting what we value. We want allocation's requirements for our behaviours to foster values we favour and facilitate relations we desire, rather than for allocation to subvert both.

Millions upon millions of participants negotiate the distribution of vast quantities of goods and services. Our values place major demands on this massively complex problem. So now what? The usual answer is: let's have markets, or central planning, or a combination of the two, allocate for us. The problem is that, used in any combination, markets and central planning mis-account costs and benefits, pervert behaviour, diminish diversity, generate class division, destroy equity, and violate self-management.

That being the case, we propose participatory planning, a cooperative and collaborative process, in place of markets and/or central planning. Each workplace council (and by aggregation, federations of councils), and each individual and collective consumer, takes into account last year's actions, as well as predicted changes for this year, to propose their preferred activities. It would be a miracle if all of that immediately matched up desirably. When it doesn't, each participant takes into account the proposals of other participants and the implications of all proposals for predicted costs and benefits, and resubmits a new proposal. There will still likely be no match, but we will be closer. Actors massage their proposals in light of their own desires and

the revealed desires of other actors, as well as the revealed social and ecological costs and benefits to society, and to themselves. This happens in a series of iterations, with some adroit mechanisms consistent with the guiding values that facilitate coming more closely into accord each time.

Details aside, participatory economics claims that participatory planning can be done without competition, without an authoritarian centre, and can efficiently arrive at a worthy plan that manifests collective self-managed preferences. More, participatory economics claims the steps involved and the actions called for will be consistent with, manifest, and facilitate other features sought for the economy, including balanced jobs, equitable remuneration, and self-managing councils.

Further Implications: Ending Needless Crises and Attaining Human Fulfilment and Development

Why would attaining a commons of productive assets, self-managing councils, balanced job complexes, equitable remuneration, and participatory planning eliminate the types of crises we currently endure?

The short answer is that these new institutions won't intrinsically produce the dreaded outcomes. But what about plagues, drug epidemics, immigration problems, wars, and situations in which the value of one's holdings collapse, workplaces under or over produce, or global warming and ecological disasters proliferate?

Having a participatory society does not preclude a disease developing and spreading. But it does change how we deal with such problems. Rather than allocating intellectual energies to medical tasks to

maximize profits, medical tasks, like all economic projects, will be ruled by best estimates of impacts on human wellbeing and development. Errors will remain possible, but systematic violations of health care to generate profit will not be possible.

In a participatory economy, there is no incentive to accumulate profit for the few while ignoring, blocking, and even exacerbating conditions of danger on the job, toxic environments, or the need for worthy insurance. Even more critically, there would not be debilitating poverty or widespread malnutrition and starvation.

A participatory economy would remove the incentive to illicitly produce and distribute addictive drugs (and foods), by making it impossible to earn and enjoy great wealth based on such endeavours. In a participatory economy, income is a function of duration, intensity, and onerousness of labour undertaken via a workers' council in an industry which the plan labels worthy, due to popular desires for its product. Now suppose that some cartel or corporation decides to try to amass wealth via providing addictive cocaine, cigarettes, sniffing glue, diet pills, opioids, or whatever. How would people earn from such actions?

First, such activity wouldn't garner resources for production via the participatory planning system. Suppose clever albeit vile dealers found a way to escape that barrier and temporarily managed to amass huge revenues (actually also impossible unless each dealer was able to amass income for many false names all going to himself), how would they then enjoy their massive income? Any huge amount of consumer benefits in the hands of any individual must be a result of cheating, stealing, etc. That is, no one can work long enough or hard enough to

legitimately amass such excessive wealth. To have really excessive wealth reveals that one is a thief.

Since penalties for illegal activities presumably exist, options to enjoy the fruits of illegal activities are nearly nil, generating exorbitant sums in the first place is virtually impossible, and since everyone gets fair income in any event, there is virtually zero reason to cheat, steal, push harmful drugs, or even just to try to sell as much as possible of some product, beyond than to meet needs of users. Does this mean we all have the same income, much less consume the same things? Of course not, but differences in our incomes derive only from working less long or longer, from working less hard or harder, or from doing particularly onerous tasks. As a result, income differences are modest.

To take another example, potential immigration problems could persist until equitable relations were international, at which time there would be no economic reason for mass migrations. This gives each participatory society further incentive to help spread participatory structures broadly. Consider trade—it ought to occur in a manner that benefits weaker and poorer parties more than richer ones, so as to reduce gaps in wealth, rather than as now, in ways that disproportionately benefit more powerful and richer parties, thereby increasing gaps in wealth. This positive result is not intrinsic to participatory institutions existing in one country, but depends instead on future policy choices among countries. In a participatory economy, national populations would function in environments that produce solidarity and security, so it is reasonable to predict they would favour solidaric policies.

Wars over water, oil, or lithium, for imperial sway over trade routes, to protect corporations, to preserve or bolster political elites, or to punish populations would disappear because their causative dynamics would disappear, as with immigration, once new institutions are international.

War and colonialism do not generally benefit whole populations at the expense of other whole populations. Instead, typically elites in one country promote war at the expense of the population of their own country, and, as a kind of gigantic collateral damage, at the expense of the population of other countries. The counter-intuitive idea behind the above claim is simple. Suppose Britain colonizes India. It steals wealth, oppresses the population, etc. The population of India certainly suffers. But who gains? Britain? Not so fast — Britain is an abstraction. What is taken from India goes overwhelmingly to corporate elites in London. But the bill for this extraction is paid by the British population, via their taxes. So, in this case, for every \$2 depleted from Britain in costs of maintaining empire, only \$1 comes back in ripped-off profits. And yet, such a strange but common empire persists because the population pays the \$2 cost and the corporate elites collect the \$1 benefit. It turns out that imperial colonialism often not only rips off the colonized, but also costs so much to impose and maintain, that it also deepens inequality at home.

Consider wars such as in Indochina, undertaken to preserve empire from the threat of a ‘good example’ — from a country choosing to extricate itself from oppressive relations, which might lead others to follow suit (a possible factor in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, even as we write this piece). Or, consider wars in the Mideast, undertaken to control a resource, oil as a bargaining chip in international relations,

and so on. Who pays? Everyone in the targeted country, of course, and additionally, everyone in the host country who pays taxes to cover the costs. Who benefits? Elites in the host country—materially and politically—and some quislings, often, in the assaulted country too.

Why does all this disappear as we attain participatory economic relations inside countries? Because in a worthy society and economy, there are no such elites to benefit, and because the populations of each country, well informed and not perverted by having climbed to relative power in a rat race that produced in them anti-sociality and personal greed, would never sanction such sadistic aggrandizement by and for a few. A classless economy would have neither an institutional push toward war, nor a compliant population that would accept it.

What is actually meant by crises, that is, by economic dislocations? It is a crisis if productive units over produce so that there is great waste. This is an endemic condition of contemporary economies, without even taking account of useless war production, planned obsolescence, etc. This is a crisis for resource and labour allocation—and for ecology. It becomes a crisis for elites, however, only if it hurts profit possibilities.

If productive units underproduce causing shortages, and they do so in a runaway pattern so that too little consumption causes cuts in production, causing further cuts in consumer income, yielding still less consumption, then that is a crisis as well—certainly for the population and also for elites, when again, it grows to hurt profit possibilities.

A participatory economy would avoid all this by closely correlating output and consumption, and by doing so not to aggrandize a few, or

to abide orders given by a few, but to equitably address everyone's needs in light of everyone's self-managing preferences. Via self-managing councils, participatory planning, equitable remuneration, and balanced job complexes, there is simply no motivation other than to fulfil the agreed scenarios of society's plans as best as possible. There is no way for individuals or groups to make significantly higher income, or to otherwise gain, by producing less or more than desirable. There is no way to make higher income by inducing consumption through deceptive advertising or predatory finance, since such consumption wouldn't actually meet needs or increase social benefits.

Similarly, in a participatory economy, any project that objectively destabilizes ecology makes no overall social sense. Yes, it may provide short-term benefits for some, as does continuing to use oil now, but there will also be offsetting harm for many, perhaps immediately, and certainly in time. If an economy's allocation system, as with markets and central planning, seeks to benefit the few, considers only short-term results, and doesn't account for ecological effects, horrible ecological and social violations inevitably occur. But, if an allocation system assesses the ecological, social, and personal implications of choices; weighs the impact of the full implications on everyone, not just on a few; if it chooses actions consistent with people's preferences in light of carefully conveyed information, communicated via proportionate decision inputs for everyone; then these types of violations will disappear. Informed and confident populations will never agree to policies that clearly enrich a few while they hurt many, let alone endanger the conditions necessary for sustained life on Earth.

While all the above anti-crisis progress is crucially important, the virtue of a participatory economy and participatory society isn't only

to eliminate current tendencies toward crises. It is to eliminate the needless suffering and drudgery of business as usual: daily levels of inequity, authoritarianism, alienation, and ecological destruction. The chief virtue is positively attaining universal economic self-management, equity, solidarity, diversity, sustainability, classlessness and freedom.

Questions about almost every claim above should arise in your mind. Further assessment of the features behind these claims is needed to decide their merits and to make a full case. In this brief presentation, we again claim only that the above ought to motivate further investigation into the idea that a viable, worthy post capitalist economic vision is something to seek.

Economy and Society

What about the effects of economy on the rest of society and vice versa?

Economics matters. It undeniably affects most of what goes on in society. But we do not live by economics alone. Kinship, sexuality, community, culture, and polity also each affect most of what goes on in society. The same holds for ecology and international relations. We need vision for all key aspects of social life. Each key aspect creates the context of the other key aspects, directly affecting and even reproducing their contours. Each aspect needs to change for any one aspect to fully, permanently change. For movements to have sufficient members, cohesion, and solidarity to win against old structures and their defenders, all economically, sexually, culturally, and politically oppressed constituencies need to be part of, and to feel sufficiently

comfortable to provide leadership in each area of focus, not only in their own most proximate area.

What is the interface between participatory economics and what will be desirable vision for gender and sexuality, for race and cultural community, and for polity, ecology, and international relations? And, vice versa, what might be some implications of fundamental changes in those other realms upon economics?

Self-management means that in the economy men can't have more say than women, whites than blacks, one religion than another, or some political actors than others. The same goes for equity in the economy. All people being remunerated for duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially valued labour precludes racial, gender, sexual, and political income hierarchies. Likewise, there can't be racist or sexist apportionment of benefits and debits at work. Two advisories or questions arise. What prevents old ways in other domains of society from restraining or reversing gains in the economy? And, for that matter, what additional extra-economic gains do we want to have impressed on economic life by innovations conceived and enacted firstly elsewhere?

The upshot is that when the logic of participatory economics is fully operative, it leaves little if any room for racial, gender, sexual, or political hierarchies in economic burdens and benefits. However, ensuring that logic applies universally implies a need to transcend the causes of such hierarchies in familial/sexual, cultural/community, and political life, just as we have to transcend the causes of class hierarchy in economic life to ensure that class hierarchy emanating from

residual economic relations doesn't restrict or subvert changes won in those other domains.

Suppose feminist revolution establishes institutions in which men don't father and women don't mother but each parent. Likewise, suppose feminist revolution also establishes that caring activity is so important to the development of social wisdom, empathy, and solidarity, that all society's members should share in it. In response, economy would need to support, and certainly not violate, kinship's gains. Similarly, beyond participatory economy treating all to equity and self-management, if inter-communal revolution establishes norms regarding relations among cultural communities and rights of each, for example, to various holidays and cultural and linguistic practices, economy would have to abide and abet that. If political revolution establishes structures that need economic inputs and that impact economic choices, participatory economy would have to abide and abet self-management in polity too. If ecological revolution establishes certain restrictions or norms, beyond what emerges from participatory economy accounting economic affects on ecology, participatory economy would have to abide and abet that. Similarly, kinship, gender and sexual relations, inter-communal cultural relations, and political relations would have to aid and abet classlessness. The point is, participatory economics can reach its full potential only alongside transformation in all other domains of social life, and vice versa.

Current Strategy

Vision is not only about the future, but also the present. What would having a vision like the one called participatory economics imply for today's practical choices?

Broadly considered, if you want to get someplace new, it behoves you to take steps towards where you want to go, not steps that take you somewhere else. An obvious corollary is that you shouldn't reinforce unwanted old structures, nor should you create new ones that are contrary to reaching your destination. You should want to undermine unwanted old structures, and to develop new structures in tune with your aims. The familiar slogan is: 'Plant the seeds of the future in the present'.

With this view, we should aim to win changes that better the lot of people who are suffering. We should aim to seek those changes, however, in ways that develop consciousness, commitment, and desires suitable to winning still more gains on a continuing path toward our ultimate destination. We should build new institutions—both for struggle, and when possible, also for daily life—whose attributes increase consciousness, commitment, and desires suitable to winning still more gains, and whose features foster and become the features of the new society we seek.

For example, say we desire improvements in income for some exploited constituency, such as low wage workers in some region or industry. Of course, we should demand and seek to win higher pay. But with the approach suggested here, we should do that by talking not only about the immediate demand for higher wages, but also about what is really ultimately warranted, which is equitable remuneration. We would in that case, make a part of our agenda to develop awareness of what a preferred ultimate aim would look like, what it would take to win it, and how our current effort to win more pay now for some workers could be part of a longer project to win equitable remuneration for everyone. We would seek to organize in ways that would

leave all involved not only desiring more gains, but also organized, prepared, and emotionally eager to embark on winning more. We would develop campaigns and organizations designed to move on to new goals after winning current goals.

The same logic applies more generally. Say we wish to address defence spending. Again, we would make demands for immediate cuts, but we would also elaborate ultimate aims—say a new mode of allocation—and we would try to create structures of struggle that would persist and keep battling to eventually become the new structures of a new society.

If we compare the above non-reformist approach that seeks to win reforms, while developing ongoing campaigns and movements with ever increasing commitment and clarity about ultimate vision, to current approaches that deal with various crises, the difference is between being status quo oriented (called reformist) and being change oriented (called revolutionary). It is precisely this difference that people of good will and serious intent must embrace on the road to a better society.

A further implication of a participatory economic societal approach is of a somewhat different sort. Seeking not just a new economy but a new society, we have recognized that attaining a new economy depends on attaining new kinship, cultural, and community relations, a new polity, and more—and, vice versa—both because the various defining features of society each reproduce the rest, and because winning fundamental change regarding any one requires participation by constituencies that will only be committed if their prioritized features

are also addressed. But what about this more specific question of economic constituency?

Our vision for a participatory economy reveals a complexity that many past economic movements have failed to forthrightly address. There is capital and there is labour, but there is also a coordinator class in between. There is capitalism, there is post capitalism that elevates the coordinator class to ruling status, and there is also post capitalism of a classless sort: participatory economics. In other words, there is post capitalism with new bosses, rather than no bosses: coordinatorism. And there is post capitalism with no bosses: participatory economics.

The strategic implications of this distinction are not simple, or uncontroversial, but they are important. On the one hand, fundamental economic change needs the skills and knowledge that are currently monopolized by twenty percent of the population. On the other hand, fundamental economic change needs to avoid even unintentionally elevating the twenty percent coordinators as a new ruling class above the eighty percent workers.

It follows that participatory economic movements must welcome coordinator class participation, while simultaneously challenging coordinator class monopolization of empowering circumstances. Participatory economic movements must welcome working class participation, while simultaneously elevating working-class empowerment and leadership. This agenda needs to inform demands, modes of winning gains, and particularly modes of outreach, organizing, and organization building. Absent this agenda, economic movements will tend to be led by, and substantially reflect, coordinator class priorities

while they, for that very reason, also tend to repel working people, who rightly resent being subordinate in activism, just as they are in their workplaces. Movements need to orient activism and organization to working class aims, to empower working class participants, and to elevate working class leadership.

This is just a glimpse into some strategic implications which both inform and are informed by, allow and are allowed by, participatory economic struggle. Our organizing must aim to be as radical and as reflective as possible of the fundamental values we claim to seek.

A worthy vision for life beyond capitalism acknowledges that neither current nor future society is made up of perfect people, ever wise and ever willing to behave altruistically. Instead, we can build participatory institutions and systems that make it automatic, instead of impossible, for us to consider ourselves, each other, the environment, and any other 'externalities'. We must therefore build a movement that fosters, promotes, and rewards equity, solidarity, self-management, diversity, and sustainability, for all. On this path, we will make mistakes and continue to be human, but we will no longer be systematically set up to fail.

méta Working Papers

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