URBANIZATION without CITIES

The Rise and Decline of Citizenship

Murray Bookchin
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revised edition
MURRAY BOOKCHIN

For Murray Bookchin, the products of urbanization...form "a shapeless blob, a mere chaos of structures, streets, and squares." This observation is important [in view] of a historical account of the rise and fall of the city-state as the arena of citizen participation...Bookchin gives us a useful history and a call for action...

The New York Times

To reverse the city's dehumanization, social thinker Bookchin here advocates an agenda for participatory democracy. The new political culture he envisions is built around citizens' assemblies and decentralized cities....It is significant...

Publisher's Weekly, New York

Bookchin is the leading ecological thinker of our times. His work ranks alongside Lewis Mumford's monumental works on the culture and history of cities and goes beyond.
Prof. Kent Gerecke, University of Manitoba, editor of City Magazine

Murray Bookchin introduces provocative ideas about the nature of community, and what it means to be a fully empowered citizen. He believes that the tension that exists between rural and urban society can be a vital source of human creativity, thereby defining a new, richly imaginative politics which can help us recover the power of the individual, restore the positive values and quality of urban life, and reclaim the ideal of the city as a major creative force in our civilization. What is envisaged is an environmentally oriented politics, a new ecological ethics and a citizenry that will restore the balance between city and country and, ultimately, between humanity and nature.

Murray Bookchin is a pioneer thinker and writer, and has been active in the ecology movement for more than thirty years. He is widely regarded as one whose ideas are decades ahead of his time. Professor Emeritus at the School of Environmental Studies, Ramapo College and Director Emeritus of the Institute of Social Ecology, he has authored more than a dozen books on urbanism, ecology, technology and philosophy.

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MURRAY BOOKCHIN
For Jane Coleman and Dan Chodorkoff—

and in memory of Zeitel Kaluskaya (1860–1930),
my grandmother, who raised me
and showed me a world long gone by.
Books by Murray Bookchin

Defending the Earth (with Dave Foreman)
The Philosophy of Social Ecology (1990)
Remaking Society (1989)
The Modern Crisis (1986)
Toward an Ecological Society (1980)
The Spanish Anarchists (1976)
The Limits of the City (1973)
Post-Scarcity Anarchism (1971)
Crisis in Our Cities (1965)
Our Synthetic Environment (1962)
THE CITY AT ITS BEST is an ecocommunity. To ignore this compelling fact is to ignore the destruction it faces by one of the most serious phenomena of the modern era, the massive urbanization that is sweeping it away together with so many natural features of our planet. Urbanization is not only a social and cultural fact of historic proportions; it is a tremendous ecological fact as well. At a time when the overwhelming majority of people in North America and Western Europe regard themselves as city dwellers, we are obliged, if only for ecological reasons, to explore modern urbanization. We must explore not only its impact on the natural environment, a subject that has already been discussed in considerable detail by many writers, but, more significantly these days, the changes urbanization has produced in our sensibility toward society and toward the natural world. A social ecology of the city is needed today if ecological thinking is to be relevant to the modern human condition.

This book attempts to lay the groundwork for such a social ecology. It tries to develop a concept of the city in those participatory terms that are uniquely characteristic of all "ecosystems" (or, as I prefer to call them, ecocommunities). It relates ecology’s participatory sensibility to the city in all its forms over the course of history, partly to show that the city was a social ecocommunity at various times insofar as it fostered diversity, mutualism, and connectedness. In applying a participatory sensibility to the city, I have been obliged to take the reader on a voyage into the evolution of the city, just as any serious natural ecologist would be obliged to deal with the biological development of an organism to better understand its life-cycle. To think about the city as an ecocommunity is to try to understand how it evolved, what forms it assumed over time, how it functioned as more than a mere market
or center of production, and, in the last analysis, how members of this urban ecocommunity called the city interacted with each other to produce a form of "second nature"—a humanly made "nature"—that existed in balance with the "first nature" we usually call the natural environment. Hence the citizens of a city are of no less concern to me than the city itself, for the city at its best eventually became an ethical union of people, an ethical as well as social ecocommunity, not simply a dense collection of structures designed for no other purpose than to provide goods and services for its anonymous residents.

What I wish to do is redeem the city, to visualize it not as a threat to the environment but as a uniquely human, ethical, and ecological community that often lived in balance with nature and created institutional forms that sharpened human awareness of their sense of natural place as well as social place. My repeated references to the agrarian world could easily be regarded as references to the natural world as well. My emphasis on civic participation can be taken as the social counterpart of biological mutualism; citizenship, as the social counterpart of biotic involvement in shaping the form of a natural ecocommunity; civic history, as the social counterpart of natural history. My goal, in effect, has been to redefine the city and the citizen in the language of social ecology in the hope that environmentally as well as socially oriented people today will understand what the city and citizenship used to be in order to better understand what they should be in an ecological society.

The real urban crisis of our time, I shall emphasize, has resulted not from the emergence of the city as such; rather it results from the emergence of a relatively new and cancerous phenomenon that poses a deadly threat to the city and countryside alike: urbanization. The nature of this threat—not merely as geographic sprawl but a devastating dehumanizing of city life, a destructing of community, and a denaturing of agrarian life—is the underlying theme of this book. I must leave it to the pages which follow for a more complete description and elucidation of the vast problems urbanization is creating. My argument runs counter to the conventional wisdom that city and countryside, like society and nature, are necessarily in conflict with each other, a theme that pervades so much of the writing on urbanity of western society.
Quite to the contrary: however much city life marks a departure in many social respects from the more natural forms of human sociation such as tribal and kinship groups, the city has often been as much a gift to the ecology of a landscape as it has been a harm. To recover a feeling for the participatory civic institutions that once marked city life and citizenship is to recover those ideals of civic life and a civic sensibility that could countervail the massive destruction that urbanization inflicts on city and countryside alike.

This book advances several reflections on how an ecological politics can be developed. In so doing, it redefines the word politics itself along ecological lines, much as Green groups in North America and Europe have been doing over the past years. Finally, this book makes a plea for a confederal and institutional politics, this is, for enlarging the democratic, grass-roots institutions that countervail the growing centralization of the nation-state, not the conventional electoral politics based on single issues and parliamentary tournaments.

Much that motivated my writing of this book stems from my conviction as a social ecologist and environmental activist that there is a pressing need to view the city—more generally, the municipality, if we are to include towns as well as metropolitcan areas—as an ecological enterprise, not merely a logistical or structural one. Hence, the largest chapter in this book advances a programmatic agenda for recovering not only an ecological image of the city and an active citizenry but a way of looking at politics that combines the high ideal of a participatory citizenship—in short, ecological values based on participation as a mutualistic phenomena in society as well as in nature.

In any case, the city is here to stay. Indeed, it has been a crucial part of human history and a factor in the making of the human mind for some seven thousand years. Can we afford to ignore it? Must we accept it as it is—as an entity that faces obliteration by a sprawling urbanization that threatens the countryside as well? Or can we give the city a new meaning, a new politics, a new sense of direction—and, also, provide new ideals of citizenship, many of which were in fact attained in great part during past times? By ignoring the city and citizenship, we do so at the peril of becoming isolated from the great mass of humanity which is threatened by the anonymity and powerless created by urbanization. This is a
issue which all socially and environmentally oriented people must face and answer in their own way. My goal, here, is to pose the question of urbanization and citizenship as clearly as I can and advance some modest solutions based on my own concerns as a social ecologist.

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INTRODUCTION

The city has been a favorite target of hostility from biblical times onward—and it is no less so today. Viewed as a festering source of moral depravity by many people, it has been variously assailed as an ugly blight on a seemingly pristine natural landscape, as the sinful embodiment of a human nature that is aggressive, domineering, or even as “male” in its “rape” of a caring Mother Earth and “her” gentle aboriginal folk and animal offspring. I will leave the metaphoric, often terribly fuzzy ruminations of this genre of anti-city sentiment aside. A far stronger case can be made for an anti-city sentiment that regards modern, generally sprawling and formless urban agglomerations as sources of anomie, fear, self-interest, and a host of environmental problems. Urbanization, as I call this ever-encroaching and ever-growing phenomenon that we so often facilely identify with cities as such, can indeed be as toxic to the human spirit as it can be to a region’s natural integrity.

But what, then, is a city? And are the people trapped in modern-day urban agglomerations really citizens?

Urbanization Without Cities raises these questions in a reflective and hopeful way. Far from joining the chorus of city-denouncers, I wish to explore the enormous value of cities—and towns—as remarkable human creations. In responding to the above questions, I have tried to examine from a historical viewpoint the origins of cities, their role in shaping humanity as a highly unique and creative species, and the promise they offer as arenas for a new political and social dispensation. I have tried to examine how the city evolved, what forms it assumed over time, how it functioned as more than a mere market or center of production, and how
citizens of a city interacted with one another to produce a form of what the great Roman thinker Cicero called "second nature"—that is, a humanly made "nature"—that existed in balance with the "first nature" we usually call the natural environment. Hence the citizens of a city are of no less concern to me than the city itself, for the city at its best ultimately became an ethical union of people, a moral as well as a socio-economic community—not simply a dense collection of structures designed merely to provide goods and services for its anonymous residents.

What I wish to do is to redeem the city, to explore it not as a corrosive phenomenon but as a uniquely human, ethical, and ecological community whose members often lived in balance with nature and created institutional forms that sharpened human self-awareness, fostered rationality, created a secularized culture, enhanced individuality, and established institutional forms of freedom. My repeated references to the agrarian world can easily be regarded as references to the natural world as well. My emphasis on civic participation can be taken as the social counterpart of biological mutualism; citizenship, as the social counterpart of biotic involvement in shaping the forms of natural ecocommunities; and civic history, as the social counterpart of natural history. In using the word counterpart here, however, I do not mean that civic participation, citizenship, and civic history are reducible to natural mutualism, ecocommunities, and biological evolution; they differ in far too many ways to be congruent. But this is a philosophical question I have dealt with in a broad discussion of first and second nature in my The Philosophy of Social Ecology (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1990). Suffice it to say here that my goal in this book has been to redefine the city and the citizen in the language of social ecology. It is my hope that thoughtful people today will attempt to understand what the city and citizenship used to be in order to better understand what they could be in a free, rational, and ecological society.

The usual kinds of answers given to the question of what constitutes a city are often spatial and demographic in character,
viewing the the city as an area occupied by a closely interlock-
ed, densely populated human community. This definition,
cast in largely quantitative terms, has been advanced for a
long time. In fact, it is the popular criterion for the prestige en-
joyed by some cities over other ones, and of cities generally
over towns and villages. Tradition has it that the larger a city
is, the better it is culturally and economically, by comparison
with smaller communities. It is worth noting that years ago,
American census-takers regarded communities of five
thousand people or more as urban and those with smaller
populations as rural. More recent criteria of what constitutes
a city have changed only quantitatively. The word city, in fact,
has turned into something of a social euphemism, the
product of a time long past. Today, statisticians and many ur-
banologists favor the use of such categories as the Standard
Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA)—sprawling, densely oc-
cupied regions that ordinarily embrace millions of people. In
reality, cities are being supplanted by areas so immense in size
that they are losing their contours, specificity, and unique-
ness. Many urban agglomerations today have larger popula-
tions than many countries had a century ago and are in many
respects hardly different from small nation-states.

My own definition of a city cannot be reduced to a single
proposition. Like rationality, science, and technology, which I
regard as defined by their own histories, I view the city as the
history of the city. That is to say, I view the city as the cumula-
tive development—or dialectic—of certain important social
potentialities and of their phases of development, traditions,
culture, and community features. Least of all do I see citifica-
tion—a processual noun for the city in history—as a mere
“system of space,” to use Henri Lefebvre’s phrase, in which
the geometrical term space becomes a quasi-mystical category
for social, economic, and cultural relationships—relationships
that I feel should be explored quite directly, without the
convoluted “decoding” that enters into the work of certain
postmodernists and neo-Marxists today. Neither from simple
propositional definitions nor from somewhat mystical
postmodernist gymnastics would I have any way of knowing
how cities and their village, temple, and town progenitors
came into being, how they developed, or what they ought to be if their potentialities were to be fulfilled in a free and rational society.

Defining the early city, I maintain, begins with the recognition of the city as a creative breach with humanity's essentially biological heritage, indeed the "metamorphosis" of that heritage into a new social form of evolution. The city was initially the arena par excellence for the transformation of human relationships from associations based on biological facts, such as kinship, to distinctly social facts, such as residential propinquity; for the emergence of increasingly secular forms of institutionalization; for often rapidly innovative cultural relations; and for universalizing economic activities that had been previously associated with age, gender, and ethnic divisions. In short, the city was the historic arena in which—and as a result of which—biological affinities were transformed into social affinities. It constituted the single most important factor that changed an ethnic folk into a body of secular citizens, and a parochial tribe into a universal civitas, where, in time, the "stranger" or "outsider" could become a member of the community without having to satisfy any requirement of real or mythic blood ties to a common ancestor. Not only did political relationships replace kinship relationships; the notion of a shared humanitas replaced the exclusivity of the clan and tribe, whose biosocial claims to be "the People" had often excluded the "outsider" as an inorganic, exogenous, or even threatening "other."

Hence the city was historically the arena for the emergence of such universalistic concepts as "humanity"—and is potentially the arena for the reemergence of concepts of political self-regulation and citizenship, for the elaboration of social relations, and for the rise of a new civic culture. The steps from a consanguineous clan, tribe, and village to a polis, or political city; from blood brothers and sisters who were born into their social responsibilities to citizens who in the best of circumstances could freely decide on their civic responsibilities and determine their own affinities based on reason and secular interests—these steps constitute a meaningful definition of the city. Cities, to be sure, can rise and fall. They can enjoy
good fortune for a time or, owing to conflicts, totally disappear. But once the city established firm roots in the history of social development, it acquired a conceptual reality that still persists, and it can still undergo many metamorphoses despite the disappearance or stagnation of individual cities. The city, in effect, has become a historic tradition—often a highly moral one—that tends to expand uniquely human traits and notions of freedom, and an idea of civic commonality that corrodes the parochial bonds of blood ties, gender distinctions, age status-groups, and ethnic exclusivity.

We can thus legitimately speak of the history of the city without focusing on the rise, development, and decline of any one city in particular. And we can speak of this history as cumulative. The late medieval city, for example, united civic and ideological traditions that had originated in Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome, and that persisted long after those cities had declined as innovative civic entities. Later, the cities of the Renaissance, the Baroque era, and the Enlightenment arose as reworked arenas of ancient and medieval cities, borrowing from them their architecture, literature, art, religions, and philosophies, yet transforming them to meet the needs of a new time.

The ways in which actual cities provide us with processual definitions of the city form much of the content of this book. Insofar as I am guided by the Greek notion that a city or polis is an ethical union of citizens, I am committed to an overarching vision of what the city ought to be, not merely what it is at any given time. The term ought is the stuff out of which ethics is usually made—with the difference that in my view the "ought" is not a formal or arbitrary regulative credo but the product of reasoning, of an unfolding rational process elicited or derived eductively from the potentialities of humanity to develop, however falteringly, mature, self-conscious, free, and ecological communities. I call this integration of the best in first or "biological" nature and second or "social" nature an emergently new "third" or free nature—that is, an ethical, humanly scaled community that establishes a creative interaction with its natural environment. From a processual
standpoint, I refuse to bifurcate that continuum we call "Na­
ture" into a biological world and a social world that stand in flat opposition to each other. Both are in a very real sense natural, and their naturalness finds its evolutionary realiza­
tion in those remarkable primates called human beings who, consciously responding to a sense of obligation to the eco­
logical integrity of the planet, bring their rational, commu­ni­cative, richly social, imaginative, and aesthetic capacities to the service of the nonhuman world as well as the human.

This ethics of complementarity, as I called it years ago, would not only be a culminating point of aeons of natural evolution, once it guided human behavior in the cities of an ecological society; it would eminently be a culminating point of reason itself—a condition in which rational goals could be established for citizenship not only in new, ecologically oriented networks of cities but in truly rational beings called citizens. For citizenship, too, is a process—as the Greeks so brilliantly saw—a process involving the social and self-forma­tion of people into active participants in the management of their communities. As this book stresses, citizens today no longer even approximate the high and eminently human standard of citizenship that was established in the Hellenic world—a meaning that must be recovered, as well as the personal and social training, or paideia, for producing citizens.

To this high civic and ethical calling, so to speak, we are sum­moned by reason: to networks of new, humanly scaled cities, to citizenship, to directly democratic political institutions, and to a vastly expanded ideal of freedom. The cities I have dis­cussed in this book approximate the fulfillment of this call­ing—some more than others, a few more highly conscious of free civic ideals than the rest—in civic cultures that held to such intuititve, often naive notions of citizenship that they were highly vulnerable to destructive forces; and in thinkers who projected (often in revolutionary situations,) in thought what they believed should have been achieved in actuality but, alas, was not.

When I use the word networks in this book, I am alluding not to ad hoc interactions, tentative agreements, contracts, or
transient associations among cities—although these were common enough, if usually very short-lived, in the past. Rather, I am referring to what has long been a theoretical ideal and at times an impressive municipal reality: namely, *confederations*. I cannot stress how integrally the confederal association of cities and towns is part of the development of a free, ecologically oriented society. Localism, in the narrow sense of a virtually autarchical locality that aspires to "self-sufficiency"—in the sense so popular in the ecology movement today—could easily produce a parochialism notable for such evils as racism, cultural insularity, and a stagnant traditionalism. Conceived localistically, municipalities would be as regressive as authoritarian nation-states.

Confederalism is explicitly *not* "localist" but is rather *integrative*, as I explain in the appendix to this book. It rests on the mutual obligations of confederated municipalities to systematically adjudicate conflicting claims, coordinate common efforts, and see to the administration of municipal policies without infringing on the right of the majority of its participants. That consensual forms of agreement where possible would be the most desirable decision-making procedure does not mean that majority decision-making should not be adopted if a confederation risks the prospect of being tyrannized by the few at the expense of the many. Moreover, confederation, if it is to be successful, must not only function in accordance with majoritarian forms of decision-making; it must diminish the authority of confederal councils, the higher they are, in coordinating the policies formulated at the basic level of decision-making—the citizen assembly of a municipality.

A clear distinction must be drawn between *administration* and *policy-making*: the former would fall within the province of the confederal councils, while the latter would fall within the province of the municipal assemblies. The traditional hierarchial pyramid of authority would thus be literally inverted in confederal municipalism; the "apex" of all authority would lie with the municipal assemblies, guided by majority rule both in the assembly and among the assemblies of a confederal region; the "base" would lie with the broadest con-
federal councils whose work is simply administrative and ad-
judicatory, and whose deputies, drawn from smaller con-
federal bodies, would be easily recallable and subject to
careful popular oversight.

Is this a chimerical scheme? History has shown that the
very contrary is true. Although confederations in the past
often fell apart, each for very specific reasons that would re-
quire a full volume to explore, they were often shattered or
confined to limited areas by imperial states and, more recent-
ly, the nation-state. Confederations, in fact, have a long and
impressive history. They were the principal political
weapons for resisting—and, for a time, diminishing—state
power. The struggles of confederated Rhenish cities in the
late Middle Ages against the Holy Roman Empire and of the
confederated Spanish cities against Charles V during the
Reformation era can be cited as partially successful attempts
to abort or restrict imperial and national power. In Spain,
confederal movements had an impact on public life that was
felt well into the 1930s.

In many respects, this contest between confederalism
and the nation-state is reemerging today, although very little
consciousness guides intuitive opponents of the nation-state,
a shortcoming that has more to do with the atrophied con-
sciousness of so-called “Left”-wing movements than with
any other single factor. Indeed, if the closing decade of this
century is permitted to pass without the emergence of a
strong, self-conscious, and well-organized movement that is
committed to municipal confederation, radical theory and
practice will deserve the ignominious oblivion into which
Marxist and individualistic “anarchist” tendencies have been
drifting for some time now. Today’s dogmatic or subcultural
radical movements may one day be viewed with contempt if
they reject the last—and in my view their only—prospect of
functioning as popular movements, and if they fail to cross
the line from academic or personalistic subcultures into the
public sphere where they could still reach millions of eager
but confused people. Popular albeit inchoate impulses toward
these same ideas—local control, confederation, and a new
politics—may well be used, in altered form, and manipulated
by reactionary forces in the service of racist, parochial, and ultimately authoritarian ends.

**Urbanization without Cities** thus advances an appeal—perhaps the last that can be made in this period—not only for a new theoretical framework in which to develop a new politics (in this term's Hellenic meaning rather than in the parliamentary meaning imparted to it by the nation-state). It also advances an appeal for a self-conscious practice in which confederal municipalists engage in local electoral activity to alter city and town charters, restructure civic institutions to provide the public sphere for direct democracy, and bring the means of production under citizen control—not under the particularistic forms of "workers' control" that tend to degenerate into a form of collectivistic capitalism, or under forms of nationalized production, which enhance the state's authority with greater economic power.

This practice is not a mere "strategy," to use the language of the traditional Left—indeed, the language of all statist movements. It is not a "means" to an end, least of all a very unclear and muddled end. Rather, it is the unfolding of an end: the famous "Commune of communes," to which socialists and anarchists alike long aspired, especially after the legendary Paris Commune of 1871, which explicitly used this term. In this process or dialectic of unfolding, the achievement of a Commune of communes—or in less colorful terms, a confederation of municipalities—requires a completely uncompromising politics. It rests on the notion of a fundamental duality of power in which increasingly independent and confederated municipalities emerge in flat opposition to the centralized nation-state. Indeed, whatever power confederated municipalities gain can be acquired only at the expense of the nation-state, and whatever power the nation-state gains can be acquired only at the expense of municipal independence.

In the force-field that exists between the two, either the municipalities and their confederations will increase their power by diminishing the the power of the nation-state, or the nation-state will increase its power by diminishing the
authority of the municipalities and their confederations. Thus, for a municipalist movement to run candidates for state, provincial, or national office would be an absurd, in fact, oxymoronic subversion of its very claim to seek a “grassroots” or “participatory democracy,” if only because any office beyond the municipal level is, almost by definition, a form of representation rather than participation. Even more significantly, it would ignore the crucial fact that as they run candidates for local offices, confederal municipalists are also running them against state, provincial, and national offices and institutions. The demand for municipal confederations is simultaneously a demand for opposition to the nation-state in all its forms, and to the illusion that the control of state, provincial, or national legislative bodies on the “top” is a precondition for the attainment of local power at the “bottom.”

Not only would campaigns for state, provincial, and national office relax the tension between the “top,” which is the realm of statecraft, and the “bottom,” which is the realm of an authentic politics; they would diminish the educational function of politics at the “bottom,” which alone can become the realm of a new politics. Far from reaching greater numbers of people by running candidates for the summits of state power, such campaigns would confuse the distinction between politics and statecraft, between the participatory and the representative, between the confederal and the national. Not only would the tension between these two utterly opposing spheres of activity be relaxed and its dialectic aborted; and not only would the truly democratic nature of political education, which is based on face-to-face discourse between neighbors and citizens, be replaced by the media; but the very moral and educational thrust of a libertarian or confederal municipalist approach would be lost as a heavy mist beclouded the distinction between politics and statecraft. A “Commune of communes” is not a “Republic of communes” or a “Commonwealth of communes”; indeed, as a confederation of municipalities, it stands uncompromisingly opposed to any spurious attempts to reduce a confederation or commune to a republic or a commonwealth.
Radicals, social-democrats, and liberals—not to speak of that hybridized phenomenon known as “the Greens”—have never learned how to deal with the problem of state power. If history from earliest recorded times to the present has demonstrated anything, it is the implacable fact that state power is corruptive. None of the most idealistic and principled revolutionary leaders of the past lived comfortably with the corruptive effects of state power. Either they succumbed to it, or they consciously tried to diffuse it. The retention of state power destroyed the moral integrity not only of the most radical Puritans of the seventeenth century, who were eager to gain it, but that of the most dedicated socialists, communists, and anarchists who actually held it for a time. The English, French, Russian, and Spanish revolutions provide compelling evidence of the capacity of state power to corrupt—a capacity that can no longer be regarded as a moral truism but, given its unrelenting nature, must be seen as an existential fact. To pursue state power—or to “seize” it, to use the language of traditional radicalism—is to guarantee that it will persist as a form of elitist manipulation, expand, and be brutally exercised as an instrument against a popular democracy.

A libertarian or confederal municipalist politics advances the best approach against “seizures” of state power and its retention by an elite, by slowly trying to accrete power for municipalities—initially, by acquiring moral power for municipal assemblies, as I have indicated in the closing chapter of this book. Libertarian or confederal municipalism seeks to expand the democratic institutions that still linger on in any modern republican system by opening them to the widest public participation possible at any given time. Hence the slogan that I have advanced: “Democratize the Republic! Radicalize the Democracy!” It is not that state power is to be “seized”—and then never relinquished—but that popular power is to be expanded until all power belongs to the institutions of a participatory democracy.

From this standpoint, the distinction between politics and statecraft must be maintained in a clear and uncompromising manner, all the more to assure that no “prag-
matic" exigencies or parliamentary "strategies"—even if they are used only to propagandize one's views or challenge the "top" from the "top"—are invoked for seemingly confederal-municipalist ends. Indeed, the most effective impact of municipalist propaganda comes precisely from the fact that it is municipalist—that is to say, that it can be conducted only by person-to-person contact and its scope hopefully extended by a movement that tries to reach every municipality in a region or nation. It is this kind of propaganda that makes for trust, personal interaction, and face-to-face education and that fosters the development of a face-to-face democracy. Its authentic starting point is the small study group, the local lecture hall, the neighborhood press, and personal discourse—not the electronic media of statecraft that hypnotized the countercultural "media freaks" of the 1960s.

Most of the ideas that appear in this introduction are elaborated in the body of this book. They are developed against the larger background of a historic moment in the evolution—and I should add, the decline—of city life, namely the emergence of a major threat to city and countryside alike: urbanization. The existence of this threat—not merely as geographic sprawl but as a devastating dehumanization of city life, a destructuring of community and a denaturing of agrarian life—informs the views that follow. My argument runs counter to the conventional wisdom that city and countryside, like society and nature, are necessarily in conflict with each other, a theme that pervades so much of the writing on urbanity in Western society. Quite to the contrary: whatever may be the ways in which city life marks a departure from the more "natural" forms of human association such as tribal and kinship groups, the city has been more of a gift to social life and the ecological landscape than it has been harmful. To recover a feeling for the participatory civic institutions that once marked city life and citizenship is to recover those ideals of civic life and civic sensibility that could countervail the massive destruction that urbanization and the nation-state inflict on city and countryside alike.
My writing of this book stemmed from my conviction as a social ecologist and eco-anarchist that there is a pressing need to view the city—more generally, the municipality, if we are to include towns as well—as an ecological enterprise, not merely as a logistical or structural one. The word *ecological* means a good deal more here than it does in the conventional environmentalism of the single-issue movements that are concerned with pollution, the retention of relatively untouched forests, the perpetuation of wildlife, and the like. Ecology, in my view, is more a societal project than a biological one. It should be conceived in terms that explore how notions of domination and the historical development of hierarchy have led to the social as well as natural problems we face today. For a clearer understanding of my ecological perspective—social ecology—the reader is advised to consult my many books on the subject, particularly *The Ecology of Freedom* and *Remaking Society*. The present book is concerned with what are loosely called "urban problems," or if you like, "urban ecology." Its goal is practical as well as theoretical. Hence, the largest chapter in the book ("The New Municipal Agenda") advances a programmatic agenda for recovering not only an ecological concept of the city and an active citizenry but the creation of a new politics that combines the high ideal of a participatory citizenship with a recognition of what the city or town can be in a rational, free, and ecological society.

In any case, the city, however much more distorted it may become in the future, will remain a problem. At its best, it has been a crucial part of human history and a force in the making of the human mind for some seven thousand years. Can we afford to ignore it? Must we accept it as it is—as an entity that sprawling urbanization threatens to obliterate, as it threatens to devour the countryside as well? Or can we give the city a new meaning, a new politics, a new sense of direction—as well as provide new ideals of citizenship, many of which were in fact once attained in previous times? We ignore the city and citizenship at the peril of becoming isolated from the great mass of humanity, which is threatened by the anonymity and powerlessness created by urbanization. This
is an issue that all socially and environmentally concerned people must face. My goal here is to pose the question of the future of cities and citizenship as clearly as I can and to advance solutions based on the principles of social ecology.

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