

**Session 6 agenda, 10/9/03. Sociology 929, *Envisioning Real Utopias*.
Michael Albert's *Parecon***

1. Is it possible that people in a parecon would decide that some domains of consumption should be left unplanned – i.e. respond simply to haphazard consumption choices which trigger adjustments. Just as in capitalism we have some things provided by public agencies, isn't it possible that for some categories of things people will decide that it is enough to regulating through public agencies the problem of externalities and allow the production process to be driven by individual uncoordinated choices.

2. The year-plan protocol: why is a year the relevant planning horizon? Aren't there major smoothing problems by having all decisions made on the same planning horizon at the same time?

3. Wouldn't there be some market-like processes at work in making the fine-gained in-process adjustments to the participatory planning. Imagine a theater: the producers in the theater firm make their proposals; consumers in the community make their consumption proposals. Everything is coordinated and results in an allocative plan. Then the theater produces a show which is wildly popular to the individuals who choose to buy tickets and go to see it. They have been allocated a run of 4 weeks. Other consumers want to redirect consumption from travel, or restaurants, or whatever to see the show. All of this triggers adjustments. Wouldn't these be really market-like: the theater gets its signal not from the coordinated deliberation of consumer councils but from the behavior of individuals choosing a particular show? Isn't that a market?

4. What is the scope for purely individual production choices based on individual priorities? I write a book and then try to convince the publishing cooperative firm to publish it rather than try to get hired as the book-writer?

5. Do councils have the right to decide on unbalanced work complexes if they believe the trade-off is worthwhile? Suppose they really would rather have more performances of the play rather than fewer, even if this means that the actors who love to perform would have a different balance?

6. Gaming the system, asses, hiding information: one of the key problems in central planning was the perverse incentives of hiding information and biasing proposals because it made life easier. This would still be a problem – perhaps not fatal, but still a problem. Would this problem be worse in parecon from markets? Perhaps not overall, but it could be in some settings. Individuals would have incentives to claim that a given task is more onerous than it really is – and this can be a group problem: everyone in an orchestra might want to insist on how onerous and burdensome practicing is, and thus get out of the floor-mopping jobs.