

An Example of the Type of Future for Which We Are Fighting

Of Course, our future development of co-ops, collectives, and other such organizations will be based on the time, place, and conditions under which they are developed. But, here is a bright example of a co-op, Nanjie in Henan Province in China.

In 1976, the only non-agricultural asset in the village was a medium-sized Kiln for brickmaking that lay unused and inoperable. However, the villagers needed bricks to build new houses; they raised funds to revive the brickworks by having people pay in advance for the bricks they ordered. This raised \$43,000, and in 1981, the brickworks commenced production. By 1991, Nanjing was the wealthiest village in Henan, generating \$20 million in sales.

The welfare system provided all villagers, including those who were self-employed, free water, electricity, coal, housing, and meat during the Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and New Year. All distributions were rationed according to family size, i.e. need.

The collective village deployed part of its income to build furnished apartments for the people. From 1992-1997 they moved out of their houses onto *free* apartments that were assigned according to family size.

Members of different ethnicities and village teams lived in common buildings. Younger people were assigned to upper floors and older people to lower floors due to their limited mobility. Each apartment is equipped with the same quality furniture, appliances and central air-conditioning and heating. All villagers receive monthly distributions of necessities, including meat, vegetables, spices, drinks, cooking oil, and snacks.

The village also provides funerals and weddings, education, and medical care! For serious diseases that the village clinic cannot treat, the village pays for its citizens to travel to large cities to get free care. The village pays for college tuition outside the village, living expenses, and travel expenses to get there. The village also provides free nursing homes for the elderly, where they receive free food, lodging, entertainment, and medical care.

All villagers are guaranteed a job, but they are free to leave and return to the village anytime. Several enterprise managers left to start their own businesses elsewhere, but all of them failed in the competitive market economy, so they returned to Nanjie to take management positions.

Many benefits are allocated according to need, not according to means (whether work skills or monetary savings). Inequity is largely eliminated through minimizing the commodification of goods and services and distributing them instead on a humanitarian basis of need. If you have a large family, you need and receive larger housing. If you are sick, you receive extensive medical care. Monetary means are not a measure of benefits. Indeed, each villager gets roughly the same \$50 salary regardless of job.

Gearing production and distribution according to human needs eliminates market economics. A group plan is formulated based on the needs of the members. The group then works to satisfy members needs. Your food, utilities, housing, medicine, and education are not allocated on the basis of your money, intelligence or amount of time you have worked. Your provisions are provided to you simply because you are a group member.

This is true egalitarianism because the group treats every individual as an equally worthy person—regardless of individual competencies. This is universal human respect and human rights.

Quid pro quo, in contrast, disrespects individuals of limited competencies and limits their social rewards accordingly. Universal human rights are a joke in market economies.

Genuine cooperation transforms the ideas of justice and fairness. Rewarding individuals equally for different amounts of work is fair if they all work the best they can. Market exchange based on exchange value is eliminated by production and distribution on the basis of need.

Nanjie not only tries to match social activities to people's interests and skills so that the activities will be more satisfying and so individuals can be more accomplished and fulfilled in their activities but the group also figures out how to collectively meet your needs through arranging certain kinds and amounts of work.

Nanjie recognizes that new policies and relations do not immediately eradicate socialized habits. Villagers carry over anti-cooperative habits until they have been discredited, re-mediated, and replaced. During this transition period, individuals are in need of self reflection and evaluation by others to check on and correct sedimented habits that impede new policies and relations. Nanjie villagers are evaluated by their supervisors on scales measuring traits such as cooperation, motivation, and punctuality. Infractions are punished by a graduated reduction in welfare benefits according to the number, seriousness, and recurrence (intransigence) of infractions one commits.

Finally, in the Nanjie-type collective, human need is collectivized, in contrast to the commodity market, which individualizes and privatizes needs and makes it a personal concern that is fulfilled through personal resources. Collectivized needs tie the individual and the group together. Individualized/privatized need separates the individual from the group.

The cultural psychology of need—the manner in which need is organized and addressed—is thus central to societal organization and understanding. Concrete needs are elements of a political-economic mode of production. The social organization and treatment of need defines a mode of cooperation. Cooperation always exists in a concrete form—or mode of cooperation—that is grounded in a particular mode of production or the form in which production is organized.

Bearing in mind that the capitalist will do everything possible to undermine our efforts to build our communal, collective, cooperative society because it stands diametrically opposed to their entire economic system.

We must get going in building co-ops and collectives in food production, electronic and computer repair, child care, elder care, auto repair, clothes production, education, defense, art and culture, home repair, buying clubs, transportation, communal villages and cities and any areas that people can benefit from the power of shared united production and control of our immediate world.

I did an experiment. I went into a grocery store here in Chicago and priced a 5-pound bag of brown rice and the price was roughly \$5. Then I went into Costco and priced a 50-pound bag of brown rice and the price was \$14.99, approximately \$15. If three

people pooled their \$5 and bought this 50-pound bag of rice, instead of having only the 5 pounds that their \$5 would buy, acting alone, by three people pooling their \$5 for the 50-pound bag of rice, instead of 5 pounds, they would each have roughly 17 pounds of rice. Although the prices may change, the concept remains valid.

We must begin now to learn and use the mutual benefits of group cooperation and ownership, communes, co-ops, and collectives in an all-around way in society for our benefit now and as lessons in how to run society from below.