

THE PLURALIST COMMONWEALTH

BY GAR ALPEROVITZ

The Pluralist Commonwealth is a model of a political-economic system based on the development of a robust vision of **community-based democracy as the necessary foundation for a renewal of democracy in general**. “Pluralist” to emphasize the priority given to democratic diversity and individual liberty; “Commonwealth” to underscore the centrality of new public, quasi-public, and democratized wealth holding institutions that take on ever greater power on behalf of the community of the nation as a whole as the twenty-first century unfolds.

The model draws on a great variety of on-the-ground efforts to project the development over time of practical and ecologically sustainable new ownership institutions, ranging from **locally anchored worker-owned and other community-benefiting firms**, on the one hand, **to state, regional and national wealth-holding public institutions**, on the other. These ultimately take the place of current elite and corporate ownership of the preponderance of large-scale capital. Over time **a fundamental shift in the ownership of wealth** would slowly move the nation as a whole toward greater equality. Private smaller firms and high tech innovative enterprise are also envisioned in the model. The changes would also help finance a **reduction in the workweek** so as to permit greater amounts of free time, thereby bolstering both **individual liberty and democratic participation**. As population continues to grow, the model also moves in the direction of, and ultimately projects, a long-term **devolution of the national system to a form of regional reorganization and decentralization**—a strategic move important not only to democracy and liberty, but to the successful democratic management of ecological and other pressing issues.

Although worker-owned and self-managed firms play a role in the design, much broader structural strategies based on community-based variations of the cooperative network model are utilized in key areas, and in connection with significant intermediate scale enterprise. Publicly-owned firms (and joint public/worker-owned firms) with worker and community participation are brought into focus for very large scale industry. Attention is paid at all levels to the de facto political power and cultural implications of alternative institutional approaches.

Functional and scale requirements set the terms of reference for various democratically and individually owned components: land and housing tends to be managed best by non-profit organizations, community groups, and accountable public agencies at various scales.; some forms of industry by worker-owned firms, others by small

scale private enterprise; still other by larger public entities. Municipal and regional-wide functions like some forms of electricity development and distribution again suggest geographic public functions.

Along with the strong affirmation of community, the concept of ‘**subsidiarity**’—that as a rule functions should be kept at the lowest level possible, moving only to higher levels when absolutely necessary—is a guiding principle throughout. Furthermore, **reconstituting a culture of community** is a necessary precondition of solving many of our national problems. This in turn requires recognition that it is not enough to simply move in the direction of new, democratic economic institutions as the community also includes stay-at-home spouses, the elderly, the young, the infirm and many other people not defined simply by their role at the workplace.

For more information on the Pluralist Commonwealth model as it relates to democratic ownership, community culture, local democracy, gender, the environment and liberty, see: <http://www.pluralistcommonwealth.org/>