



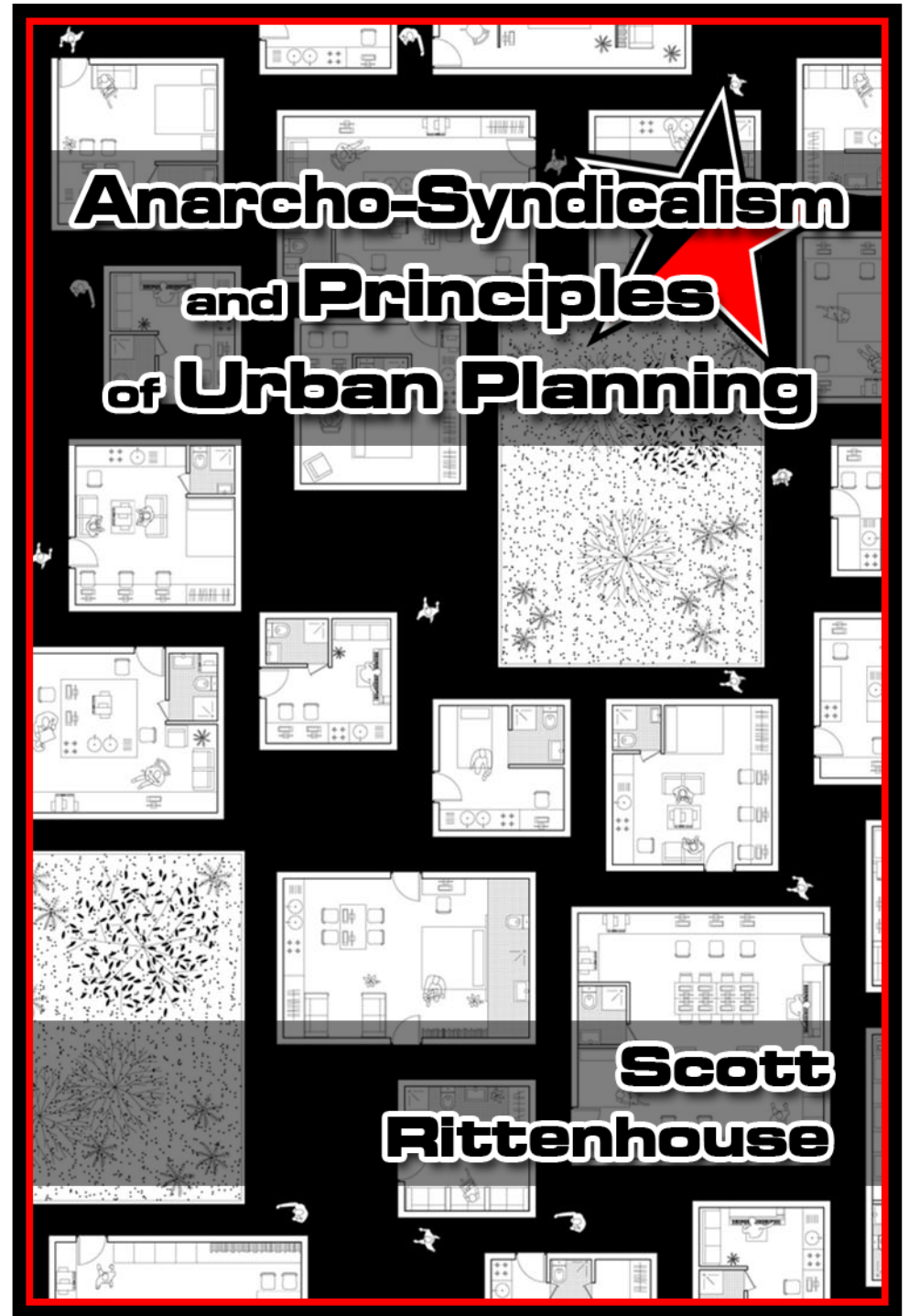
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# **Anarcho-Syndicalism and Principles of Urban Planning**

**Scott  
Rittenhouse**





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**by Scott  
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*In Memory of  
Scott Rittenhouse,  
1959-2012*

*Scott passed away in October 2012. More on Scott, and messages of respect to him can be read at:*

*<http://zabalazabooks.net/2012/10/17/scott-rittenhouse-presente-1959-2012/>*

*Some quotes from him:*

*The well-being of people is more important than money. Social problems can be done away with by eliminating poverty and cruelty and the reasons people hurt each other out of desperation to survive.”*

*“There can be no political freedom without economic freedom. There can be no freedom without social equality.”*

*“Capitalism...can only lead to a social class system with extremes of political power, over-consumption and concentration of wealth supported by extremes of poverty, war and environmental destruction.”*

*“To resist authoritarian institutions we must undermine their legitimacy.”*

*“The emancipation of the working class must be the task of the workers themselves (First International Preamble). If I want change I have to be willing to work for it myself. Politicians, leaders and bosses only act in their own interest.”*



**U**rban Planning is neither boulevards for conquerors, nor a landscape for the palaces of the rich, nor an opportunity for land speculators, nor a design opportunity for artists, nor a conspiracy for social engineers.

Urban planning is conducted to promote the health, safety, and well-being of people living together in urbanized areas; to enable people in urbanized areas to use scarce resources efficiently (all natural resources are “scarce”: supply and demand equals scarcity); and to mitigate the impact of population growth on the health of the planet.

Under capitalism, planning has been used to service the interests of the rich who own property [real estate] and the means of production. Under Anarchism, these will be “socialized”: expropriated, collectively “owned” by the Free Commune / Community, used and self-managed by workers and residents, non-transferable, and non-saleable. People will be able to make the land use decisions which meet their needs and make their lives better. There will be no “property values” or land speculation.

### ★ **Why are there urban centres?**

Since the stone age (around 12,000-9,000 B.C.), urban centres are the manner in which people work together to survive and improve their lives by storage, manufacturing, transportation, trade, security and knowledge of people, resources and goods. Centres were permanent population settlements located where there was water and food (plant and animal domestication), so they were places to store food and resources.

They were also places where people had the time to manufacture tools, pottery, baskets, clothing, weapons and other goods. They traded their

(I have written down my ideas on how this might happen in other essays on the Free Commune, Housing, Health Care, A Living Wage, Agriculture, Ecology, Economics, etc.)

surpluses with other centres. Extended families would intermarry with other centres for healthy blood lines and trade relations. Some centres were near transportation routes like waterways. So they were centres of trade and transportation.

All culture is based on trade, beginning with language. Centres were a place of security from wild animals (surrounded by a wall or fence), but they also had to be a place of security where people felt safe carry on their activities without being robbed, killed or otherwise molested. So residents agreed to conduct themselves cooperatively in the interest of the community and come together in its defence or an emergency like a fire. Later on, workers associations would each have a militia that shared part of their common defence.

Lastly, centres were places where knowledge was accumulated and shared; eventually, using writing. Writing also allowed the keeping of records like agreements and economic activity. Centres with knowledge, culture and trade are “civilization” and civilization is inevitable (but not necessarily the one we live in today: many were non-hierarchical and did not waste resources building large structures or monuments of stone).

Urban centres have been shaped by the invention of the State (originally, a professional military), technology and economic changes, but their function is the same.

## ★ What is urban planning?

Modern urban planning resulted from the failures of Capitalism addressed in 3 social reform movements: (1) The Progressive Era produced zoning and building codes to regulate land use development and structural safety; (2) Social Democracy produced the idea of public goods which could not be produced efficiently by Capitalism, but must be produced socially through public works projects and services (infrastructure, employment and health); and (3) Ecology introduced the idea of The Limits to Growth (e.g., scarce resources, pollution and economy) and produced regulations for environmental health, energy efficiency and adequate infrastructure capacity.

## ★ Conclusions

Neoliberalism is a reaction against planning regulation, enforcement and finance other than in the service of corporate business interests. It would privatize and restrict access to much of the State including infrastructure, services and facilities. American cities are already firing workers, selling buildings and turning public libraries and parks over to private foundations. This idea (e.g., privatizing tap water) has already caused unrest in other countries. *The most significant impact of this besides reduced services will be a reduction in the demographic, land use, and environmental information collected by planners and engineers for planning purposes. This makes it harder to understand urban problems.*

The future will be driven by scarcity. Capitalism is not up to the job. It promises urban colonialism (working class neighbourhoods run by political machines, cops and absentee landlords), pollution, and global warming (e.g., population growth, migration, climate change, hunger, pestilence, pandemic, economic elitism, police statism, social unrest and resource wars). Clean air, water and open space will be privileges of the Rich and those rewarded by the police state who will live in exclusive communities. Most people will be condemned to ignorance, drudgery and daily toil to survive.

...unless there is an intervention by people willing to fight for a Social Revolution and a better world.

facilities like schools, staff service cuts, and work speed-ups of service and infrastructure workers.

In a socialistic society, the definition of what is a public good may change; especially, in counties with very low salaries. The society is responsible for the health and well-being of all its peoples. *The rich currently benefit from labour but do not pay for the full value of that labour as part of the cost of production.* Under worker self-management, those costs will be shared by workplaces — the equivalent of subsidizing water, electricity, housing, food, clothing, health care and other basic necessities to assure a productive workforce is nominal compared to the wasteful consumption of the bourgeoisie and the rich under the current system. Social needs should be produced based on demand (forecasted use), not speculation or privilege (luxury).

**7. Urban areas should be designed to be energy efficient.** Communities should be designed around public transportation with mixed use (housing atop parking, stores and other nonindustrial workplaces) and residential populations concentrated along transit right-of-way corridors. Urban sprawl must be contained and precluded. Communities should use “best available practices” to minimize air and water emissions (pollution), and recycle their waste products as is done with reclaimed water (especially toxic and radioactive wastes).

**8. All land used must be recyclable and recycled when community needs change.** Urban “brownfields” (poisoned land and groundwater), “superfund sites”, leaking underground storage tanks, must be cleaned up and replaced by ecologically friendly land uses. Future uses must be more safely designed.

**9. The urban spaces of the future should reflect the classless society** including leisure, creative, and artistic activities for everyone; mutual aid; and public meeting spaces (aka, *Casa del Pueblo*) for conflict resolution, research, information exchange, social-economic planning, decision-making, entertainment, etc.

I have tried to encapsulate these into 9 principles of urban planning. I have described some of the cases where Capitalism has deviated from these principles. However, I expect these principles to apply to a new society based on Anarcho-Syndicalist organization, worker self-management and the abolition of social classes.

**1. To separate incompatible types of land use, so that people do not have to live in, about, or near dangerous or unhealthy activities.**

By contrast, the capitalist class system has historically located the housing of poor, immigrant, coloured, and working class peoples near to industrial areas.

**2. Planning originated to promote health** [e.g., insure proper ventilation to prevent disease, non-lead pipes and paint to prevent lead poisoning], structural integrity and fire safety [e.g., proper electrical wiring, fire walls, fire escapes]; especially, walk-up tenement apartments like the overcrowded apartments of the poor. It is also intended to provide adequate affordable housing for people with working class incomes and special housing needs.

*Under capitalism, housing speculators build for the rich and leave the oldest and poorest quality housing for the working class and the poor.* “Affordable” rents for the working class often exceed 50% of income; forcing households to under-consume housing (use less than they need) and live in overcrowded or severely overcrowded conditions [based on US Government Dept. of Housing and Urban Development definitions: “overcrowded”=1 to 1.5 persons per habitable room, excluding bathrooms and hallways; “severely overcrowded”= over 1.5 persons per habitable room; many households exceed 2 persons per habitable room according to US Government Census]. Unhealthy and dangerous slum housing for the poor is common and anti-slum laws are rarely enforced and lightly penalized. Liveable apartments are often left unoccupied by speculators who “land-bank” the property by writing off any costs on their taxes and waiting to develop the property or sell it until it becomes profitable to use it to benefit rich people.

*Housing in immigrant, non-white, and working class neighbourhoods is also penalized by a racial and class discrimination practice called “redlining”.* Until 1961, banks, insurance companies and the government literally

drew lines around areas they would not serve, based on a standard banking practice adopted by the welfare state of not permitting loans that would allow people from different races or ethnic groups to live in the same neighbourhood. This also set aside areas where the poor and working classes were expected to live in apartments or single room occupancy hotels [where liquor stores, drug addiction, religion, cops, and social welfare could be concentrated to keep the poor under control]. Later, the poorest families were given rent subsidies or housed in “public housing” projects. Unemployment, police profiling and gang activity now lead a lot of poor people to being imprisoned or killed at a young age.

**3. *All new economic, residential and public/civic development must provide adequate infrastructure*** and be supported by adequate unused infrastructure and treatment capacity. Capital improvements (public/civic infrastructure construction) requires several years to forecast demand, design, and build—they must be functioning when a new development is completed to service the people and activities which will take place there (e.g., streets, water, electricity, sewers, telecommunications); including the construction of regional scale public generators, treatment plants, and recycling. These activities support life, transport resources, and manage waste externalities (organic, by-products, pollution) to protect the health of the community.

**4. *Land use decisions should be made by community residents who will be affected by them*** (and take into consideration the workplaces/jobs which will also be affected). Under capitalism, government is a Plutocracy (rule by the wealthy). Appointed power-elite “commissions” manage the bureaucracy (the State) and claim that bourgeois “citizen advisory groups” provide public input into laws and policy-making (aka. C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*). *Land use decisions are made to protect the “private property rights” and profits of capitalists, speculators, and bourgeois*. Political machines try to corrupt and control “grass roots activists” in working class communities, so their residents can be more easily exploited and pacified.

Land use decisions should also consider public safety (e.g., fire protection, emergency medical services, and physical security). *Capitalists use police violence to protect the rich and maintain the class system. Capitalism is the principle cause of social malaise* (poverty, illness, social

violence/“crime”, etc.). Night lights and open spaces can be laid out so that people and residents are visible and more safe from “crime” or they can be chained from public use. Concrete barriers and fences have been used to protect children at schools, parks, and in child care from gun fire or abduction. An egalitarian socialistic society will make social violence and exploitation unnecessary — we should not adopt, OR TOLERATE, the methods of our exploiters.

**5. *People are products of their environments***. Each neighbourhood should be landscaped and provide basic “public goods” within walking distance (facilities, services, resources—schools, parks, libraries, etc.; also, grocery stores, drug stores, clothing stores, clinics, cafeterias, and other basic social needs). *Under capitalism, working class and poor neighbourhoods are underserved or discriminated against* (e.g., school districts buy books for schools in rich neighbourhoods — at working class schools they use the same money to buy security guards, metal detectors, and drugs to sedate and control “problem students”). Working class students have to go to overcrowded schools or are bussed.

Trees (“urban forest”) help mitigate the “urban heat island” effect of paved urban areas. Minimizing impervious paved surfaces, xeroscape (plants needing little irrigation), and building groundwater settling basins helps to mitigate urban runoff water pollution. Reclaimed water can be used instead of fresh water for irrigation. *The upper classes develop hostile fire, earthquake and flood-prone environments to suit their vanity and profits*. Landscaping with fire-resistant plants and requiring fireproof housing materials can help mitigate brush fires. In a classless society, urban sprawl would not be economically practical, and these areas would be more suitable for conservation due to safety or ecological concerns.

**6. *Public goods should be socially (publicly) owned and benefit the entire community***. The burden of financing public goods should be borne equally like mutual aid by the community. *Under capitalism, existing residents vote and have come to scapegoat the impact of growth on newcomers who are then billed for it through environmental impact fees or “proffers”* (“voluntary contributions” as a condition of approving a development=government extortion). Similarly, older wealthy residents and capitalists have resisted public good spending not directly beneficial to them and called it “pork barrel”. The result was a lack of maintenance on public