

THE LIBERTARIAN **COMMUNIST**

FREE OR DONATION

ISSUE 1

Aim: the creation of a World wide Libertarian Communist Society.

Purpose: To provide a forum for an exchange of ideas between groups and individuals in the anti state, non market sector.

Preamble to issue 1

Since recently resigning from The Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB) Clapham I have been thinking over the pros and cons of producing a newsletter for the purposes of discussing ideas within the anti state non market sector i/e those who believe that capitalism in all it guises can only be replaced by a classless, stateless and moneyless world wide society. I was previously involved in a newsletter called People's Planet produced under the name of the World of Free Access. One of the reasons against was the question do we really need something else promoting or discussing ideas amongst Libertarian or Anarcho communists or what ever we wish to call ourselves? The group World in Common has similar aims but it is disappointing that this project has never emerged from being anything other than an online discussion forum and has not engaged in activity in the so-called real world. Since leaving the SPGB I have spent time looking for an alternative and the closest I have come is the Anarchist Federation

(AF) formerly the Anarchist Communist Federation. The problem here is that whilst they are more open than the SPGB they seem to limit themselves to promoting only groups within the Anarchist stream, seemingly dismissing groups such as World in Common and the SPGB as part of the anti state, non market sector.

On leaving the SPGB I wrote to a comrade, (people do not cease to be comrades just because you leave an organisation that they are still a member of), explaining the reasons for my resignation and his response made my mind up that I would not just reply to the points he made by letter but would open the debate up by starting this project. Because this issue is an answer to a member of the SPGB space is given to discussing issues related to that group however some of these issues are of broader concern. The aim is to make this a discussion forum for all within the anti state, non market sector and I hope that members of groups and non aligned individuals within the sector will respond to the

issues raised and put forward new topics for discussion.

For World Libertarian Communism
Ray Carr
The Declaration of Principles of the
Socialist Party of Great Britain

Since resigning from the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB) I have had some discussion with members of that organisation about the reasons for my resignation. The Declaration of Principles (DOP) of the SPGB came up as I mentioned that a former member had suggested to me that as the membership of the party was based on an acceptance of the DOP it made it difficult to make changes that might conflict with those principles. An SPGB member suggested to me that I was attaching too much importance to the DOP. However it is clear that the DOP can stand in the way of change as some members treat them in much the same way that religious zealots treat the Holy Scriptures.

For example when the last split occurred in the SPGB when the old Camden and North West London branches and some others left to form what became known as SPGB Asbourne Court or SPGB 1904, a major point at issue was over the Party name. Despite a conference decision that the party would use the name The Socialist Party for most purposes the two branches in question continued to use the full title and part of their argument was that Clause 8 of the DOP states that "The Socialist Party of Great Britain enters the field of political action"... and since the full name is used in the DOP the name could not be changed by a conference decision. I would hold, although it cannot be proved or disproved that there are still members in the party who believe that the expulsion of these former members was wrong. Whilst they were expelled and the conference decision was upheld by a party poll which decided on expulsion it provides evidence of the negative role the DOP plays. It cannot be denied that membership of the SPGB is based on an acceptance of the DOP as six of the questions that applicants must answer in order to become members are based on the DOP. The SPGB pamphlet, **Socialist Principles Explained**, states "*Everyone who applies for membership, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, colour or age is asked to show that they understand and agree with the Object and Declaration of Principles because they are the basis of our party and the World Socialist Movement it is part*

of." So as far as the SPGB is concerned one can hardly attach too much importance to the DOP.

It could be argued that there is little wrong with the DOP of the SPGB as of a description of the fundamental features of capitalism and how the working class might organise for its abolition, although the latter is open to discussion and clauses one to five are okay in this respect apart from the fact that they need to be explained so that people under 100 years of age can understand them. But clauses six to eight are more problematic. Despite a member suggesting to me that the DOP does not mention parliament clause 6 states that "**the working class must organise consciously and politically for the powers of government, national and local . . .**". If that statement does not mention parliament its meaning is pretty clear and if you read the pamphlet, **Socialist Principles Explained**, page 18, where parliament is mentioned it becomes even clearer. It is very well known, in any case, that the SPGB insists that electing delegates to parliament is the way to achieve a revolutionary change in society. This might not be so bad if they advocated other forms of working class organisation and action that would go alongside it but it would seem that they advocate the use of electing delegates to parliament not merely as the preferred method but as the only one. This subject deserves far more discussion and will be dealt with a future issue.

Clauses seven and eight outline that the SPGB is hostile to all other political parties. Clause seven states, ". . . , *the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.*" Clause eight states that, "*The Socialist Party of Great Britain therefore enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist . . .*" In line with these clauses rule 6 of the party states, "*A member shall not belong to any other political organisation or write or speak for any other political party except in opposition, or otherwise assist any other political party.*" This may beg the question what about groups that agree with the aims of the party but do not class themselves as a political party, anarchist groupings for example, does the hostility clause and rule 6 not apply to them? The historical record of the SPGB makes it pretty clear that the hostility clause and rule 6 applies to all other organisations no matter how much they may have in common with the party and whether they class themselves as a political party or not. The SPGB refuses to work with any

other political or non political grouping no matter how close they may be in terms of longer term aims and this is carried to such a point that a branch cannot have a guest speaker at one of its meetings unless there is an accredited party speaker (someone who have taken the speaker's test) present at that meeting.

The DOP seems to act like a dead weight around the necks of members of the SPGB. It divides the organisation from like minded individuals and groups outside of it and prevents meaningful discussion taking place to move the anti state, non market sector forward. Perhaps this is no concern to the SPGB because according to their logic their position on all matters is correct and until the day when the majority of the world's working class accept their view a revolution is impossible. It is not the case that the thinking of the party has not changed at all over time, this is due to some members being able to break out of the dogma they have inherited, but the way their thinking has changed is limited by their refusal to change or delete the DOP in line with historical experience. Maybe the whole dogmatic stance the SPGB takes cannot be put down entirely to the DOP but retaining them in their original form is symptomatic of the rut they seem to be stuck in. The problem with organisations like the SPGB is that over time the organisation becomes an end in itself and it becomes more important to preserve it than to develop and put forward ideas which are needed to help create the movements necessary to bring a change in society.

The Capitalist Recession and the promotion of Libertarian Communist ideas.

It is stating the obvious to say that at present we are living in a period of a world-wide capitalist recession what is not so obvious is whether it is any easier in such a period to put forward the case of the anti state, non market socialist/anarchist sector. On the positive side more workers start to question the status quo and are forced into taking action to protect their living standards, rights and means of earning a living. The problem from our point of view is that the actions most workers are engaged in are seeking solutions within the capitalist system and can have reactionary elements to it such as the

"British jobs for British workers" element in the recent unofficial actions over sub contracting jobs at a host of oil refineries recently. Although it should be added that the nature of these disputes were more complex than the media was leading people to believe. The question is how do we approach workers involved in disputes/ actions during this period of recession? Quite clearly it is not our aim to attempt to take control or assume leadership of any actions, quite the opposite our intention should be to encourage workers to take charge themselves and beware of officialdom or any groups from outside trying to assume a leadership role. The problem is in offering this type of encouragement whilst also being realistic about what can be achieved. Meaningful victories within the confines of the present system are difficult to achieve and long term meaningful victories more or less impossible until they begin to look beyond the system. Education of past experiences is important in this respect as workers have been engaged in similar struggles for similar reasons throughout the history of capitalism and unless workers begin to think about how to organise themselves for the struggle against the system they could be back in a few years time taking similar actions under similar circumstances. On the issue of world wide solidarity we need to be able to convince workers that they are engaged in a global struggle. This global outlook is one that recognises that working class actions around the world are not a series of individual, unrelated instances but are one struggle by the world's working class confronted with the same problem, namely to free itself from the chains of capital as a prelude to the creation of a truly free global system. Putting across this message is more easily said than done. On the subject of how we relate to workers engaged in defensive actions we can certainly endorse the words written in Solidarity as far back as 1967; ***"Meaningful action for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian tendencies and self activity of the masses and whatever assists their demystification"***. (For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton, Ed by David Goodway, AK Press, 2004)

What has been stated here is very general but how we approach workers in this period is crucial, it needs discussion because it is anything but simple to link capitalist recession with the need to create a world wide movement aimed at abolishing the profit system. Such periods do present opportunities for the ideas of libertarian

communism but at the same time they present the dangers of a turn towards reaction and the acceptance by many people of right wing ideas.

We must also remember, during this period not to solely concentrate on an economic critique of the profit system. Unless there is something fundamentally different about the current economic downturn we would expect that the capitalist system will begin to gradually move out of recession into a period of growth. However the profit system faces more fundamental problems. One of these is damage the buying and selling system, a system that has an insatiable need for continual economic growth, is doing to the environment. The confrontation between the present economic system and the health of the planet, which therefore includes the health and welfare of all species on the planet, humans included, is twofold; firstly the planet cannot sustain the economic growth the capitalist system needs to survive and secondly the division of the world into competing national states and multi national companies means that the world wide co-operation needed to tackle global warming will never happen. We cannot allow this issue to take secondary importance during troubled economic times. There are also other more fundamental critiques of the profit system than the constant up and downs of the economy. There are the alienating features of the system whereby we have no control over the use of our labour as work is dominated by the need to be employed, generally by some profit making institution, there is the concern with aspects of our lives created by humans that have come back to haunt us, markets, prices, consumption for the sake of consumption. Even the time outside of wage labour, which should be ours to enjoy, has been taken from us, as our leisure time has been taken over by the capitalist system. Under capitalism we are slaves even in the time we have outside of wage slavery. All this brings us to the essence of what libertarian/anarchist communism is all about. This is summed up some years ago in Solidarity.

***“Socialism is not just about common ownership and control of the means of production and distribution. It means equality, real freedom, reciprocal recognition and a radical transformation in all human relations. It is peoples understanding of their environment and of their selves their domination over their work and over such social institutions as they may need to create.*”**

These are not secondary aspects, which will automatically follow the expropriation of the ruling class. On the contrary they are essential parts of the whole process of social transformation, for without them no genuine social transformation will have taken place.”
[For Workers' Power. P.153. The Selected writings of Maurice Brinton. Ed by David Goodway, AK Press 2004} certain parts of this quotation have been changed to avoid the use of the terms related to the male gender.

Hostile to Whom?

The intention here is to broaden out the discussion beyond the hostility clause of the SPGB. To begin with why is it necessary for any party, organisation, group to have a specific statement that it is hostile to this or that other grouping? If it is an organisation that stands for a classless, moneyless, stateless world it should be fairly obvious that you stand in opposition to any grouping that is in favour of capitalism which is a society divided into classes, is dependent on a money system and where the state is a necessary institution to protect and uphold the system. Since any group in the anti state, non market sector, whether political or anti political stands for the abolition of capitalism we all must be opposed to any organisation whose aim is to reform that system in anyway and this must include those favouring state capitalism under what ever name they might wish to call it. What is important is substance not names given to things. So we all know what we are aiming for and therefore what we oppose so why bother with a specific statement outlining hostility against other organisations.

Any hostility statement is usually aimed against all other organisations, including those who have very similar or identical aims. There may be differences in terms of what methods may be used to achieve the society we are aiming for but such differences will sort themselves out at a point when workers begin to seek radical change on a much larger scale than at present. In the meantime these differences should be discussed in an environment based on trying to work out the differences not with the aim or battering each other around the head with each organisation trying to prove how it is right on every issue. What

we need to emphasise are the issues that we in the anti state, non market sector have in common.

It might be obvious why organisations based on Trotskyist, Leninist, Marxist Leninist or Stalinist lines have a need to show how their organisation alone have the correct interpretation of their past idol ideas. But what have we in a sector that does not have to rely on a hero worship mentality regarding individuals who have made positive contributions to our ideas to gain by a statement of hostility that is aimed at like minded groups. Perhaps still the greatest division in our sector is between the anarchists who consider themselves anarchist communist and those who see themselves as socialists or libertarian Marxists. It should be outlined that those in the Anarchist sector do provide information on other anarchists, on their websites for example, but it is disappointing that this is restricted to anarchist groups alone. The Anarchist Federation states in various places that it is hostile to all political parties. This is presumably aimed at any organisation that seeks to use parliament to achieve its aims which would mean that the SPGB would come under this list. From their anti parliamentary perspective perhaps one can see the logic behind their thinking but does it make sense to be hostile to an organisation that has very similar aims just because they intend to use parliament when this proposed method may well be changed by future events? The SPGB itself is far worse it maintains a hostility clause which is seemingly aimed at all other groups whether political or anti political and it would be surprising, to say the least, to find an approval of any other group outside of those involved in the World Socialist Movement (WSM) The SPGB seems to revel in the role of believing that it is the one and only genuine anti state, non market organisation. It seems to also believe that a majority of the world's working class will have to join it or at least accept its DOP before socialism, as it sees it can be achieved. If this is not its view than the Libertarian Communist would be pleased to print something from the SPGB explaining how it sees its role at a more developed stage of socialist consciousness and if accepts that there are other genuine organisations in the anti state, non market sector.

The one group who do promote all organisations in the sector is World in Common (WIC). The one problem with WIC is that it seems confined to an online format, produces very little in the way of hard copy material and seems uninterested in

breaking free from this format. However as they do stand for very similar principles to The Libertarian Communist we would welcome the involvement of WIC members in this project.

The need for a hostility statement no longer exists, if indeed it ever did, the anti state, non market sector is small enough as it is and those of us who count ourselves as part of it need to look for ways in which we can work together. Perhaps, for example, organisation should think about opening up their journals to other groups and individuals within the sector to get a proper discussion going about the way forward. The days of Trotskyist and Leninist state capitalist organisations are numbered. When the working class begins to shed its adherence to capitalist ideas it will be in the direction of a stateless, moneyless, classless world society but it is unlikely to move into any one organisation on mass. It is far more likely to spread its allegiance over already existing organisations within our sector and/or create new ones. It will expect that these organisations will work together and not continue to argue just for the sake of it. The time to begin the groundwork for such a situation is now and that is what the Libertarian Communist is here to promote.

The whole idea of The Libertarian Communist is to provide a forum for an exchange of ideas between groups and individuals in the anti state, non market sector. If you have any views on any article in this issue or wish to raise other issues please feel free to write in but please don't make your contributions too long. You can contact The Libertarian Communist by emailing me at ray.carr1@ntlworld.com or writing to Flat 1, 99 Princess Road, Poole, Dorset, BH12 1BQ.

On the following page there is a list of parties/organisations of the Anti State, Non Market sector. This is not exhaustive. It also is somewhat problematic for two reasons, firstly the object of Libertarian Communism is to provide details of groups which contain contact information by post as well as online and for some of these organisations we can at present only find details of their websites. Secondly some of the groups listed do not seem to be active any longer. The latter should not deter people from checking them out as the ideas they contain need to be carried forward. So here goes.

Anarchist Federation: www.afed.org.uk
Postal address: Anarchist Federation,
BM Arnarfed, London WC1N 3XX.

This site is well worth a visit, I have found the AF North site especially interesting, perhaps because of my former involvements with the SPGB, and this includes some texts from former Libertarian Socialist or Communist groups such as **Solidarity**, **Subversion** and **Wildcat**. Some of this stuff is well worth reading in that much can still be taken from it and used in the light of our experiences in the last twenty to thirty years and also in the context of the present time. My only problem with them is contacting them and trying to get a reply but I will keep trying.

Red and Black notes:

http://ca.geocities.com/red_black_ca

This group is or was based in Canada. It is one of those that seem to have given up the ghost, shame because it looks very interesting and is still well worth a visit. Its journal is listed from May 1997 to spring 2005. The last reference seems to be an anti war leaflet handed out in Toronto which was produced in September 2005. The leaflet is about the Iraq war and is entitled **What's Going on?** It lists periodicals and organisations of like minded groups and some has sections on articles, reviews and history/theory which look like they are well worth taking a look at and perhaps downloading. I found the reference to it on the World in Common website under links.

World Socialist Movement/SPGB:

worldsocialism.org/spgb

Postal address: 52 Clapham High Street,
London, SW4 7UN

I am including this because whatever criticisms I and others may have of them they are still part of the anti state, non market sector. Not surprisingly I cannot find any links to other organisations or periodicals in the sector but the site does contain a section entitled: **Other useful links**, and on this you can find, which is somewhat surprising, **Marxist Internet Archive**, **Labour Start**, **John Gray For Communism**, **Interactivist Info Exchange**, **Riff Raff**, **New Internationalist** and **Counterpunch**. Perhaps things are improving.

You can also browse or download articles on various aspect of the case against capitalism that you might find useful.

World in Common:

www.worldincommon.org.

This is one of the most useful sites for finding out about the present and past groups that make up the anti state, non market sector via the links on the website. Although it lists a postal address as the Green Leaf bookshop in Bristol, to my knowledge, this closed down some years ago. Some of the things on the website look somewhat dated but hopefully it is still going. The last issue of Common Voice, their online journal is dated August 2005 and the website was last updated in August 2008. Apart from the links section it is well worth looking at the theory and archive sections all though the last piece in the latter is dated June 2006. The discussion forum on Yahoo seems to be up to date but to take full advantage you have to join the group.

Industrial Workers of the World: [iww.org](http://www.iww.org)

or PO Box 1158, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE99 4XL

This is an alternative for organising at your workplace. The dues are fairly cheap and are based on your monthly take home pay. The union is not based on full time officials trying to control the way you try to organise or do things and no one in the IWW is going to tell you to go on strike or not go on strike. So if you are fed up with paying substantial dues to a bureaucratic organisation that does not seem to represent you very well or want to get together with your work mates so you can sort things out amongst yourselves but need support, this could be for you. Just one thing the IWW needs to concentrate on being a union that is what it is supposed to be, of course members can have political views but they are supposed to be kept out of IWW business.

Some others.

Libcom.org. Very good and we should have given it more space. Please visit if you have not already done so.

Workers Solidarity Movement: www.wsm.

Workers Solidarity Alliance: www.workersolidarity.org
Class Against Class and **London Anarchist Forum:** To find these follow links on the Anarchist Federation website

