

The Libertarian Communist

A Discussion Bulletin for the Anti State, Non Market
Socialist/Anarchist sector

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

£1

Capitalism: Private and/or State Ownership equals a world Divided



Libertarian Communism: Common ownership the basis of a world united

Issue 16: late October 2011 to mid January 2012

The purpose of The Libertarian Communist is to promote discussion amongst the Anti State, Non Market sector irrespective of whether individuals or groups consider themselves as Anarchist, Communist or Socialist as all such titles are in need of further qualification. If you have disagreements with an article in this or any other issue, wish to offer comment or want to contribute something else to the discussion then please get in touch. If any article focuses on a particular group then that group has, as a matter of course, the right to reply. So please get in touch with your article, letters and comments. You can do this by contacting lib_com.bull@mail.com or writing to Ray Carr, Flat 1, 99 Princess Road, Branksome, Poole, Dorset BH12 1BQ.

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Introduction to issue 16.

This issue covers just over two months the end of October 2011 to mid January 2012 and hopefully this will enable the bulletin to go quarterly from the beginning of next year.

The workers self management issue takes off in this edition with a letter from Mike Young, a further in house piece and an article by Stefan. Elsewhere we have contributions which focus on articles that have appeared in the previous two issues. David Dane; *"Building the new society in the shell of the old"* focuses on Laurens Otter's contribution in issue 14 *"Revolution: three strategies, three groups of*

theory". R S responds to the part of Mike Young's letter in the last issue which commented on his article "*Reconsidering organisation and the role of communists*" in issue 14 and Laurens Otter's letter provides an interesting comment on the section of Stefan's article in the last issue; "*How strict should requirements be for membership in a socialist organisation?*", dealing with the attitude of the SPGB to a transition period between capitalism and socialism. Elsewhere Kathy Summerson makes a further response to Robin Cox and to Stefan concerning organisational and other factors in the anti state, non market sector and in the World Socialist Movement in particular. To finish we have edited contributions from our sector on the riots in Britain in August.

**Letter from Mike Young on
Workers Self Management and
commodity society.**

Many thanks for Libertarian Communist 15. I enjoyed the article on Workers Self Management and thought it was an engaging, balanced and reasoned presentation of the argument. Sadly, though, I can't share its concluding note of optimism. I would love to be more positive about Workers Self Management, but I am far from convinced that as it stands this social movement is in any way equal to the force of (or even truly concerned with) property ownership and the means of production. The question is, in a situation of profound economic disintegration, would Workers Self Management be the seed bed of socialised production, or does Workers Self Management carry within itself (and would reproduce) the capitalist character of the forces of production? At the risk of being "*foolish in the extreme*" (my basic default position), whatever enjoyment Workers Self Management gives me as a manifestation of workers' solidarity isn't enough to make me believe that in its essential character it is anything beyond a movement for palliative reforms which cannot seriously damage (and can easily be retained within) the commodity system.

As things stand Workers Self Management can only really signify workers helping capitalism to manage their own exploitation, possibly a fairer form of exploitation but exploitation nonetheless. Some might argue that Workers Self Management is

valuable in the part it plays in engendering a "culture of resistance" (to borrow the AF phrase for this concept). The trouble is if we stare hard at the "culture of resistance", all that is solid melts into air. Can we discover a "culture of resistance" or contingent instances of resistance arising from the suffering and needs of contingent subjects. As things stand, it is also possible to argue that the "culture of resistance" exists only as a conceptual synthesis (who decides what belongs to this "culture"? who decides what constitutes "resistance"?) and a project which has proved itself ineffectual. This project (whatever its aspirations) is without effective power and so remains trapped within the orbit of capitalism, unable to achieve escape velocity and lacking evocative and constructive force. Lacking a situation of profound economic disintegration that seems to be the only substance our "cultures" and "movements" can have within capitalism".

Regards **Mike**

Workers self management: some thoughts.

Mike's letter raises two interesting points; the first of these is whether or not workers self management could break out of the limitations of a reformist mindset that would leave commodity society well entrenched. We recognised the point that self managed enterprises alone were not an end in themselves by reference to a quote from Buick and Crump when they stated that what was important about an enterprise was not its

internal structure but whether or not it followed the law, one might say, of capitalist accumulation [*issue 15;p 3*]. Mike's point accepted then. The point of raising the self management issue was to point to a problem we face when presenting our case to workers for a genuine communist society, namely that there is too little to point to that is a concrete example of what we are aiming for. Whilst there is no doubt that socialistic experiments within capitalism have their pitfalls it could well be that they are a necessary part of the class struggle which they cannot be isolated from.

Stefan's article in this issue elaborates on what could be positive about a movement for workers self management within capitalism as well as their difficulties and limitations. The point about this is that self managed enterprises could help promote the idea that a different type of society is possible through practical examples rather than ideas that seem to many to be divorced from real experience. So really they are a means to an end rather than an end in themselves. The problem when discussing concepts such as workers self management is that we can be guilty of accepting or rejecting the actual term without considering the actual substance and the point is that workers self management can take a variety of forms [*see Stefan's article in this issue and the article in issue 15, pages 4 and 6*]. The point is that should we see such a development it would surely be better to try and engage with it and encourage it in a communist direction than to ignore or discourage it. So could a movement for workers self management develop ideas that go beyond the basis of commodity society and seeking merely to reform capitalism? Yes it could.

A movement for workers self management can not be viewed in isolation much is dependent on what is going on around it and the influences on it. When we state that a self management movement could go beyond the confines of commodity society what we mean is that it has a much chance of doing so as the normal organisational forms workers use in defending themselves against the encroachments of capital the; culture of resistance argument. We certainly would not see workers self management as a movement for change on its own it would need to be linked to other forms of struggle, more traditional forms of industrial struggle,

workplace and community councils and so on, [*see the section of Argentina in our last issue, p.5*].

Whilst the class struggle is not something workers have a choice of getting involved in or not, they are involved, conscious of it or not, in an organised or unorganised way and this will remain the case until they organise to take possession of the means of life from the tiny minority who own and control them at the moment. However at present the headline conduct of the class struggle is often narrowly defined in terms of industrial struggles over wages, working conditions, job losses and so on. This is where the idea of a "culture of resistance" comes in. Now to get a clear idea of what that means we will have to ask the Anarchist Federation to enlighten us. Presumably it goes along the lines of starting to build an offensive movement from a defensive one as workers have to experience how to resist before they can build a movement towards a revolution. Does a culture of resistance exist at the moment? Probably not; to give it that term we would expect to see a situation where struggles are linked up as workers come to realise that their own struggles are not isolated but part of a broader problem. We might also expect to see workers whether unionised or not developing their own organisational structures outside of the bureaucratic leadership channels that exist at present. That is not to say that a culture of resistance would not be a positive development and cannot be achieved, indeed it is probably a necessary development from where we are now.

No one can deny that defensive battles within capitalism are part and parcel of the class struggle or that they will continue as long as capitalism does. The point is that they are defensive struggles and at any one point are limited to a minority of the working class and at some point they will need to develop into offensive struggles and broaden out to take alternative forms onboard. So the question that we are addressing here is; are moves towards workers self management, perhaps arising out of the struggle to defend jobs and so on, just as much a part of the class struggle as the more traditional types of industrial action to prevent wage cuts, job losses and so on? The answer surely has to be yes. Further more could such a movement provide a stimulus to the idea of a libertarian communist society

by providing evidence that a more democratic society run for people by people is a feasible proposition?

As previously stated workers self management is a means to an end rather than an end in itself and we are not arguing that by itself it could bring about a change from commodity society. In the end, just as with other parts and phases of the class struggle of which it must form a component part, it cannot play a positive role in isolation, its development and role will be dependent on the direction the struggle against capitalism takes in the coming years. If these thoughts have raised more questions than answers there are no apologies to be made we do not have many let alone all the answers they will only come partially from discussion but in the main from experience. To put it another way the answers will only come from a combination of theory and practice.

Self-Management in a Market Economy: What's In It For Socialists?

Stephen Shenfield (Stefan)

A self-managed firm is a production organization – industrial, agricultural, or both – that is managed as a democratic community of producers, typically through an elected council (or a network of such councils). Professional managers may still play a vital role, especially in a large firm, but they are hired and fired by the councils and cannot make major decisions without approval from the council (and/or a referendum). Managers placed in this position are likely to treat those they manage with greater respect and consideration than managers answerable to the board of directors of an ordinary company.

Self-managed firms can exist in diverse forms and circumstances. It is important to draw a number of distinctions:

(a) A self-managed firm may OR may not also be "self-owned" – i.e., owned

by the community of producers. To the extent that a self-managed firm is owned by outside shareholders, banks or government agencies, its options are constrained accordingly.

(b) A self-managed firm may be one of only a few such firms in an economy where ordinary capitalist firms are the norm OR it may operate in an economy consisting mainly of self-managed firms. Historical examples of such economies were the anarchist-influenced areas of Spain (especially Catalonia) during the civil war in the late 1930s and (with some reservations) Tito's Yugoslavia.

(c) Self-management may be a living reality OR merely a set of formal institutions and procedures. A firm established on the basis of self-management can gradually degenerate, eventually coming to resemble an ordinary capitalist firm. This seems to have happened at Mondragon, for instance. In the process of degeneration:

-- Fewer and fewer producers actively participate in self-management.

-- Managers break free of effective democratic control and seek to run the firm without "interference" on "normal" capitalist lines. Likely reasons include pressures from the capitalist environment, an education that has imbued them with a capitalist conception of efficiency, and envy for the higher pay, undisputed authority and other privileges enjoyed by their counterparts in ordinary companies.

-- Newcomers increasingly join the firm as hired workers rather than members or co-owners. As a result, the workforce splits into two classes – "self-managers" and proletarians. (A similar split occurred in many Yugoslav self-managed firms.)

(d) Self-management may be valued for its own sake OR serve other purposes,

possibly purposes that as socialists we find abhorrent. An example of this is the Israeli kibbutz and moshav. [Note 1] Although interesting as social experiments, their purpose was to settle and defend the borders of the Zionist state; even now they do not admit non-Jews.

Setting the issue of ownership aside for now, let us consider what value self-management might have for socialists.

The most important point was made by Adam Buick of the SPGB in his December 2005 article on Argentina's worker-run factories: "Workers [in some bankrupt enterprises] occupied the workplace and resumed production on their own account... It did at least show, to any who might not have realised it, that workers can organise production without bosses."

My only objection here is to the doubtful implication that such demonstrations of workers' abilities are not really needed because almost everyone already knows that we can all get by quite well without bosses. If only! [Note 2]

Even limited departures from the standard forms of capitalism can be used to convey the vital message that we do not have to live this way, that there are alternatives! Not only can we organise production without bosses; we can also relate to others in a democratic, egalitarian and cooperative manner. Socialists should bring this home by finding out and telling others what it is like to work in a self-managed firm. In what ways is it like and in what ways is it unlike our typical experience of capitalist employment? It is not socialism, but does it perhaps in a certain sense point toward socialism?

A specific example. Many managers and supervisors in capitalist firms use their power to insult, humiliate and even physically or sexually assault their subordinates. Does this happen to

people who work in self-managed firms? I lack the knowledge to say for sure, but I suspect that these and other kinds of mistreatment are much less common there – because the victims would be in a much stronger position to get their abusers fired. In this context, self-management has advantages similar to those of a strong union presence.

True, self-management within capitalism has severe limitations. It is part of our task as socialists to make those limitations clear. The members of a self-managed firm are forced to struggle for their firm's financial survival in the face of local, regional and global capitalist competition. Nevertheless, they may have broader options at their disposal than people working for ordinary capitalist firms – provided that their firm is self-owned as well as self-managed.

Thus, during an economic depression capitalist firms prefer to cut costs by laying off workers rather than "share out the work" by reducing working hours. A self-managed firm also has to cut costs under adverse market conditions. However, its council is free to decide that it will adapt to the situation by reducing working hours – and there is good reason to expect that this will be its choice. Economists with an orthodox training view this as a suboptimal inefficient solution, but "self-managers" are likely to give greater weight to considerations such as solidarity and the interests of the local community (to which they, unlike capitalist owners, will usually belong). In technical terms, they internalise factors that the ordinary firm treats as externalities. In this sense, indeed, the self-managed firm is MORE efficient, not less. Similarly, self-managers are likely to choose to work at a less hectic pace than that imposed on workers in ordinary firms. They know that this will somewhat reduce their money income, but consider the sacrifice of some income justified by the benefits of a less stressful work environment to physical

and mental health. This is a choice that workers in ordinary firms are not free to make. A self-managed firm CAN make such choices – within certain limits, to be sure – because it unites labor and capital in the same group of individuals.

To prevent misunderstanding, let me repeat that these “non-standard” (in capitalist terms) options are available ONLY to the self-managed firm that is also self-owned and financially independent. If a self-managed firm is financially dependent on outside capitalist actors, be they shareholders, a government agency or a bank to which it owes money, then it must constantly worry about keeping up the price of its shares or reassuring the bank or government agency that the firm is being managed “properly”. Under such strong pressure, it can be expected to run its affairs almost as though it were an ordinary capitalist firm.

This is an appropriate place to discuss the idea that self-managers “help capitalism to manage their own exploitation” (see the letter from Mike Young in this issue). This is, indeed, the position in which the financially dependent self-managed firm finds itself. But I do not think that a financially independent producers’ community that owns its own firm is in the same position. Here there is no division into capitalist owners and workers exploited by them. Strictly speaking, producers who have formed such a community are no longer members of the working class. They receive not wages (i.e., the price of their labor power) but a variable sum equal to a predetermined share of the firm’s net income. True, they remain dependent on the market and may find life very hard under adverse market conditions. But self-employed craftspeople, farmers and professionals who likewise own their means of production are in the same plight. This does not mean that they are exploited in the Marxian sense.

Admittedly, it is much more difficult to establish a self-owned firm than one that is merely self-managed. Workers who hope to launch such a venture have to raise enough money to buy out the current owners of the firm where they work – and without becoming indebted to other capitalist outsiders. It is no accident that self-owned firms are found in sectors of the economy where capital requirements are fairly modest – bakeries and sawmills, for instance, rather than high-tech factories. Workers who aspire to self-management after occupying a plant abandoned by bankrupt owners (as in Argentina) usually count on the firm concerned being taken into state ownership. As the new owner, the state would assert the power of oversight even if it did not insist on appointing its own managers. The first priority of the self-managed firm would then have to be satisfying the demands of the state agency responsible for exercising oversight.

Finally, a few words about the character of an economy consisting solely of self-managed self-owned firms. This type of economy is not socialism, which by definition presupposes ownership and control by the whole of society rather than by separate and often competing groups producing for sale on the market. But neither, in my view, is this type of economy a form of capitalism. It is not divided into a capitalist owning class and a class of exploited workers. [Note 3] It is not based on wage labor. The functional logic of such an economy is quite distinct from that of capitalism. [Note 4]

It should be recalled that Marx did not identify capitalism with market economy as such. He also discussed a non-capitalist form of market economy based on simple commodity production by independent producers. Self-owned firms might coexist with self-employed farmers, craftspeople and professionals as another type of commodity producer

within this non-capitalist market economy.

It am not arguing that a non-capitalist market economy is an adequate solution to the global problems facing humanity. Such a solution must entail self-management not just within separate production communities but on a planetary scale. Nevertheless, it is conceivable, especially in light of the Spanish experience, that self-management at lower levels, in the context of a market economy in the process of losing its capitalist character, might serve as a stepping stone toward socialist revolution in the full sense. As socialists, we need to progress beyond the simplistic approach that views all modern social phenomena solely in terms of two directly counterposed categories – capitalism and socialism.

NOTES

[1] Both kibbutz and moshav were self-managed: the difference was that the kibbutz also had collective living arrangements. Many kibbutzim have degenerated to some extent: in particular, they now hire unskilled workers as non-members.

[2] <http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/dec05/tx/page10.html>. This is one of the techniques used by members of the SPGB and its companion parties to minimise the possible benefits of “reforms”. Their motive underlying this bias is the fear that acknowledging the positive potential of certain changes within capitalism will weaken the appeal of socialism as a global alternative.

[3] This does not mean that it lacks economic inequality, only that inequality does not take the form of a class division. The research of Saul Estrin on Yugoslav self-management revealed sharp inequality between members of economically successful and unsuccessful firms, with managers at unsuccessful firms considerably worse off than rank-and-file producers at successful firms.

[4] There is a substantial literature on this in the field of comparative economic systems, based mostly on Yugoslav experience.

Building the new society within the shell of the old. By D Dane.

A response to Laurens Otter’s article Revolution: three strategies, three groups of theory. The Libertarian Communist Issue 14.

In the article Laurens names and describes three strategies which are, (the numbering being mine) 1) All power lies at the point of production; 2) Undermining the state; 3) The withdrawal of consent argument. At the end of the article Laurens talks about the United Front as the fourth strategy.

“Obviously when one examines such proposals in the cold light of later days, such a united front could only come about if, at least in some measure, the proponents of each strategy and/or of each theory were prepared to abandon the pure expression of their case. Yet it is to an extent that there is an unexpressed, unofficial, underlying united front that there is/was such a thing as a revolutionary movement at all.”

My view of this is that these points made are examples of ‘*building the new society within the shell of the old.*’ This expression was used by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the twentieth century but even now has much relevance. I would suggest that stateless socialist parties must be based on pre-figurative organisations, such as workplace and community groups. Creating these forms of organisation now is essential rather than expecting some mythical revolution to sweep all evil away. Indeed such an idea has totalitarian implications which anarchists/libertarian socialists need to be wary of.

From this, in Britain at this moment, (summer 2011) I would conclude that there are plenty of issues both in the workplace and the community in which libertarian socialists could invest their activities in.

The World Socialist Movement and a transition Period between capitalism and Socialism

In the article "How strict should requirements be membership in a socialist organisation", Stefan wrote, ". In the first issue of Frank Girard's Discussion Bulletin, Laurens Otter pointed out that Clause 6 also clearly implies that government will continue to exist during the period when socialism is being established. Nevertheless, the idea of a "transitional" government has become highly controversial within the WSM, so that an applicant may even be denied admission for advocating this idea."
(<http://libertariansocialism.4t.com/db/db010703.htm>).

In commenting on this Laurens Otter writes the following:

Dear Lib Com

In the late 40s when I first met the SPGB, before the objection to blue-printing became dominant – quite a lot of members used to reconcile this conflict by saying.

" There will be no transition period in the sense of our being in power and transforming society, but there may well be a period of transition when we will not be in power, while we are building wider support, when the effect of previous activity (including our own) will have forced changes on to capitalist society, (just as before the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia, many changes had already been made;) and it is likely that then the reformists will have taken control of the state and introduced some form of state capitalism; it would be hard to say whether this will facilitate or complicate the change to socialism."

It's possible that if that formula had ever been officially adopted; the party might have avoided subsequent travails.

Yours; **Laurens**

Below is the part of Mike Young's letter in issue 15 in response to the article in issue 14, "Reconsidering organization and the role of communists". This abstract from Mike's letter is followed by the response of **R S**, the author of the original article.

I found R.S.'s article to be very much in line with my thinking now. That said, I have doubts that his statements following, "Well it depends who "we" are" actually illuminate that thorny issue of identifying class membership all that much (and I thought briefly that the libretto of Pulp's "Common People" could be inserted seamlessly into the text at this point). His statements seem to imply something about mental attitudes defining class that goes needlessly beyond his already crystal clear definition of "relation to the means of production". Anyway, "If you are outside the class ... don't try to lead or direct the working class", can only sound a wee bit odd if you then plan to quote Marx and Fred Engels. M and E clearly did not feel the need to follow the "or, if you're really serious, join the working class" advice in any meaningful social or economic way (i.e. getting into the appropriate "relation to the means of production"). Their chosen "relation to the means of production" was as distant as they could make it (easy in Engels' case, requiring a tad more ingenuity and rather more sponging in Marx's case). Nevertheless, to my mind he is absolutely right for the most part. There has been too much attempted organization of workers by 'revolutionary experts'.

Editor,

I appreciate Mike Young's letter on my article "Reconsidering organization and

the role of communists" (The Libertarian Communist #14) in the last issue.

Of course I think it's a positive thing that Mike finds himself in agreement with the arguments I have put forward, but his doubt over the need for any genuinely revolutionary movement that can actually bring a human community into being to come out of the self-activity of the working class itself, and Marx's insistence on this, necessitates this correspondence.

Contained within the original version of my article were passages showing that both Marx and Engels were adamant that "The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves." I showed that Marx refused official leadership positions, and that both he and Engels warned against allowing members of the petty-bourgeoisie to become leaders of a proletarian organization.

"Citizen Marx has just been mentioned; he has perfectly understood the importance of this first congress, where there should be only working-class delegates; therefore he refused the delegateship he was offered in the General Council." – *James Carter, Geneva Congress of the First International.*

"...Victor Le Lubez ... asked if Karl Marx would suggest the name of someone to speak on behalf of the German Workers.' Marx himself was far too bourgeois to be eligible so he recommended the emigre tailor Johann Georg Eccarius..." – *Wheen, Francis. Karl Marx: A Life.*

"Lawrence moved that Marx be President for the ensuing twelve months; Carter seconded that nomination. Marx proposed Odger: he, Marx, thought himself incapacitated because he was a head worker and not a hand worker." – *The General Council of the First International: Minutes. (Institut marksizma-leninizma)*

I could fill several pages with similar information. For example:

"Considering that the I.W.M.A., according to the General Rules, is to consist exclusively of 'workingmen's societies' (see *Article 1, Article 7, and Article 11 of the General Rules*);

"That, consequently, Article 9 of the General Rules to this effect: 'Everybody who acknowledges and defends the principles of the I.W.A. is eligible to become a member', although it confers upon the active adherents of the International who are not workingmen the right either of individual membership or of admission to workingmen's sections, does in no way legitimate the foundation of sections exclusively or principally composed to members not belonging to the working class;

"That, for this very reason, the General Council was some months ago precluded from recognizing a Slavonian section exclusively composed of students;

"That according to the General Regulations V, I, the General Rules and Regulations are to be adapted 'to local circumstances of each country;'

"That the social conditions of the United States, though in many other aspects most favorable to the success of the working-class movement, peculiarly facilitate the intrusion into the International of bogus reformers, middle-class quacks, and trading politicians.

"For these reasons, the General Council recommends that in future there be admitted no new American section of which two-thirds at least do not consist of wage laborers." – *Marx, Resolution of the IWMA on the Split in the U.S. Federation (Section III, Article 2, February 1872).*

Or:

"In the course of the debate on the credentials of Section 12, the following resolution was adopted by 47 votes against 0; abstentions, 9:

"The International Working Men's Association, based upon the principle of the abolition of classes, cannot admit any middle class Sections.'" - Engels, *Resolutions of the Hague Congress of the International Working Men's Association (Part IV, Section 2, September 1872)*

So, no, I don't think it's odd to quote Marx and Engels.

And ultimately, what matters in the end is not that Marx and Engels made the statements, but that the content of the statements holds true.

The history of the class struggle since the death of Karl and Fred provides the information we need.

As always, the appearance of another issue of *The Libertarian Communist* was great to see. I await the next.

With thanks,
R.S.

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Again: Religion and the SPGB

Because, bar the blathering, that's the only meat in the Coxey stew. Now, I have no wish to continue this pointless excuse for a discussion, which is nothing but a loop cycle commenced by the Cox some years previously, and, if past dingle berries are any model, will continue many years hence. I have said all I wish to say with precious little but a few lawyerish quibblings and a glaze of macho-aggressive thuggishness in response. But on a practical level, if she/he/it thinks, despite observation and the experience of the WiC, that there is a queue of 'all but the god thing' would-be members waiting outside no. 52, or

the HQ, real or virtual, of the AF or any other similar group, she/he/it is living in an alternate reality from the rest of us. And, theory-wise, since any mention of class brings up that liberal swear-word 'dogma', it is obvious we are speaking in mutually incomprehensible languages – class communism versus utopian socialism. For myself I would prefer ten dogmatists, who know what they are supposed to say even if they don't know why, to a hundred political perverts of the Cox-ite variety, who know damn well why but would never let this get in the way of a good 'I'm right you're wrong' ego-trip debate of the pompous old SPGB type.

Instead, I would like to take the opportunity to add an observation. That is that both Cox and Stefan, in promoting the broad church approach (that is a relaxation of entry requirements – and why limit this to religion, why not take all hang-ups into account, nationalistic, misogynistic, or whatever), in effect accept the SPGB-ism that only a single unified party can achieve communism. That by drop by drop accumulation of members, a critical mass of revolutionaries will be reached. If it were thus necessary to incorporate all communists in one group then all-inclusiveness would be not just logical but essential. However, the social revolution will not be achieved by the party but by the class. It might well be that this revolution will have a variety of different aspects (parliamentary, councilist, etc). Since the AF, the SPGB and a variety of other communist groups operate in different ways towards the same goal, it may well be that the groups contribute equally towards the revolution. Be that as it may, at the current moment, all communist groups can only act as propaganda vehicles with a limited amount of inter-group cooperation (see the NEFAC interview with the AF for what the abolition of the SPGB's clause 7 could achieve in practice). To propagandise effectively, the group must be focussed. The broad

church approach is a disaster so far as effective functioning is concerned and has been the ruin of many a promising group (such as the ORA in the '70s).

Ironically, the SPGB *has*, in effect, been operating a semi-broad church policy over the past twenty years. What has been deemed important is 'the vision', whereas the D of P and the questionnaire have become learn-by-rote accessories. And over this same twenty years, the SPGB has seen a drastic decrease in its numbers and effectiveness. Not further wettish watering down but only a Marxist revival of its core class-based values can revivify the SPGB.

Kathy Summerson

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The riots in Britain in August in many cities took place after our last issue went out and now, writing in early October, they seem a bit of a distant memory and if not forgotten they seem to have faded somewhat into the background. They were an indication, not that we needed any notification of the fact, that something is deeply wrong with the social system we are imprisoned in. They showed that there is much discontent, but also a lack understanding, by many, of just what is wrong with present society and clarity of thought as to what could replace it. Maybe part of the blame has to fall on genuine revolutionaries (us) who are failing to get our message across to those we need to reach. Some analysis of the riots was/is needed and below we include some interesting articles which appeared around the time from groups within our sector.

1) [Nothing to lose, nothing to win](#) by David Broder

We hear a lot about how these kids have 'nothing to lose': one of the reasons they are so willing to resort to open defiance of the law, whether smashing windows in broad daylight or torching cars. The sheer extent of the disturbances has doubtless emboldened a spirit of recklessness, giving the impression it is possible to get away with looting: but

these are also the actions of people without a stake in society. However, if they have 'nothing to lose', the rioters also have 'nothing to win': they have such little hope of any alternative that individual looting seems like a better way of getting ahead than does making common cause with other working-class people.

Days of rage

The left response to the current rioting in London has been rather confused. The riots have wrong-footed left opinion because it is untenable to condone attacks on ordinary people's homes and cars. Many complain about establishment hypocrisy: but if the 'real' violence is war or the 'real' looting is the City of London, it is also hypocritical to ignore the damaging effects that these riots also have on Britain's communities. In a sense, this confusion on the left is nothing new. Reflecting its own inability to pose a positive alternative, for decades socialist groups have increasingly tailed just any form of resistance to the powers-that-be. For instance, supporting Islamist groups fighting against imperialism shows a bankruptcy of purpose where, recognising our own weakness, we can contract out our 'resistance' to forces with totally different objectives. Left-wing support for rioters - even if they are attacking working-class people's homes, even if they have no positive idea what they want - is essentially another version of the same phenomenon

Con-Dem nation

The point, however, is not to 'condemn' or 'condone' the rioters. There is nothing to 'condone' or support; 'condemning' them is not a means of engaging with them, and yes, we should try and engage the rioters in a positive alternative to a capitalist system which keeps them downtrodden. Yes, they should struggle against being shat upon. But that does not mean their current actions are part of the answer. That is a discussion to be had openly and honestly: if there is no point shaming these young people by wagging our fingers in moral disapproval, it is no better to patronisingly imagine they are not capable of better than this.

As communists we believe in a means of struggle which reflects a radically different set of social relations. To that end our fight against the government includes as many people as possible, organises in a democratic way, and seeks to promote an alternative social order in the here and now. This is a quite different attitude from blindly cheerleading any 'resistance' against the powers-that-be: it is a programme for collectively changing our mutual relations, a mass of people able to engage with each other in an egalitarian, non-hierarchical way. We don't just want to make it known that we're fed up, we want to revolutionise society. We must also be honest that the current riots are not even the embryo of the kind of movement we want. This is counter-productive behavior whose only results will be division amongst working-class communities and an excuse for the state to step up its use of force.

Full article at:

<http://thecommuene.co.uk/2011/08/10nothing-to-lose-nothing-to-win/>

2) Riot criminality is a product of consumerism and social breakdown by Donnacha De Long

Commentator after commentator, from politicians to journalists, is blaming the recent chaos in London and beyond on "criminality". What does that even mean? What people aren't recognising is that this kind of criminality is a direct product of consumerism. These kids have been told, all their lives, that what they own is more important than who they are or what they do. Having the right trainers, having the latest iPhone, eating the right chocolate bar - these are the things that are supposed to make you happy.

After the first student protest that attacked Milbank, every subsequent demonstration had large numbers of kids from the very same areas now in chaos. How were their legitimate concerns addressed? With kettles, riot police and political indifference. Then came the News of the World scandal and the [revelations of police corruption](#). What many suspected was shown to be true, the police, politicians and the corporate media were working together and breaking the law. This is all cognitive dissonance on a major scale, a society supposedly based on respect for authority and the rule of law is revealed to be nothing of the

kind. The situation was like a tinder-box doused in petrol. And then the police shot a man dead in Tottenham and left the community without answers. The shooting of Mark Duggan lit a show burning fuse that exploded in Tottenham on Saturday night. The events in communities elsewhere saw what happened there and took advantage. Stretching the police by popping up all over the city meant they could loot with impunity.

What is looting but the collapse of the agreement in society that a building full of desirable items can sit on the high street and you need to pay to take things from it? Suddenly people found that this wasn't true any more, you could just break the window and take what you wanted and, as was discovered in Tottenham Hale Retail Park early Sunday morning, no-one could stop you. CCTV cameras, ubiquitous in our surveillance society, were either forgotten or ignored. A dangerous sense of power and fearlessness overtook a considerable part of the youth of this country. Worse, all respect for other people was gone and firebugs started burning things, with no apparent concern for the people who lived above the buildings they burned. Muggings, stabbings and shootings ensued.

Mass waves of criminality like this are not simple; they are a sign of a complete collapse in social relations for a large portion of the population. What makes it so tragic is that they were absolutely predictable, not just by those in the communities where the trouble is. In April last year, they were [predicted by the leader of Liberal Democrats](#) - now Deputy Prime Minister - Nick Clegg, if the Tories won with a narrow majority. Instead, the government has less legitimacy than that and the riots are far worse than anyone could have predicted.

Full article at:

<http://donnachadelong.info/2011/08/10/riot-criminality-is-a-product-of-consumerism->

3) Riots in Britain: The Fruit of Forty Years of Capitalist Crisis -statement by the ICT

As world stock markets tumbled and financial panic threatened the euro zone the British ruling class were congratulating themselves that London is well prepared for next year's Olympics. Then, with all the unpredictability of

a natural disaster Tottenham, Enfield, Brixton, Walthamstow, Croydon, Clapham burned. Since then riots have spread to other cities including Bristol and Birmingham. Now Prime Minister Cameron has been obliged to foresake his Italian villa and return to a city pitted by burnt-out and looted areas with all the visitor attraction of a war zone. For now the details of what triggered the riots are not the main issue. The truth is they are an indication of the incipient social collapse that typifies capitalism in its supposedly advanced democratic metropolis today.

Big Society or Little Chance of a Civilised Life?

While it is easy for Labour politicians and their left-wing hangers-on to blame the current round of austerity cuts for the situation everyone (apart from maybe millionaires like Cameron and his crew) knows that anger and frustration have been running high for years as more and more youngsters are excluded from the world of wages and work. Undoubtedly the Con-Dem austerity cuts have only served to intensify and deepen the social chasm which divides the 'haves' and 'have not's'. Labour's role in propagating the low-pay, flexible economy which has no place for traditional skill training shouldn't be forgotten, much less the cuts to services which were also carried out under the 1997-2010 Labour government and accepted by the trade unions. Even so, the situation goes back much further than the last Labour government. As the capitalist crisis deepens the only response it has left to the growing level of social exclusion is to increase the level of repression by the capitalist state.

A Communist Perspective

While the right wing press have been busy condemning the riots as simply 'yobbery' Labour and the left of capital are more careful about pinning the blame on the youth. Labour MP David Lammy was one of the first to comment. He condemned the violence as being an act that only targeted their own community, followed with the usual appeal for calm. The response of the British SWP has as usual revealed its role on the coat tails of Labour. For instance, while recognising the social and economic causes of the riots their solution is to call for some form of police accountability. As if reforming the police was a matter for a revolutionary organisation

supposedly working for the overthrow of capitalism. The police are an integral part of the capitalist state machine whose core purpose is to defend capitalist legality, which in turn exists to defend the right of capitalists to make profits by extorting surplus value from workers.

It is not for communists to condemn the riots. They are a sign of capitalism's crisis and decay. Neither do we romanticise the riotous act as an effective form of struggle against capitalist exploitation. In the present case the target of the crowd's anger often appears to be in the main branches of national chain stores where the participants simply break into the stores and take what they can carry. Far from being a liberating form of activity this sort of 'expropriation' is simply a reflection of capitalist ideology which sees the strongest taking and keeping whatever possession it has acquired. So long as capitalism continues on its downward spiral of crisis with the rich getting richer and the poorest more and more excluded there will be more and more explosions like these. The race is on for the revival of a really liberating movement of the working class to present an alternative to capitalist barbarism. That movement will be a collective one where workers understand why they are battling against the forces of repression: for no less than the overthrow of the old world order and a completely new world where distribution is based, not on profits for the few, but on direct production to fulfil the needs of everyone. Instead of capitalist parliaments acting as a smokescreen for the real power of money and profit a revolutionary workers' movement will form councils of recallable delegates who are accountable to those who elect them and whose sole purpose is to introduce a communist mode of production to ensure that all workers' interests are addressed. In short, unless and until the working class begins to see there is an alternative to capitalism and begins to struggle politically there will be more outbursts from those who have no stake in this society, who have no serious job prospects, who are not enthralled by East Enders and who have no religion to chain them to this world.

Full article at: <http://www.revleft.com/vb/riots-britain-fruit-p2200473/index...>

Contact Details for Groups in Anti State, Non Market Sector.

worldsocialistmovement/SPGB:

worldsocialism.org/spgb: Postal address:
52 Clapham High Street London SW4
7UN.

Email spgb@worldsocialim.org

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For further details on all items contact Veronica at veronica.clanchy@hotmail.co.uk or phone 01202 569826

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World Socialist Party US (WSPUS) website wspus.org Postal address: World Socialist Party, Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144.

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World Libertarian Socialist Network

An excellent resource with a similar aim to this bulletin to bring groups in the ASNM sector together. Website: www.libertyandsocialism.org

World In Common:

www.worldincommon.org

Email

worldincommon@yahoogroups.com

www.Libcom.org;

Red and Black Notes

You can obtain some RBN items from libcom.org as listed above. If you want to know more than read issue 6 Of The Libertarian Communist and the article by Neil Fettes pp.4-7

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Red Anarchist Action Network (RAAN)

www.redanarchist.org

Radical History Network of North London.

For details contact Alan Woodward on 020 8800 1046 or RaHN at alan@petew.org.uk
Email: radicalhistorynetwork@googlemail.com
This group have published a series of articles to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Spanish Revolution this can be found at <http://radicalhistorynetwork.blogspot.com/>

Northern Anarchist Network (NAN)

If you want further information about this group contact: **Brian Bamford, 46 Kingsland Road, Rochdale, Lancs O11 3HQ or email northernvoices@hotmail.com**

Anarchist Federation:

www.afed.org.uk: **Postal Address BM Arnafed, London WC1N 3XX. Email info@afed.org.uk**

The Commune

For workers' self management and communism from below.

Website: thecommuene.co.uk
Postal address: The Commune, Freedom book shop, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX

The following three groups are industrial unions. They offer an anti bureaucratic alternative to trade unions. You can join either as an individual or if there is support for organising at your workplace.

Solidarity Federation.

www.solfed.org.uk or **PO Box 29, South West P D.O Manchester M15 5HW**
Email: solfed@solfed.org.uk

Industrial Workers of the World:

www.iww.org Or **P/O Box 7593, Glasgow, G42 2EX** Email: rocsec@iww.org.uk

Workers International Industrial Union.

www.wiiu.org or www.deleonism.org/wiiu.html or see the article on Industrial Unionism in issue 9

Wrekin Stop War

This can be found at www.wrekinstopwar.org or contact **Duncan Ball, 23 Sunderland Drive, Leegomery Salop, TF1 6XX** email: Duncan.ball@blueyonder.co.uk.

Take a look at Andy Cox's website which looks at how socialism might be developed: <http://socialistmatters.webs.com/>.

See also: Institute for Anarchist Studies, the similar but separate, Anarchist Studies Journal and Anarchy Archives. See also the Socialist Labour Party of America (www.slp.org), and the Marxist Internet Archive Library.

