

# **THE LIBERTARIAN** **COMMUNIST**

**Free or Donation**

## **ISSUE 3**

**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.**

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### **Getting Our Message Across.**

Groups within the Anti State, Non Market sector, (ASNM) unlike those in the state capitalist sector such as the Labour Party left, (if it still exists at all), Trotskyists, Leninists and Stalinists, have a distinctive message to put across, a genuine alternative to capitalism. Concepts such as the state, capital, production for profit, wage labour, the market, buying and selling and money, or any form of exchange, are all incompatible with the society we propose. In opposition to these we counterpose an alternative world of common ownership, production directly for use, voluntary co-operative work and free access on the basis of our self determined needs. Different groups within our sector may propose different methods for achieving this objective and an on going discussion will continue over how this new society will be organised, in terms of issues such as how decentralised it could or should be. What is clear is that if we do not find additional ways of getting our message across then our concept of a free society will remain merely futuristic and capitalism will continue to devastate millions of people's lives through poverty and war and destroy the environment with fatal consequences for the planet.

At present the groups with the ASNM sector use similar methods to propagate their ideas, we hold public meetings, distribute leaflets and sell our journals, attend various events such as demonstrations and meetings to engage with like minded people, provide

assistance in industrial and local struggles, some contest elections and most are active on the internet through their websites and discussion forums. These activities should be continued but on their own they are not enough. How often do most people come into contact with the idea of a society free from the constraints of the state and market? Compare that with how they are bombarded with the idea that a world dominated by states, the market and production for profit is inevitable and the only way that society can possibly be organised. It is true that a tiny grouping such as the ASNM sector can never hope to compete with something as powerful as the mass media, which is not merely biased towards capitalism it is part of the structure that exists to uphold it, but we have to look to ways in which we can begin to counteract it. We need to start thinking about projects in areas where we do have something of a presence that mean that people will begin to come into contact with our ideas on a more regular basis.

Some people within the ASNM sector have been discussing the idea of something like a café/bookshop in selected areas. The idea being that people could pop in for something quite simple, like a cup of tea or coffee and a sandwich, piece of cake or biscuits and there would be second hand books and a variety of radical literature, including free literature with various journals from our sector. The point would not be to bombard people with our

ideas but would mean that they would come into contact with such literature in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. An article in the Anarchist Federation journal *Organise* (Summer 2008) on the concept of social space and social centres is related to this idea. This article does not advocate the idea of a café or bookshop but such a setting could create the kind of relaxed atmosphere that is required. As that article pointed out the aim would be to make such places; ***“an easy point of access to others in the community to encourage communication, education and confidence within the class”***. As that article also suggests such places could have the potential to act as a local hub of organisation and struggle and could play an important role in taking the class struggle out of the confines of the workplace and into the life of the community. They must, as the author points out, reach out to the community and not become the preserve of activists.

The problems with such projects are the usual ones of time and finance. A café/bookshop would be costly to start up and there would be the problem of at least having to cover costs even if they were run on a voluntary basis. Another suggested project is the idea of an internet radio station and this might not cost as much to set up and run. As we are limited in terms of finance and time, projects such as cafes/bookshops/social centres might be more realisable if two or more groups within the ASNM sector organised them as a joint venture. The aim here is to put the idea forward or maybe just to reintroduce it so if you have a comment or want to contribute to the idea in some way feel free to use *The Libertarian Communist* to discuss it further or if you prefer use one of the online discussion forums within the ASNM sector. It would be good to hear proposals of how to take this forward, we know what the problems are, and we need to discuss how we might overcome them.

The 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 write on any other issue feel free to write in but please do not make any contributions too long. You can contact *The Libertarian Communist* by emailing me at [ray.carr1@ntlworld.com](mailto:ray.carr1@ntlworld.com) or [ray.carr1951@yahoo.com](mailto:ray.carr1951@yahoo.com) or writing to me at Flat 1, 99 Princess Road, Branksome, Poole, Dorset BH12 1BO

## Feedback from issues 1 and 2

We received the following comments about various points made about the SPGB in the last two issues. These comments have been extracted from a longer letter.

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From Laurens Otter

### The DoP

The D.o.P. Clause 6 is illogical. It starts by rightly saying that the sole purpose of government is **“to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class ..”** it then says that someone wishing to change society must (at least de facto) become such a government, one might accept that **“conquer the powers”** meant something else if it wasn't for the party's general stress on parliamentarianism.

There is no clue as to how long that conquest should last, no consideration - which is weird from Marxists - that having taken power, the SPGB reps, (so placed in government /parliament) might come to like the power and privileges so gained, and be less eager to abolish capitalism. No doubt the party has said on occasions that the M.P. s would be delegates subject to party recall; but it has also denounced others for going against **“democratic norms”** - which were interpreted to be the existing parliamentary rules - rules which specifically forbid as **“contempt of parliament”** any attempt by an external party organization to intervene in the voting patterns of M.P. s. *Which is why Atlee was able to claim that Maxton and the ILP had abandoned its commitment to democracy.*

### Propaganda

I am not as irked as is L Robertson by the SPGB's basic approach. They specialize in non targeted propaganda. That non - targeted is important. Most of us - whether it's at work, (whether the issues are with the boss or the T. U . bureaucracy), some other economic context such as a tenants' / residents association, whether it's in the peace movement, the anti racist one, a civil liberties' issue or whatever, look out for an area where there are people who already have an issue with the status quo and in some way are protesting or otherwise opposed. We go to a

ready made audience, and provided our actions show us to be more sincere than Stalinists or Trots, it's not really difficult to get people to discuss and think about libertarian socialist arguments. The SPGB tackles the much harder job of going to people who may well be perfectly satisfied with society as it is. They are unlikely ever to have any significant impact, but are doing something that someone has to do; it may be strangely un-Marxist, but if the SPGB didn't exist we'd have to invent them.

### The Hostility Clause

However much as an anarchist I am on the wrong side of it, I don't really object to the hostility clause. The thing is that early on it was given a meaning that its wording doesn't imply; and this was purely because the SPGB founders were tired of being patronized by De Leon. They like him had reacted against Hyndman's on - off line on going in to the nascent Labour Party (then the Labour Representation Council) but he hadn't informed them that he was leaving; Allen had fallen out with the Edinburgh De Leonists and Lehane had done so with James Connolly. So they didn't want to talk to the SLP, and used the hostility clause as a justification for refusing to do so, though only a few months before they had regarded the De Leonists as fellow "**impossibilist**" socialists; which - by a literal reading of the clause - should have meant that both groups should unite as the same party.

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The Following article was sent in by Robin Cox.

### Bringing it all together

I was interested to read the feedback/ responses to the discussion on the SPGB in LC2.

I think there is a danger in dismissively attacking the "parliamentarianism" and "abstract propagandism" of the SPGB, of merely mirroring or reproducing the kind of black-or-white mindset entertained by some (but, by no means all) comrades in the SPGB itself. This comes across in some of the comments made in the feedback section. For

example, it is pointed out that the SPGB "**is solely a propaganda organisation that sees its role as converting workers one by one to the "case for socialism". If that is the way to achieve a new society, than frankly we have no hope at all**". Quite. But that surely doesn't mean that propaganda has no role to play at all and that we should be putting all our eggs in whatever other basket is available to us, such as building up a "**culture of resistance**" to capitalism.

We really should be moving beyond this kind of sterile either-or approach. We should be thinking in terms of a way that weaves together these different strands of activity into a more comprehensive, multi-faceted, inclusive approach to bringing about change - not limiting or narrowing down the options available to us. Abstract propagandism has a role to play in this as much as building up a culture of resistance or whatever. Indeed, there are synergistic benefits to be gained from the interaction of one with the other and I would argue that it is only through bringing into play the full range of options available to us that we can ever hope to create the necessary momentum for change

I know it is difficult for an organisation like the SPGB to break the historic mould in which it was formed and to look beyond its political horizons. Confined to the hothouse environment of political activism, there is a tendency to view those **not "with us"** as being necessarily "**against us**". Political contestation encourages such a dichotomous view of the world. Personally, I am a tad suspicious of any wholesale sweeping absolutist denunciation of the SPGB's way of doing things on such (frankly questionable) grounds that it has no bearing on the class struggle whatsoever. Concealed within such statement - ironically - is the assumption that there is, somewhere, some single unique magical univocal formula which can be applied but that, given the all too evident failure of the SPGB to make progress, this clearly is not to be found in what the SPGB has to offer. So we have to reject altogether what the SPGB has to offer. This argument would carry slightly more weight if it could be shown that other approaches than the political one promoted by the SPGB had

significantly propelled us forward towards communism. Unfortunately, there is scant evidence to suggest that they have. So it is time to stop thinking in terms of maybe the answer lies in going down this particular path as opposed to that particular one. The more different routes we take, the greater the likelihood that we will all arrive at the destination we commonly desire, providing of course, that we maintain constant communication with each other in the process and remind ourselves of just what it is we are wanting to achieve. That actually is the role of abstract propaganda as I see it - to give creative clarity and coherence to our various activities and invest them with a sense of purpose and direction. We should not be quite so dismissive of the importance of the SPGB in this respect. At the very least, it stands head and shoulders above virtually everyone else on the Left in upholding the communist ideal where so many have succumbed to the paralysis of Leninism or Labourism.

For their part, the SPGB should learn to be less defensive and uptight about its political convictions - more relaxed, experimental and accommodating in its approach to other approaches. It should also learn to curb its tendency towards "party line-ism" and monolithism and foster instead a more open, pluralistic culture in which differences of opinion can be respected rather than instantly condemned. This is difficult because of the very format in which ideas are considered, debated and subjected to a vote. Losing the vote on some theoretical item up for discussion at conference carries the very strong implication that the Party collectively considers your opinion to be wrong on this matter and invites you to fall into line with the mainstream. No doubt those who believed, several centuries ago, that the sun revolved around the earth and not the other way round, felt much the same. The veracity of a point of view is not dependent upon the amount of support it attracts and there is an urgent need to build up a kind of vigorous healthy alternative culture within the organisation - indeed any revolutionary organisation - as a counterweight to the bureaucratic tendencies towards quantification and vote counting which stifle fresh thinking and reinforce dogmatism. Of

course, there is a need to maintain boundaries, to assert what the organisation is basically about in order for it to perpetuate itself in a coherent fashion. The problem comes when you draw the boundaries around yourself too tightly and this is I think the problem with the SPGB - it is, clearly, unnecessarily restrictive in some of its conditions for membership.

One final point, I am not persuaded by the views of Pannekoek, Bookchin and co on the question of parliamentarianism. Pannekoek's view is that "**Parliamentarianism inevitably tends to inhibit the autonomous activity by the masses that is necessary for revolution**" But does it? I think this a case of taking what is only historically contingent to be inevitable. If you solicit votes on the grounds that you are going to do something for the electors so that they then have an expectation of this and wait upon you to fulfil your promise then, yes, I suppose it could conceivably inhibit autonomous activity. But this is what capitalist political parties do and of course the Leninists likewise with their theory of the vanguard party. It doesn't follow that a socialist party should follow suit. It is certainly not how I think the SPGB envisage their role in electoral activity

But there is also a further point which comes back to what I have been saying all along. Parliamentarianism can only inhibit autonomous activity by the masses if that is all that that you see as needing to be done to effect change which will then lead you to disregard other activities. So it is not parliamentarianism as such that leads to this outcome but only the dogmatic insistence that nothing else but parliamentarianism is required. In a sense, "anti-parliamentarianism" can be just as dogmatic and restrictive as the belief that the only way you get a communist society is by voting for it.

**Robin Cox**

**Articles, comments, letters for the September/October issue of The Libertarian Communist should arrive by Friday August 14<sup>th</sup>. By Post or Email, see details in the text box on page 2.**

### The Dilemma of trade unionism.

This year's Tolpuddle Festival takes place on Saturday/Sunday July 18/19<sup>th</sup>. To many the events that led to six Dorset farm labourers being convicted and sentenced to transportation to Australia in 1834 for attempting to form a trade union mark the beginning of the British trade union movement. Whilst today trade unions are tolerated in most of the advanced economies of the world it is just as dangerous to be a union activist in many parts of the world as it was in Britain in 1834. According to the Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights 2009 (ITUC), widespread and grave anti union practice is still occurring in Columbia, Burma, Belarus, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Iran, Pakistan Philippines, Honduras and Guatemala. The survey adds that in 2008 at least 76 labour activists died trying to defend/promote workers rights', 49 of these occurred in Columbia. In countries in every region, trade unions are either banned or their activities restricted. For example China continues to ban independent trade unions and those involved in organising or protest activities are often arrested and likely to be subjected to prison or "re-education through work" (ITUC 2009) For the workers involved in these parts of the world the choice is often as stark as attempting to resist and risk being killed in the process or acquiesce and live in dire poverty.

To those of us in the anti state, non market socialist/anarchist sector (ASNM) trade unionism places us in a dilemma. In a non revolutionary period, as at present, it would be foolhardy to urge workers to desert trade unions and join us in revolutionary unions. Most workers would ignore such calls and you cannot build mass class conscious industrial organisations without mass class consciousness. This does not mean that many of us will not, out of principle, join the Industrial Workers of the World or the Solidarity Federation but for the present such movements are likely to remain a tiny fraction of organised labour. So many of us have little alternative but to work within trade unions but at the same time we remain highly critical and sceptical about them. This is due to the very functions that trade unions carry out. The most famous and still accepted definition of

trade unions comes from the Webb's who spoke of their function as being improving the conditions of employment of wage earners, at a later date Flanders listed the main function of trade unions as to regulate and improve working conditions. So modern trade unions were born out of the capitalist system and aim only to operate in it, not overturn it. In carrying out their basic functions the trade union movement encourages the already accepted ideas that the wages system is natural and inevitable and that to struggle to abolish it is utopian. Very often they put forward the idea that workplace struggles are merely due to bad management rather than the inherent conflict of interest inherent in the profit system itself. They foster a leadership - follower, "*leaders know best mentality*". The life styles of union leaders and high ranking officials are tied up with the continuation of capitalism and they mix more with the employing class than with those they are supposed to represent. Many unions fund and support, the Labour Party, an openly capitalist party that exists to maintain and run capitalism. Very often their comments on issues stresses just how tied up with the system they are, take for example the present economic crisis where they align the interests of workers to those of the exploiting class.

For trade unions freedom means the right to have a job, in other words the right to be exploited, the right to be a wage slave. To the ASNM socialist/anarchist this is not freedom at all. Writing in Guitar World in 1997 about "American Freedom" for which you can substitute any country in the world, private or state capitalist, Tom Morello, the Rage Against the Machine guitarist had this to say about the wages system: ". . . **the number one freedom that you and I have is the freedom to enter into a subservient role in the workplace. Once you exercise this freedom you've lost all control over what you do, what is produced and how it is produced. And in the end the product doesn't belong to you. The only way you can avoid bosses and jobs is if you don't care about making a living. Which leads to the second freedom: the freedom to starve**". How should we relate to trade unions, should we seek to by pass them or work within them? This is a subject worthy of far greater discussion and it would be interesting to get peoples thoughts on the issue.

**Below is a list of groups/organisations of the anti state, non market sector. Where possible we are providing postal as well as online addresses. Some of the groups listed do not seem to be active any longer but this should not deter people from checking them out as the ideas they contain remain relevant. If you know of any other group that you think should be listed please contact me and we will try to include it.**

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**Anarchist Federation: [www.afed.org.uk](http://www.afed.org.uk). Postal address BM Arnafed, London WC1N 3XX.**

The site includes texts from former **libertarian socialist or communist groups such as Solidarity, Subversion and Wildcat**. This is all well worth reading as much can still be learned 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.

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**Red and Black Notes: <http://ca.geocities.com/red>**

This group which was based in Canada is interesting but unfortunately is no longer active. The journal is listed from May 1997 to the spring of 2005. The last reference seems to be an anti war leaflet handed out in Toronto which was produced in 2005. The leaflet concerns the war in Iraq and is entitled “**What’s Going On?**” It lists periodicals and details of like minded groups. The sections on articles, reviews and history/theory are well worth taking a look at. I found the reference to it via the World in Common website under links.

**World Socialist Movement/SPGB: [worldsocialism.org/spgb](http://worldsocialism.org/spgb). Postal address: 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN.**

Apart from all the information about the SPGB This site contains a section entitled “other useful links” and through this you can find **Marxist Internet Archive, Labour Start, John Gray for Communism, Interactivist Info Exchange, Riff Raff, New Internationalist and Counterpunch.**

**World in Common: [www.worldincommon.org](http://www.worldincommon.org).**

This is one of the best sites for finding out about both present and past groups that do, or have made up, the anti state, non market sector via the links page. It is well worth visiting the theory and

archive section and there is an active discussion forum to join.

**Industrial Workers of the World: [www.iww.org](http://www.iww.org) or p/o Box 1158, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE99 4XL.**

Here is an alternative for organising at your workplace. The dues are fairly cheap and based on monthly take home pay. The IWW is not based on full time officials trying to control the way you organise and do things. No one in the IWW is going to tell you to go on or not to go on strike. So if you are fed up with paying substantial dues to a bureaucratic organisation that does not seem to represent you all that well and prefer to get together with workmates to sort things out amongst yourselves but need support, this could be for you. The IWW is an industrial organisation and whilst members can have their own political or anti political affiliation and views these should be kept separate from IWW business.

**Libcom.org.**

This is the online place to keep up to date with what is going on in the world wide struggle against capitalism. Apart from the news section it has **Library, history, Gallery and Forum** sections. There are various forums to get involved in. Well worth a visit.

**Northern Anarchist Network**

If you are interested in getting in touch and participating in this group than please contact Brian Bamford, 46 Kingsland Road, Rochdale, Lancs., OL11 3HQ.

**Wrekin Stop The War**

This can be found at [www.wrekinstopthewar.org](http://www.wrekinstopthewar.org)

**Anarchist Archives**

This features information and thoughts of all the great Anarchist theorists and it also has information on pamphlets and periodicals and a section on Anarchist history.

Other Anarchist sites that you might want to visit would include **Red and Anarchist Action Network** and there is the **Worker Solidarity Movement** at [workersolidarity.org](http://workersolidarity.org). To round up in a more Marxist direction there is the **Socialist Labour Party of America**.

