

The Libertarian Communist

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

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

£1

Parliament: Dung heap or useful for cementing Social Revolution



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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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Issue 17

This issue is dominated by two issues; the first of these is the proposal of some people involved in the World Libertarian Socialist Network to develop it as an organisation. This is a proposal that was very much welcomed by this journal and a few of our supporters including the editor signed up so as to get involved. At the time of this issue being prepared this proposal was still in its infancy and as yet no votes had taken place. However there did appear to be some snags developing as far as the LC was concerned. These was basically to do with the fact that there are differences, that perhaps we did not consider, between the term libertarian socialism and anti state, non market socialism. It therefore seems to be a good idea to make our position clear at this early stage although it is quite possible that things might have moved forward before this issue hits the streets or people's doormats or computers. The second issue is the case for and against using parliament in the process of a socialist revolution. We quite understand that to many of our readers this is probably considered a bit of a stale issue. So why highlight this debate yet again. Well to be honest it was not something that was planned. We received an article from Laurens Otter that was a reply to an article by Stair (SPGB) which was infact a reply to a review of the SPGB pamphlet, "What's wrong with using parliament that appeared in a recent edition of Black Flag. At the time of receiving this article we had not even seen the Black Flag review or Stair's reply to it but we felt that if we were to include the piece by Laurens Otter it made sense to also print Stair's article so we sought his agreement to publishing his article. Why did we not also publish the Black Flag review? Basically two reasons, one was space and the second was that it was not considered that the Black Flag review really got to grip with or developed the main issues. To finish we have an analysis from krisis.org on the current financial capitalist crisis.

The possible development of the World Libertarian Socialist Network (WLSN); the position of The Libertarian Communist.

The Libertarian Communist (LC) exists for the purpose of giving a voice to the anti state, non market anarchist/socialist sector and to encourage it to develop as a sector in its own right. It could be argued that, as a living body the anti state, non market sector does not currently exist it is just the name accepted by some of us who feel that various groups who stand for socialism /communism as a society which has transcended the market and can have no need for a state belong to this general heading. We raise this point here because the question has been raised of whether the LC will just remain a discussion journal or whether at some point it will branch out as a group within its own right. The LC would certainly support the establishment of a grouping that could play a role in developing the sector as a whole but at the current time such a move would need support from people involved in groups within the sector as the influence of the LC on its own is minimal

Libertarian Socialism and Anti state, non market Socialism: the differences between them

The LC is not the only proponent of the view that we need to develop the ASNM as a group within itself. World in Common (WiC) started out with a similar aim and we hope it maintains this point of view. Towards the end of 2011 the World Libertarian Socialist Network (WLSN) started a list for members who wished to be involved in making decisions about the future direction of the group. The idea being that it should function as a Libertarian Socialist Organisation proper rather than just remaining as an online entity. Some supporters of LC joined the WLSN and

the list as we believed this looked like a step in the right direction. What follows here is written in a personal capacity and is not intended to represent the views of other LC supporters involved in the WLSN project. At the same time this does reflect the view of this journal but as usual we welcome contributions that either agree or disagree with the editorial position. The proposal of the WLSN seemed to be similar to the view of the LC that something should be set up that would act as a type of umbrella group both for people who were members of groups aligned to the WLSN and to people who though not members of any group had similar opinions. The aim of this group would be to promote the ideas of the sector as a whole and to play an educational role. From a fairly early point in the exchange of emails it became clear that the WLSN was advocating the acceptance of a wider body of opinion than what the LC understands as the anti state non market sector. This became clear when it was proposed that this new grouping would include groups and people who describe themselves as "Market Socialists". This is not the time to enter into a critique of "market socialism" but it is pretty clear that people who believe that there is the role for the market within a socialist society cannot be described as anti state **non market** socialists. Apart from the fact that the LC does not exist to promote concepts such as 'market socialism' which seems to be a contradiction in terms it also feels that any new grouping has to be based on a common set of objectives. Even within an ASNM grouping there would be differences in terms of how we reach our goal but it is possible to leave such discussions to a time when our movement is more advanced but if some believe in a so called socialist society that included a market system, even if this is just envisaged as a transitional society, whilst others reject outright such a concept and perhaps do not even believe that such a thing as a half way

house between capitalism and socialism is a possibility then we feel that such a wide divergence of views would be an obstacle to a sound development of the new grouping.

It could be that part of the problem lays in terminology. The term *libertarian socialism*, or *communism* for that matter exists to differentiate ourselves from the "socialism/communism" of Russia from 1917 and other regimes that developed along similar lines. Some refer to this as "authoritarian socialism/communism". There is a major problem here because to prefix the term socialism/communism with the term "libertarian", a name which is also used by advocates of a society based on the "free market" implies that what existed in Russia and elsewhere was a form of "socialism/communism. This is something that this journal and others believe to be a falsehood that must be challenged. So why is this journal called The Libertarian Communist? The answer to this is that this is a journal of the anti state, non market sector and as such we wish to bring on board some social and class struggle anarchists who may well turn away if we just called it The Communist but of late the front page does emphasise Communist. Then we have the term "market socialism". This might also encompass a diverse range of opinions but apart from the fact that to accept some people who use this title while rejecting others could cause all manner of problems; the main point, as mentioned earlier, is that there is no way people who call themselves "market socialist" could be described as anti state, non market socialists and therefore, in the view of the LC, to accept them would mean abandoning the basic principles on which we rest.

It now appears that there is a wider divergence between the WLSN and World in Common (WiC) than was first thought or to put it another way the terms libertarian socialists and anti state, non market socialists are more

than just different names for the same thing. The WLSN seeks to develop a movement that has a wider divergence of opinion and whilst we also believe that sectarianism should be avoided and unity encouraged wherever possible we also feel that any coming together has to be based on mutual objectives. Supporters of both the WLSN and WiC are both welcome to voice their disagreement with the line taken here and any response will be printed in a future issue.

Towards a ASNM Grouping

So what kind of umbrella grouping would the LC propose? What follows here are not concrete proposals but intended as the basis for future discussions. Experience has shown that there is never much point in dragging people from one group into another, nor is there much to be gained from setting up another group which can only have a limited shelf life because it lacks an adequate basis of support. Many would also cry out in despair; "*please not another Libertarian Communist type grouping*". So the time would only be right when the idea had enough support, (meaning enough people who see the development of the anti state, non market sector itself as more important than the groups within it). Having said this even at this point the LC does not believe that membership of this new grouping would entail people having to leave their current affiliations in order to join it. It would be open to all members of groups within the sector as well as people who consider themselves anti state, non market anarchist/socialists but who were unaligned. It would probably function as a type of co-ordinating or umbrella group to promote the sector as a whole but as with all the issues raised here these points are all open to debate.

This brings us to what type of movement we would be attempting to develop. Any new grouping would need to have an

open, democratic and flexible structure. It would be counter productive for it to be based on a long list of principles but in order that we have an idea of what we are about membership could be based on a few core principles. In his discussion paper Andy Cox lists three core principles. 1) What do we want? 2) How do we get it? 3) When do we want it? **On point 1** there would presumably be an agreed wording based on a society of common ownership and democratic control on the basis of from each according to their abilities, to each according to their self determined needs. **Point 2, how to achieve our ends**, whilst there are differences between groups within the sector, Stefan, writing in LC issue 15, page 13, indicated a solution when he stated; *"Exactly how a socialist majority will establish socialism (workers councils, parliament, socialist unions, etc.) can be left open, at least for the time being. I see no reason why socialists with different views in this area should not work together."* In his discussion paper Andy Cox favours some use of the ballot box. From the outset this journal has taken an anti stance as far as the use of parliamentary methods is concerned and to put the record straight that opinion holds firm. However to be realistic our problem is that this issue will only be of real concern at a later stage and if we were to form a ASNM grouping it would be foolish to rule out people whose only difference was that they believed that a free society could be established through parliament. Perhaps the only people that we might have to rule out would be those who assert that our aim could **only** be established through parliament or workers councils or socialist unions or whatever as this would put too deeper constraints on the development of such a movement. Alongside this it is not our place to decide how workers in the future will establish a libertarian communist society and in different parts of the world various methods may have to be used either out of choice or due to material conditions. **On point 3, when**

do we want it; Andy Cox states: *"The establishment of socialism/communism must not be delayed; in other words, we must consciously forgo any involvement in reformist activity as this will only sap our energies and resources, and in any case, often prove to be futile"* The LC would echo the point that Andy goes on to make: *"(That said, what constitutes 'reformist activity' needs to be clarified:"* [For Andy's discussion paper see; <http://socialistmatters.webs.com> under articles]

The LC position is that an open and democratic organisation means having a journal that is open to differing points of view within the sector and this would include groups within the sector who took a different view point on an issue to that of the established position of the group or which was in opposition to the setting up of a new group. Such openness is vital so that a proper discussion can take place on both practical and theoretical issues. This hopefully, would also help us draw a correct balance between theory and activity. As we do not want to be spending all our time in theoretical debate whether in a hall, or writing for or reading a journal or engaging in online discussion forums neither do we want to be charging around and involving ourselves in various activities without a clue of what we are doing or in what direction we are heading. So a balance needs to be struck and an open journal can be of assistance in this process.

Whilst it is far too early to be discussing the structure of any future ASNM grouping we would like to offer a perspective of some fundamentals of an open organisation. Firstly any type of local organisation, for simplicity lets call them branches, should be autonomous and be able to engage in forms of activity of their own choosing without recourse to any ratification from any centralist body. The point here is that in any organisation that aims to have a

democratic structure there needs to be trust and if when aligning themselves to anything like an ASNM grouping people have agreed to a set of principles about what the aims and methods of the organisation are they have to then be trusted to carry out local activities without any interference from any other body. So regarding structure there should be no need for a standing central body. If such a body is needed at any particular time then mandated delegates could be elected from the localised organisation and stand down when those particular circumstances have been dealt with or perhaps a conference could be arranged with delegates elected from the local branches.

Is this a broad church approach?

The type of open grouping that is being discussed here may be categorised as the type of broad church format dismissed by Kathy Summerson in *issue 16, page 11*. We agree with Kathy that the social revolution can only be achieved by the class not by a party and that it will probably have a variety of elements to it as discussed earlier. She goes on to say that at the present time all communist groups are limited to the function of propaganda with a little inter group co-operation and to do this job effectively the group needs to retain its focus [*LC, issue 16, page 10*]. So Kathy probably believes that the type of more open approach we are advocating here could not function effectively although we do not want to put words in her mouth in advance. This all depends on what is meant by a broad church. Well the Labour Party used to be described as that and up until the late 1980s it included elements that just wanted to run a mixed economy and various groupings that wanted a state capitalist society to a lesser or greater degree. It was controlled by the mixed economy faction and when its function as an organisation committed to a mixed economy was challenged it simply

expelled the leftist factions of the state capitalist tendency and made sure the rest never got air time. So a bit of difference there to what we are proposing. For a start we would have a common objective. Any grouping is always going to have differences over some issues like how to achieve our aims and any ASNM group would have some differences on this score. However if we merely want to create groups who agree on everything then fine, but at the most we will be limited to around 50 people and there is likely to be such strict entry requirements that growth will be severely limited. A grouping restricted to people who more or less agree on most issues is not only going to be limited in terms of numbers but also a pretty boring place to be. What we need is an open structure where disagreement can be aired without it leading to minorities leaving and forming even smaller groups. If as groups we cannot develop democratic structures and discuss our differences without disintegration then what hope can there be for a revolution that sets about building a democratic society. Discussion and disagreement and minority rights in an organisation are vital, democracy is essential not because it is a good idea but because it is only by open discussion that we can move forward. How else would a minority opinion that has positive implications ever become a majority view.

To finish lets be clear on what we are advocating in terms of a possible ASNM grouping if and when the time is right. If we add up all the members and supporters of groups within the anti state, non market sector worldwide it would probably not contain more than two to three thousand people, at a guess. As a sector we have a fairly general agreement of the type of society we are advocating but our influence is limited; just ask most members of the working class what they think a communist society is? However this influence can only grow if at some point

we put forward our viewpoint as a sector rather than as separate groups. This does not mean disbanding already existing organisations and joining together in just one, this would be counter productive. What is being suggested is thinking about creating a type of co-ordinating or umbrella group in which the people who become involved retain membership of their current organisation. This could only come about when there are enough people who believe that this would be the right approach. Such a move will not be without its problems but these will have to be faced and overcome as with any attempt at trying to move forward. In finality these are only opening proposals on the subject and the purpose is to open up a discussion via constructive criticisms, developing the points made and seeing where we go from here. One possibility might be us developing a listing of LC supporters which would be added to the contact section for ANSM groups. Those interested could just supply an email address or whatever contact details they wish. We look forward to some feedback on the issues raised here as we feel there are others who see the need for the type of developments we have suggested but who may have differing points of views as to how this could best be developed.

Below we print the full version of Stair's (SPGB) reply to Blag Flag regarding their review of the SPGB Pamphlet, "What's wrong with using Parliament? An edited version appeared in Black Flag and a fuller but not the full version appeared in the November Socialist Standard.

What's wrong with using Parliament? Stair (SPGB) responds to Black Flag

Dear Editors,

Good to see that you gave the recent SPGB pamphlet "What's Wrong with Using Parliament?" a review in your last edition.

My take on the review as one individual in the SPGB...

Firstly the review starts off with a piece that says "Introduction by Stair". No idea how the reviewer got this idea, all SPGB pamphlets are put out in the name of the Party and are not individually authored as a matter of principle. Maybe there was some confusion because I introduced the pamphlet at a talk in Housman's in November last year (2010). It seems ironic that the review should start with a romantic nod in the direction of William Morris when one of the things that Morris is well known for was his passion for "making Socialists", something the SPGB rightly or wrongly is often simplistically ridiculed for, despite the further argument that it could be that many members may feel that Socialists actually "make themselves". But then again if I am to elaborate further on this point it would mean that I would be talking about the nature of revolutionary consciousness and that's going off the subject... a bit. In essence though Morris's socialist "propagandising" was about making sure that there was a strong body of socialists who had a good understanding of the workings of capitalism and a clear understanding of the components of a society in contrast to it. He happened to call this socialism, as does the SPGB and it rested on the belief that there needed to be a mass of opinion in favour of it. Incidentally, I'm only positioning Morris in all this because that's how the article starts, News from Nowhere doesn't particularly send me into a quiver of ecstasy.

As for the reviewer trying to explain that it's not shown how "socialism" will be defined I would suggest that he reads the back cover where it says a "*classless, wageless, moneyless, stateless society based on common ownership and democratic control of the means of life*". What more does he want? And if he does want more there's plenty of it and he wouldn't have to look far!! Let's be clear though on one thing, if people do start to believe in the possibility of a future society beyond the market and the state then to some, including myself, it is a sensible option to cover all bases and rob any ounce of legitimacy that the capitalist class (including leftist would be managers with their own statist dreams) will try to bestow upon themselves. Or does the reviewer have some cuddly idea of the left and is therefore blinded to the fact that these potential future managers of our own oppression also have to not be

allowed to fill a space which would exist if no one thought it sensible to neutralize the effects a state as a state would have if left alone? So... maybe if we should learn anything from history it is that capitalists and leftist generals alike love or at least will take full advantage of a vacuum, and that vacuum becomes pretty nasty when they may also have the command of the forces of the state. We can't necessarily know how things will turn out if a large percentage of the world's population become enthused by "that future society" but isn't it a knee jerk reaction to ignore all bases rather than consider that at present, as in the past, it's often the fact that the machinery of government is vested in the hands of the state that we are able to be repressed, shot and massacred to keep hold of their order by weapons greater than we would ever be likely to muster if we were to arm ourselves. The icing on the cake is that we don't allow them that privilege and that we would be in parliament as rebels.

Is being a rebel in parliament flawed then? If so, why? We can all pick and choose our favourite quotes from folks from the past, one of mine is probably one from Alexander Berkman where he says that *"Our social institutions are founded on certain ideas and as long as these are generally believed, the institutions built on them are safe. Government remains strong because people think political authority and legal compulsion necessary. Capitalism will continue as long as such an economic system is considered adequate and just. The weakening of the ideas which support the evil and oppressive present-day conditions means the ultimate breakdown of government and capitalism. Progress consists of abolishing what man has outlived and substituting in its place a more suitable environment."* In other words the big holding power that capitalism in more "developed" countries has over many is in peoples' heads in that the majority believe that there is no alternative or/and that they are "free" and living in a "democratic" society.

And yes, I have read what he wrote about "socialism" and using parliament but despite various valid points about what I would term "pseudo-socialists" it doesn't really answer that initial question I've posed in relation to the SPGB's position unless one is able to relate it to the "problem" of the "corrupting effects of politics". If that's the case then anarchists also wouldn't be able to trust their own mandated

recallable delegates for that's what we propose as well when we seek the platform of parliament to further articulate that desire for a society free from capital and the state. And ultimately capture those powers that could be used against us. Hey, maybe we'd even want to send guns to comrades across the world that didn't have the luxury of being able to call the "democratic" state's bluff.

So... what else is up for ridicule in this review? To quote from the review *"The Socialist Party argues that it is possible for the great majority of people in all countries to vote for, and achieve..."* Does it? The SPGB does advocate the use of the vote in those countries that offer that facility though, is that such a big problem? When I come to London from Norwich I use the motorway. I don't think about how I might better go there via the coast using a dingy in the sea. Ironically it is in the countries that "appear" to have a semblance of democracy that seem to be the most stable in capitalist terms for the reasons stated by Berkman above so if that's the case what's wrong with using the platform offered by parliament to call their bluff? Of course the SPGB doesn't have a blueprint for how a future society may come about but isn't it wise to minimise as many risks and therefore violence that States which, left alone have at their disposal via their own "delegates", resources and the subterfuge that could more easily be played out against the development of a new society. If the state is not important then why are so many anarchists concerned about the BNP getting hold of it then?

"Allende was not a socialist according to SPGB definitions", yes that's right, he was a statist who believed in nationalisation policies, was a president and had no critique of the fundamentals of how world society operates, the wages system, buying and selling. But why was that said? It would be equally facile to say that "Murray Rothbard isn't an anarchist by most anarchist definitions". Or maybe that's the problem that the reviewer has, that the SPGB likes to have definitions so that it is more able to articulate what it wants and what it doesn't want. Many people who define themselves as anarchists think that to have principles are a good thing too don't they? To further articulate on the case of "Allende" and beyond, all the more reason to have a principled organisation/Party in the belly of each and every nation state that is able to

concentrate its energies and provide encouragement to others who want to undermine the very ideas and support that will, until we become a worldwide force for communism allow any nation state, in that case America to support its own vested interests to dominate another in the interest of capital. Are we not able to say that State Capitalist illusions are just as harmful to the development of a socialist consciousness? How does the reviewer see it then? Should we all give up because it's always going to be in the hands of the nasty lizard men? Surely only a fool could think that ideas that challenged the status quo would not be happening or don't happen in any process that has as its aim the revolutionary transformation of society? So of course that would mean that a future vision as a realisable possibility would increasingly gain ground by being articulated in workplaces, the community, shops, pubs, in the arts and culture in general. As that future society was gaining ground as a tangible possibility then of course the conversation, discussion and plans will I would have thought be increasingly enthused about how best to organise and adapt in all areas to meet society's needs. Or, should we go down the route of fetishising every struggle going. That struggle that according to many on the left is alone going to magically transform our consciousness into hardened revolutionaries. If the struggle alone is supposed to incrementally revolutionise us all then what's the excuse for so many workers who've gone through a lot of struggle, the miners, construction workers', the list goes on... not reaching radical conclusions but very reactionary ones. *See here:*

<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/mark-seddon-the-bnp-is-mining-a-rich-seamin-our-former-coalfields-1635920.html>

It's one of the most important reasons for an organisation like the SPGB to exist. It spends its time focusing on what it sees as the root cause of society's problems rather than tinker around with the edges (symptoms). That's why as a Party we think it important not to spend endless amounts of time campaigning against the inevitable aspects of what capitalism will have to throw at us. "No to CCTV" anyone? When many workers living in estates will quite logically be crying out for it when the little "peace" they have is marred by the anti-social behaviour of their potential comrades.

Back to the review... Germany in 1933, Spain in 1936 and then Hungary in 1956 get thrown

into the equation. Why? What it proves is the importance of undermining ALL the ideology of the ruling/capitalist class the world over and that if we don't do this isolated countries or pockets of "progressiveness" stand little chance of hanging on to that "progressiveness". If the review was only conceived as an insult "fest" I would suggest that even many anarchists recognised that there was a dilemma to be faced vis-à-vis their participation in government in Spain. Again, history isn't made in a vacuum and to quote the Situationists "Those who only make half a revolution dig their own graves."

After a slight pause for a compliment about the SPGB being of service to "the actors of freedom" along with the council communists and anarchists in relation to the deeming of Russia to be state capitalist early on and the Party's analysis of various collapse theories of capitalism it's swiftly back to the insults... Anyone would think from reading the review that ALL we do is campaign to persuade people to resort to the ballot box and that the fact that people aren't voting for themselves, IE socialism is some indication that it's all a hopeless failure. Are there swathes of people who are viably putting anarchism or council communism as a serious proposition then? Haven't seen it where I live. The conception that the reviewer has of the Party supposedly thinking that strikes are a "diversion" is a complete red herring too. What fairy tale was that whisked up from? Strikes are an inevitable part of the class war that workers can sometimes utilise to defend, improve their working conditions or rates of pay. Shock horror, SPGB members will be involved in these as workers! What's wrong with the Party thinking that all these things don't necessarily lead to revolution then? If that was the case with all the struggles on the economic front that the working class is forced to engage in every day since it came into existence we should already be there in the reviewer's [for want of a better explanation] "councilist utopia" then shouldn't we?

Fuck this rosy view of the working class. It doesn't accord with reality. Most workplaces in the developed world are not one big "comradely experience" although I believe that most people are pretty decent despite the competitive environments they find themselves in. In the UK for example it's the "Service Sector" that accounts for 73% of the UK's

GDP. Have you worked in it? I wonder if the reviewer is able to see what I see. Low pay, poorly unionised, competitive and non-stop "target" driven bullshit for many. Hierarchies built in all over the place where managers most likely believe they've got a better deal than other workers who they often view as their subordinates and where often workers in return have respect or/and fear of the "higher ups" and in many cases the view is that to improve one's position is done not as a class but as a rat in the "rat race" up the ladder. The effect being that the higher up the worker goes the more they are forced to compromise and conform and get those beneath them to do the same. Try openly putting across revolutionary ideas in most workplaces like this (and many are like this) and you will be seen as "different" by your fellow workers who generally have very reactionary ideas in their heads. Oh, and back to hierarchies, there's also the problem of all the informal ones that are there as well as the real ones. Ever seen *The Office*? It's a brilliant example of this kind of behaviour. Once the bosses get an idea that there may be a "real revolutionary" in their midst, one that can't easily be compromised that is, then they'll soon "come up" with a "plausible" reason to get rid of them. Has the reviewer also looked at the figures for part time work, temporary contracts and self employment that also pose severe problems with various "down tools" scenarios on top of the above? And what about the unemployed, those dependent on benefits, the retired or those dependent on partners or parents who may well go along with the way things are? Those pushing papers around in the world of academia or those working out how to push product onto the "consumer"? What clout do they or will they have if just tied down to a concept of revolution as a purely economic struggle?

Then we come to another snide put down oft repeated, the "Small Party of Good Boys" jibe, most likely conjured up by some wisecracking prick that had then and would have now no idea of the various individuals who happen to agree on certain basics that make up the organisation. Maybe the wisecrackers should also wise up to the fact that there are women in the organisation too who don't play a subordinate role to the "boys". Is this stupid epithet used as some kind of competition as to supposedly "prove" some non-conservative credential? Too bad if it disappoints that rebellion needs to have a brain to get

anywhere. And why the jibe and fascination about the "vast financial income" the Party supposedly has. If members of a stamp club joined it because they wanted to be a part of and promote philately it would be rather irrelevant if some outsider started informing them that they should give their money to Hugo Chavez because he's a better coin collector wouldn't it?

What was probably most offensive about this review though is the final paragraph where the reviewer sites the SPGB "slap bang in the middle of the Marxist vanguard groups whose characteristics it shares - authoritarian structure, party chauvinism and so on". Funnily enough one of the reasons I joined the Party was because I didn't like the personality defacto dominated politics that often crept into groups that deemed themselves to be "anarchist", with little or no structure to get the "personalities" to come down from their privileged positions and often in my view "strange un-anarchist concepts". I actually felt that the Party was actually more "anarchist" than the anarchists if it can be understood that an important part of my "anarchism" was that I believed it was allowing for the widest conception of democracy sensible/possible to suit the needs of society. I haven't changed that opinion despite the fact that in an organisation one is always likely to find some comrades/members more irritating than others, but hey, they could say that about me couldn't they? The SPGB even had the strength to expel members who had put years into the socialist cause but decided to go against Conference decisions and in effect subvert the Party's own democratic process. Not to belittle the sadness that this would have had as a result. A democratic structure that is accountable and can always be adapted and changed by the membership to suit is not a "Monument" I might add.

There's much room for argument and improvement and maybe few would dispute that but then again all the Socialist Party is a tool to be used by those who happen to agree with its analysis, think that organising democratically is more important than seeing yourself as bigger than the society that you want to inhabit and think it important to have a voice for the possibility of a future that is so often buried. Ultimately, what socialist conscious workers decide to do will be for them to decide. If they decide that

parliament is an irrelevance then they will ignore it. On the other hand if they see that to ignore it could be dangerous and also has potential then they could well make use of that potential. What else can be said for the "eccentric" review?

Yours for Socialism, (and I'd even go as far as circling the middle letter in socialism)

Stair

What's Wrong with using Parliament? Laurens Otter responds to Stair

There is in the (November) Socialist Standard an article by Stair replying to a critical review, published in Black Flag, of an SPGB pamphlet on the viability of the parliamentary road to socialism. *I confess that I've read neither the pamphlet, nor the Black Flag review and therefore will have missed much of the argument.* Except that he singularly forgot to touch on the central issue to the debate. Stair's article is well worth reading; but though he may have thought that the main issue had already been done to death, his neglect of it would seem to need an answer; especially since I recall an earlier article by Stair arguing along similar lines, (making some valid points on context but dodging the main issue).

Some anti organisational tendencies within anarchism

Stair rightly says that the extreme anti-organizational case advocated by some anarchists, (arguing that majority decision making is authoritarian) can lead in practice to rule by a single figure, uninfluenced by any democratic procedure. For those unaware of the war-time and post WW2 history of the anarchists I should perhaps mention some of the history of such tendencies in the anarchist movement.

At the beginning of the war an exiled Italian anarchist left the then Anarchist Federation £3,000 (*at least £100,000 in today's money*) towards buying a press. The federation managed to raise a further £5,000 (*some comrades taking second mortgages on their houses for the purpose during the war*). War-time regulations were such that a subversive paper could be confiscated from an organization but not from individual trustees; and so nominal ownership was vested in two comrades, (*the exiles son and a young doctor*). Unfortunately at the end of the war, a group round the trustees got greedy, manufactured a split, and so acquired the paper. That soon after adopted the name of Freedom though there was already in existence a remnant of an earlier group of that name claiming to be the heir of Kropotkin's original Freedom. That would be bad enough, but they then sought to justify their actions by saying that all organization was authoritarian, that all organization of whatever form, which might wish to control a paper, was de facto reactionary; and so a small self-elected elite effectively dictated the position that no anarchist organization with any element of democratic decision making could exist with any links to the only anarchist paper with its own press. No doubt, that reading this, Stair and other SPGB comrades will be saying, *'well that proves all we say about anarchism'*. They might ask themselves why during the war, no one bothered to consider that the Socialist Standard might be seen as subversive.

A small group of the Anarchist Federation survived and managed to buy another, (*much inferior*) press; and changing its name to the Syndicalist Workers' Federation, went on with activity for a quarter of a century. In the early sixties, it merged with the remnant of PYAG (*an anarcho pacifist group*) and the Behan group which had just left the Trots. Its work within the industrial unions and the peace movement began to bring in new recruits and this pushed

others to considering reviving the Anarchist Federation, but at what should have been the founding conference of the latter, a 'comrade' who had been one of the most ardently pro-split members of the freedom press group, and had then left anarchism to spend nine years on the right of the Tory Party, suddenly re-emerged at the conference and by pushing an ultra-anti-organizational line persuaded it to vote to have no elected officers, no structure and no decision-making votes. A few hours after the conference ended he changed his outward views and appointed himself secretary of the new Anarchist Federation with undefined and therefore unrestricted powers. He had by this time fallen out with Freedom and a few years later launched Black Flag. There are other groupings that are to a lesser extent marred by neo-Leninism.

Some problems with the parliamentary Road.

Understandably, in these conditions, Stair has – as an anarchist who believes in an effective democratic organization – found membership of the SPGB more congenial than belonging to the available anarchist alternatives. Some sixty years ago I joined the remnants of Common Wealth the ILP (*having earlier been refused by the SPGB*) for roughly the same reasons). Fair enough if he just so did, saying that there's no anarchist movement worthy of the name to which he could belong to instead, but Stair finds it necessary to speak up for the parliamentary road to socialism without actually showing how socialism might be achieved by parliament. He rightly says that only when a vast majority want a changed society will such a society be possible, but then argues against working for this where people work since the people there often have views that are at the bottom deeply reactionary. How does he think we can convert the majority without converting the majority of workers? It is funny he doesn't appear to have heard of a German thinker,

whose name escapes me, (*begins in M and ends in x*) who insisted that in a capitalist society power lies at the point of production and can only be changed there.

No doubt people have to be approached elsewhere as well; does he think that such approaches can only be made by people seeking votes? Are there basically no reactionary views held by people on electoral roles, in their homes? I will concede him this much, that there are people more inclined to consider politics at election times than at others – not, I would have thought, the permanent change in consciousness of which the SPGB speaks – but does he claim that these cannot be reached by "don't vote" campaigns? I will also concede that the presence of a "Leftist" M P. on an industrial, peace or other picket line has a remarkably good effect on the conduct of the police, and that a Jim Larkin, James Connolly, James Maxton or Dick Acland, speaking on platforms or even in parliament can do much to further propaganda. So I would even concede that a handful (*not more than twelve*) of M P. s, at early stage of the struggle, might foster the spread of socialist/anarchist ideas.

Stair, in an attempt to turn this into a full scale parliamentary road, bases his case on the SPGB's present intention that all its M P. s would be bound by party discipline and so subject to recall. That however depends on them choosing to be so bound. If they change their mind there is nothing that the party would be able to do. The early ILP also had such a rule. Parliament ruled that it was contempt of Parliament for any outside body to attempt to regulate the voting of members of parliament, and any organization purporting or attempting to do so, being in such contempt, was liable to have all its elected officials imprisoned for an indefinite term, and all its communal property confiscated. How long would it be before SPGB M P. s decided that *"they could best promote socialist*

ideas", by joining a less prescriptive organization?

Stair at one point talks about it being "*wise to minimize as much as possible the risk of violence that states if left at the disposal of those who currently control them . . .*", but the use of parliament does not mean absence of violence, it merely means directing a state official to use that violence on your behalf. Does he think that capitalist supporters in the armed and security forces are going to change sides when the parliamentary numbers change? Indeed does he or any other SPGB member actually believe that the cause of socialism could ever be advanced by the use of nuclear weaponry or even police kettles?

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The following is from www.krisis.org/navi/english and with many of the occupy movements at the crossroads as 2012 gets underway it is timely to remind ourselves about what the current world – wide struggle is really about. Whilst this was written in at the end of 2008 the analysis is as current as ever.

The collapsing of the financial bubble, "greedy bankers" and why there can be no going back to a social welfare capitalism

A new version of the "stab in the back" legend of the 1920s and '30s is making the rounds: "our" economy has supposedly fallen victim to the limitless greed of a handful of bankers and speculators. Gorged on the cheap money of the U.S. Federal Reserve and backed up by irresponsible politicians, these greedy bankers have-so the legend goes-brought the world to the edge of the abyss, while honest people are made to play the fools.

Nothing could be more contrary to fact nor, given its demagogic and even anti-Semitic propensity, as dangerously irrational as this notion-now being broadcast across the entire spectrum of public opinion. It stands things on their heads. The cause for the current misery is not to be sought in the huge over-valuation of financial markets; the latter was itself not a

cause but an effect, a mechanism aimed at avoiding the real, underlying crisis with which capitalist society has been confronted ever since the 1970s. That was when the post-WWII boom, and the long and self-sustaining period of growth made possible by the generalization of industrial production methods and their expansion into new sectors such as auto-making, came to an end. Mass production of commodities in the 1950s and 1960s required additional masses of labor-power-labor-power thereby in a position to attract the flow of wages and means of subsistence that in turn enabled it to go on mass-producing such commodities. Since then, however, widespread rationalization of the core, world market-oriented sectors of production has displaced ever greater quantities of labor-power through processes of automation, thus destroying the basis for this "Fordist" mechanism and with it the precondition for any renewed tendency towards prosperity in the real economy. Capitalist crisis in its classical form gives way to an even more fundamental crisis in which the viability of labor itself comes to the fore.

De-valorized labor power – "superfluous" human beings?

The real insanity of the capitalist mode of production is expressed in the contradiction between the enormous advance in productivity brought about by the "microelectronic revolution" and the fact that that advance has not even come close to guaranteeing the possibility of a good life for all. On the contrary: work itself has been intensified, its tempo accelerated and the pressure to produce ramped up even more. Across the world, more and more people must sell their labor-power under the worst possible conditions because, as measured against the standard set by the current level of productivity worldwide, that labor-power is increasingly de-valorized.

But it is also a contradiction of capitalism that, in the process of becoming 'too productive,' it wrenches its own foundations out from under its feet. For a society that rests on the exploitation of human labor-power collides with its own structural limits as it renders this labor-power, to an ever-greater degree, superfluous. For over thirty years, the dynamic of the world economy has only been sustained thanks to

the inflation of a speculative and credit bubble - what Marx termed "fictional capital." Capital is diverted into the financial markets because the real economy no longer offers adequate investment possibilities. States go into debt to maintain their budgets and more and more people finance their own consumption, directly or indirectly, at the credit pump. In this way finance turned into the "basic industry" of the world market and the motor of capitalist growth. The "real economy" now so suddenly prized is not forced into submission by finance. On the contrary: it could only flourish as the latter's appendage. The "Chinese economic miracle" and Germany's so-called world-class export economy would never have been possible except for the gigantic, global recycling of debt that has been going on for more than twenty years, with the USA at the centre of it all.

Crisis management and stagflation

Such methods of postponing an eventual collapse have now reached their limit. There is no reason to be overjoyed about this. The effects will be dramatic in the extreme. For the combined potential for economic crisis and devalorization that has been building up over the last thirty years is now exploding violently into the here and now. Politics in the accepted sense may be able to influence the tempo and the trajectory of this process. But it is inherently incapable of stopping what has, in truth, become unstoppable. Either the rescue packages themselves, already topping the trillions, will go up in smoke, and the crisis will break through into the "real economy" with catastrophic results. Or they will catch hold of the runaway train one more time with the result being an exorbitant increase in national debt, followed by another, still more gigantic collapse in the near future. The return of "stagflation"—galloping inflation combined with a simultaneous recession—is already looming, and at much higher levels than in the 1970s.

The last decades have already seen massive downward pressure on wages, a descent into ever more precarious working conditions and the privatization of large parts of the public sector. The present crisis means that, to a degree previously undreamt of, ever-greater numbers of human beings will simply be declared "superfluous." The much-invoked "new role of the state" has not the slightest

chance of recreating a 1960s style social welfare capitalism, with full employment and a rising standard of living. What it portends, rather, is the organization and administering of racist and nationalist policies of social exclusion. The return of "regulation" and "state capitalism" is at this point conceivable only as an authoritarian and repressive form of crisis management.

The world is too wealthy for capitalism

The present financial crisis marks a turning point in the epoch of fictional capital and with it a new stage in the underlying crisis of capitalism already discernable in the 1970s. This is not just the crisis of a specifically "Anglo-Saxon system" of "neoliberalism," as is widely affirmed amidst the current emotional outburst of European anti-Americanism—an outburst in which, however faint as yet, the echoes of anti-Semitism are unmistakable. What is clearly apparent now, rather, is that the world is and has long been too rich in relation to the stinginess of the capitalist mode of production—and that society will break apart, unravel and sink into a morass of poverty, violence and irrationalism if we do not succeed in overcoming that mode of production. It is not the "speculators" and the financial markets that are the problem, but the utter absurdity of a society that produces wealth only as a waste product of the valorization of capital, whether as a real or a fictional process. The return to a seemingly stable capitalism, kept standing by the onslaught of massive armies of labor, is neither possible nor anything worth striving for.

Whatever sacrifices now being demanded of us in order to perpetuate the (self)destructive dynamic of this senseless mode of production and the capitalist way of life count only as an obscene mockery of the good and decent existence long since within reach in a society beyond commodity production, beyond money and beyond the state. With the present crisis the question of the system itself is finally being posed. It is time that we answered it.

www.krisis.org/navi/english

Has anybody any thoughts on this type of analysis? It would be interesting to receive any comments, criticisms or discussion for the way forward for current anti capitalist movements.

Anti State, Non Market Sector Groups

worldsocialistmovement/SPGB:

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

Email spgb@worldsocialim.org

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Workers. £10.
For further details on all items contact
Veronica at
veronica.clanchy@hotmail.co.uk or
phone 01202 569826

**Read issue 22 of the World Socialist
Review: Publication of World
Socialist Party US.** "Socialists take a
look at Obama" "Is Obama a socialist?
He does not regard himself as one.
Neither do we. This issue of World
Socialist Review examines Obama's
outlook and life story, his packaging as a
politician, and his policy in such areas as
healthcare, the economy and the
environment. It also places Obama in
the context of world capitalism and the
American political system."

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

World In Common:

www.worldincommon.org

Email

worldincommon@yahoogroups.com

A separate letter/information article or
attachment is being sent out with this
issue to highlight the current on going
attempt to rejuvenate World in Common

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

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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

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Take a look at Andy Cox's website which looks at how socialism might be developed:

<http://socialistmatters.webs.com/>.

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A couple of places to purchase Literature and help support the ASNM sector.

"there is an Alternative!"

STIMULANTS: A collection of material highlighting an opposition to the Mantra that "There Is No Alternative" to how we live today. Journals, Pamphlets, Books, DVDs and Cds etc available

www.radicalbooks.co.uk

Libertarian Communist Literature has a selection of pamphlets and journals related to the anti state, non Market sector. Journals Include: **Black flag, Aufheben, Socialist Standard, Organise** and others. We have a variety of pamphlets and a few books.

If you are interested please contact the postal or email address on Page 2 with your details This list is also included in our blog which can be found at <http://lib-com.blogspot.com/> This also includes issues 1 to 16 of The Libertarian Communist. The Libertarian Communist can also be found at www.scribd.com

Worth taking a look at

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.

Direct Action Industrial Unions

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

The following groups although not strictly defined as anti state, non market are still worth taking a look at

World Libertarian Socialist Network

An excellent resource for groups who come under the heading of Libertarian Socialism many of which come within the remit of the anti state, non market sector

www.libertyandsocialism.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

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.

