

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

## **ISSUE 2**

**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.**

### **Direct Action the way Forward**

The current global capitalist economic crisis is taking its normal course, those who bear no responsibility for it and can least afford to pay for it are being forced to foot the bill. In this situation many workers are faced with a stark choice either mildly accept this fact or organise themselves to fight back. Meanwhile in the first week of April we witnessed the sickening spectacle of seeing representatives of the world's leading legalised gangsters assembling in London attempting to save an economic order that is laughingly called civilisation but is in fact an affront to human society. "Let it die", is a current cry that we would echo with the addition that we need to organise to give it a lethal injection to help it on its way.

The two demonstrations held around the G20 summit showed alternative approaches. The one on Saturday March 28<sup>th</sup> was mostly made up of various charities, pressure groups, trade unions, and environmental groups most of whom seemed to be appealing to the G20 parasites to consider how they could help out the various causes. All power to those willing to take to the streets for worthwhile causes but appealing to a bunch of idlers is of no use and even if they were prepared to listen, the system they are out to preserve has no time for worthwhile causes, profit and power is its only concern. The demo on Wednesday April 1<sup>st</sup> showed more of the attitude needed, capitalism cannot be appealed to, it must be confronted. What was also evident in this demo was the nature of the force we

have to confront. The police acting on behalf of the state showed its usual violent reaction and due to this one person, who was not even involved in the demonstration but was caught up with it on his way home from work, died. Countless others were injured due to an over the top reaction from the police in their attempt to protect the institutions of capital. We certainly need to see more of the type of demonstrations that took place on April 1<sup>st</sup> but they need to be far larger.

The fight back is not confined to street demonstrations at major events such as the G20 summit but will mainly be conducted in our local communities and places of employment. All over the world workers are once again showing that they do have the spirit and capacity to fight back. Already 2009 has seen workers using various forms of direct action in places as far afield as the Ukraine, France, Dundee, Belfast, Basildon and Enfield. Most of these have involved the issue of job protection and have included occupations, picketing and taking the fight to their company's administration in order to force management to negotiate some form of agreed settlement rather than unilateral action. Most of these have met with some success, even if only limited whilst some occupations are going on at the time of writing. This is best summed up by workers at the Visteon plant in Enfield when they stated, "This is a fight we can win. We're off our knees and fighting fit". With this sort of attitude and organisation we can begin, not only to fight back within capitalism but take that fight forward and defeat the system itself.



The SPGB: Some feedback

*In issue 1 of the Libertarian Communist we focused on The Socialist Party of Great Britain and their Declaration of Principles in particular. What follows is the feedback we have received.*

We received the following article.

Condemning capitalism, not people

As a member of the SPGB I share your concerns and have wondered before if I am compromising myself by being under the banner of the DoP. I think the words 'hostility' and 'war' are completely unnecessary, and that they may put a lot of people off before they have a chance to fully understand what socialism is. I had assumed before that the 'hostility' was to capitalist political parties - but I can see how this could be interpreted differently. Perhaps there were no other fully consciously anti-capitalist groups when the DoP were created? But there are now - so on that score it would need updating. Also - even in relation to capitalist groups - as you also point out, it is an over statement. That the Socialist Party wants a classless, stateless, moneyless world society *does the job*. That is what we need to be aware of and determined about, and to achieve this we have to propagate socialist ideas. And to propagate socialist ideas the important thing is not to be *hostile*, but rather to be welcoming for the purposes of communication and persuasion; *so that we can get on with explaining why it is so important to hold out for real socialism rather than trying to reform the capitalist system*.

I generally accept the use of the word 'war' in a poetic way - as a strong description of the struggle, but - as with the use of the word 'hostile' - when it is directed at 'parties' rather than the capitalist system, I think that it tends to make us forget that *it is the*

*system and what it does to people that we really want to get rid of*. Everyone is trapped in Capitalism, and it harms everyone, including those of the capitalist class. They also are indoctrinated, deprived of the truth, and presently have to live in a world being brutalized and an environment being devastated, along with having extra helpings of suppressed guilt, and other related and unpleasant psychological conditions.

I think that the present use of these words may be involved in a tendency to exude too much animosity, rancour and scorn at individuals and groups, and tends to make us actually do that, instead of directing this energy into passionate, but reasoned, reasonable and friendly expositions of the case - which are by far the most successful for producing understanding. We do not, after all, want fearful acquiescence, triumphal herding or to unnecessarily provoke offended dismissal of the case.

However, the socialist party is a party of equals, and it is a truly democratic party. So besides general discussion on forums etc., any ideas from any member can be put forward to conference for discussion and as motions to be voted on by all members. I can see that there seems to be something of a catch 22, in that we have to agree to the DoP in order to be members - so how can we then question them? Never the less, *it is possible to propose renewal of the DoP without being expelled*. - And I think that a process thus begun could be immensely helpful to the cause. The original DoP would still be an important historical document. Concerning democracy in the Party, there is an issue, I believe, to do with it being easier for London members to be on the Executive Committee, which means that they tend to have more say than those from the regions, but this too can be put to the conference and discussed and solutions can be sought.



Crucial to my membership of the Socialist Party is my trust in the democratic process to be the most efficacious for healthy development of ideas. It may take longer than we would like - but this will only be because *that is the time it takes for the ideas to be clear and strong enough, and widely enough held to be carried out properly*. When enough people are sufficiently aware and determined to work together to make something happen, then there can be enduring benefit. We all accept that this is the only way that world socialism can come, and it is the same for every idea that is part of that process. The majority are sometimes wrong *in a way* - but in that case they are simply not ready for the challenges that the idea involves; and thus *in a way* they are right. When 'a good idea', i.e. one that is helpful or even *essential* to the cause of socialism is not taken up, still, the fact *that it is raised* is an important part of the process of development. People may be more prepared to take it up in the future, when it is proposed again. Sometimes the most vehement objectors can suddenly see the sense in it.

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*L Robertson sent the following by email. This has been edited from a longer email to relate to the discussion on the SPGB.*

The SPGB and why we don't relate to it. In my case, at least, this is not because of the crass parliamentarianism that pervades the party it's because of the way the SPGB relates to the working class. It 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. I don't see the revolution coming about because of the will of a group of people, no matter how big that group. I'm a materialist and firmly believe that ideas change as a result of

interactions with society. The most important determinant in changing consciousness must be the engagement of workers in class struggle against capital. The struggle determines the consciousness, not the other way round. Revolutionaries will never be anything more than a minority of the class, though to be successful a revolution will need to be the act of the majority. That's one of the reasons we talk about the need to build a culture of resistance - that culture will be more important in changing the way people behave than our propaganda.

The SPGB detachment from the class struggle has been a criminal waste of talent. The SPGB has no understanding of what the class struggle entails. I would expect in a workplace that their members would not be the most militant and would not see the need to break away from the shackles of the unions, nor to spread struggles to other groups of workers.

You are absolutely correct about the DOP. It has almost biblical status. In the 70s anyone who suggested rewriting it was vilified as being a reformist or worse. To be honest this attitude pervades the whole socialist/communist movement, it's just the texts that differ from organisation to organisation. That said it is very difficult to rewrite something like that and retain a commonly understood meaning.

#### Other Comments.

We received some other comments but these were related to the SPGB policy on the use of parliamentary elections to achieve socialism. As the next two articles discuss how the anti state, non market sector should view parliament as a vehicle for achieving socialism we will deal with these comments in the first of the two articles.

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### **The SPGB and Parliament: a critical analysis**

In issue 1 of Libertarian Communist we discussed the Declaration of Principles of the SPGB including their position on the use of parliament. Some SPGB members replied in a personal capacity arguing that the party does not advocate that socialism can be brought about by parliamentary activity alone but see the need for various other forms of working class organisation. The point is that there is little or no evidence to support this claim. Where is the analysis of how change might be brought about apart from electing socialist delegates to parliament? For example there is no mention in **Socialist Principles Explained** of any form of working class organisation outside of political action; the reason for this is that the Declaration of Principles don't mention any other form of action.

One pamphlet cannot explain everything, is a fair enough argument. However the Socialist Standard scores zero regarding reports or analysis of industrial struggles or any discussion about industrial organisation in general. The current (May) issue of the Socialist Standard is a prime example. There is no mention of the strikes, picketing and occupations that are taking place as workers attempt to organise to protect themselves against the effects of the current capitalist recession. However there is plenty about the forthcoming European elections and an article on this issue suggests that the vote can be used to overturn the capitalist system, it goes on to argue; *"... we can transform elections into a means of doing away with a society of minority rule in favour of a society of real democracy and social equality"*. There is no mention of organising in other ways, even to compliment this electoral activity.

In this respect the SPGB position was summed up by a SPGB branch circular in the late 1980s when they stated the following: *"It is quite true that we do impress upon workers the need to organise within trade unions to protect their living standards. But as an organisation we are not based in the economic or industrial*

*sphere. We draw a rigid line of demarcation between this and the political sphere which we see as our true domain."*

Owing to this there is no engagement in working class struggles to try and develop a strategy of how to turn the defensive struggle within capitalism to an offensive one to end it.

**Socialist Principles Explained, page.18,** argues that there are two possible methods of achieving socialism either one based on a violent insurrection or a peaceful method of gaining a majority in parliament or a similar institution. Arguing in favour of a peaceful as against a violent revolution is avoiding the main issue. If there is one thing we can be sure of it is that the ruling class will not give up their privileges without a struggle, whatever methods are used to bring about change. Therefore the main issue is how to defend ourselves against any violence that might be used against us. On the point about needing to gain control of the coercive powers of the state it needs to be pointed out that in a situation where there is massive support for change the coercive power would be much reduced if it is not then no revolution would be possible whatever method used. Would those in power stand by and do nothing whilst there is a gradual build up to a socialist majority in parliament if they could use the violent arm of the state to suppress such a movement? It can be argued that it will be a majority of the working class who will decide what institution they may use to rubber stamp the change from minority class ownership to common ownership, if they need or decide to use any. The issue is not the rubber stamping of change but strength of the organisation at the workplace, in the communities and so on as it is this that will defend the revolutionary change in society. If the SPGB is to be taken seriously as an organisation of revolutionary socialism then it is the sphere outside of parliament that it needs to turn its attention to.



**“The Emancipation of the Working class must be the work of the Working Class.”**

Most groups in the anti state, non market sector would adhere to the above, the idea that the working class cannot be led to a free society by some enlightened leadership acting on its behalf. This acceptance would seem to rule out the possibility of achieving a Libertarian Communist society by means of electoral activity, or at least it could only play only a minute role in the process. There are two interconnected reasons for this.

Firstly electing delegates to such an institution as parliament to transform society on behalf of the majority, no matter how democratic the structures, would place too much power in the hands of the elite who were assigned this role. The other side of this coin is that it is a process that reinforces the attitude that capitalism indoctrinates workers with, the idea that they need an elite body to act on their behalf. Herman Gorter in his open letter to Lenin emphasised that the basis of revolutionary activity had to aim at increasing the power, autonomy and class consciousness of the working class.

Pannekoek made the same point when he argued: **“Parliamentary activity is the paradigm of struggles in which only the leaders are actively involved and in which the masses themselves play a subordinate role. It consists in individual deputies carrying on the main battle; this is bound to rouse the illusion among the masses that others can do their fighting for them.”** He sums this up:

**“Parliamentarianism inevitably tends to inhibit the autonomous activity by the masses that is necessary for revolution.”**

{1] It is very difficult to imagine how a movement that seeks to bring about a free society via electoral activity could avoid these pitfalls.

A further point involves the question of structure. An organisation intent on gaining control of the state machine will, if it is going to have an impact, organise itself along bureaucratic lines because of the nature of the task it is aiming at. The following quote is seemingly based on the previous experience of organisations aiming

at controlling the state even if their purpose was seemingly to dismantle it. Bookchin argues: **“A party is a bureaucratic apparatus structured from top down – as opposed to a libertarian confederation, which is structured from the bottom up – and is nothing more than a state that is waiting for an opportunity to acquire power. When it does take power, it acquires the tyrannical features of the very state machinery it has come to control, irrespective of whether that state is a dictatorship, a monarchy or a republic.”** [2]

It can be argued that whatever organisational form a revolutionary movement takes it will have problems balancing organisational priorities with democratic structures. A revolution is never going to assume a path free from wrong turns and difficult decision making. The question is which type of organisational form has the best chance of creating a bottom upwards form of decision making? One formed from grass roots activity based and developing around work and community struggles or one which aims at the capture of the state machine? The latter would by the nature of the beast seem to naturally rely on a division between the mass of working class and those entrusted to act on its behalf.

- 1) (Both quotes are taken from Mark Shipway, Council Communism in Rubel. M and Crump. J ed Non market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, P110)
- 2) Murray Bookchin, Anarchism, Marxism and the Future of the Left: Interviews and Essays 1993-1998.]

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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 raise any other issues 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 writing to me at Flat 1, 99 Princess Road, Branksome, Poole, Dorset, BH12 1BQ.**

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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.**

Their site is well worth a visit, I found the AF North site especially interesting, perhaps due to my past involvement with the SPGB. The site includes from 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 still worth including despite the fact that, as mentioned before, it 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.**

Still including them as they are still part of the anti state, non market sector. The site does contain 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. As well as the links section it is well worth visiting the theory and archive section. We have been asked to make a couple of corrections in relation to WiC. By all accounts in its early days it did produce hard copy leaflets and these were distributed at several large demonstrations. They also had informal get togethers and took part in bookfairs. A second point is that you do not have to be a WiC member to participate in their online forum, only a member of the anti state, non market sector.

**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. Well worth a visit.