

Assessing the Agorist Movement's Progression from Statism to Freedom

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September 7th, 2016

The goal of this essay is to examine where the counter-economy and the “Agorist movement” is in relation to Samuel E. Konkin III’s hypothesis of a progression from Statism to Agorism in four phases. Readers who are new to the philosophy of Agorism and the practice of counter-economics are likely better served by reading The New Libertarian Manifesto or introductory essays provided by C4SS.

In the late 1970’s, anarchist, activist, and writer Samuel E. Konkin III (SEKIII) released The New Libertarian Manifesto, presenting his case for a new strain of Libertarianism that he called “New Libertarianism”. The philosophy behind the New Libertarian Movement was Agorism, named after the “agora”, the Greek word for market place. “An agorist is one who acts consistently for freedom and in freedom,” SEKIII wrote. Essentially, Agorism is a radical libertarian philosophy that seeks to create a society free of coercion and force by using black and gray markets in the underground or illegal economy to siphon power away from the State. Konkin termed this strategy “counter-economics”, which he considered to be all peaceful economic activity that takes place outside the purview and control of the State.

In the NLM, SEKIII outlines his vision of a more free and just world by first describing society’s present condition: Statism. Konkin briefly outlines the path of human thinking from slavery to the discovery of libertarian thought and also emphasizes the importance of consistency between means and ends. Indeed, Konkin believes exposing Statist inconsistencies is “the most crucial activity of the libertarian theorist.” From here Konkin describes the goal of Agorism and the Counter Economic means necessary to achieve this goal.

In order to paint a clear picture of the Agorist struggle for a more free world, Konkin explains the four stages from Statism to Agorism, as well as various actions that a consciously practicing Agorist might seize upon in order to advance Agorist propaganda and Counter-Economic activity. By understanding Konkin’s vision of progress it is possible to create a diagram to outline how far society as a whole has come and where we, as individuals, fit within these steps. After the

steps have been mapped it will then be possible to pinpoint strategies that can help the New Libertarian move from one stage to the next.

Konkin starts in “**Phase Zero: Zero-Density Agorist Society**”. Phase Zero is the time when no Agorists existed and libertarian thought was scattered and unorganized, which Konkin says has been “most of human history”. Once Libertarians became aware of the philosophy of Agorism counter-economic activity began and we moved into “**Phase 1: Low-Density Agorist Society**”.

In this phase the first counter-economic libertarians appear. Konkin believed that this was a dangerous time for activists who would be sold “Get-Liberty-quick” schemes. Konkin also reminds Agorist’s not to be tempted by political campaigns. “All will fail if for no other reason than Liberty grows individual by individual. Mass conversion is impossible,” he wrote. Phase 1 is presented as a time when the few existing practicing counter-economists’ main goal is recruitment and creation of “‘radical caucuses,’ ginger groups, or as a ‘Libertarian Left’ faction in general”. Konkin also notes that the majority of society is acting “with little understanding of any theory but who are induced by material gain to evade, avoid, or defy the State. Surely they are a hopeful potential?”.

In order to achieve the free society Konkin again emphasizes the need for education and “consciousness-raising of counter-economists to libertarian understanding and mutual supportiveness”. SEKIII also called for the creation of a Movement of the Libertarian Left which may grow strong enough in influence and numbers in the latter stages of Phase 1 to be able to “block marginal actions by the State”. The ability to block actions by the State has absolutely increased in recent years (see this and this for starters) with the explosion of decentralized, peer to peer networks via the internet that allow for rapid sharing of information and calls to organize. With the spread of ideas like Freedom Cells we will continue to see communities stand up against State actors.

As we move to “**Phase 2: Mid-Density, Small Condensation Agorist Society**” the statists take notice of Agorism. Is it in this phase that Konkin believes the counter-economy will grow and Agorists will begin to represent “an ever-larger agorist sub-society embedded in the statist society”. Although the majority of Agorists are still living within the States claimed territories, we begin to see a “spectrum of the degree of agorism in most individuals”. This includes benefactors of the State who are “highly statist” and “a few fully conscious of the agorist alternative”, however, the majority of society is still engaged in the Statist economy.

From here Konkin suggests that Agorists may want to start condensing into districts, ghettos, islands, or space colonies. We are, in fact, beginning to see the creation of Agorist minded communities, eco-villages, co-ops, and underground spaces which emphasize counter-economic activity and the creation of counter-institutions to the State. Konkin believed these Agorist communities might be able to count on the sympathy of mainstream society to prevent an attack from the State. This is the moment where the question of community protection and defense comes into play. We have seen the creation of community protection alternatives to the police state monopoly, but so far nothing completely Agorist has come into existence.

It is the creation of these syndicates of community protection which will ultimately allow the Agora to flourish. However, in order for this to happen “the entire society has been contaminated by agorism to a degree”, leading to the possible creation of an above or underground movement which Konkin called the New Libertarian Alliance. The NLA simply acts as the spokesperson for the agora and uses “every chance to publicize the superiority of agorist living to statist inhabiting and perhaps argue for tolerance of those with ‘different ways’”.

This brings us to “**Phase 3: High-Density, Large Condensation, Agorist Society**”, which is described as the point when the State has moved into a terminal crisis period due, in part, to “the sapping of the State’s resources and corrosion of its authority by the growth of the Counter-Economy”. As the Agora grows in influence the State’s stranglehold is also dissipating as a result of unsustainable economic practices. Konkin again warns that the statists will attempt to win over New Libertarians with “anti-principles” and calls for maintaining “vigilance and purity of thought”. Highly motivated New Libertarians move into R&D to help create the first Agorist protection and arbitration agencies that will compete with the State.

At this point statism exists in pockets with the state mostly concentrated in one geographic territory. Those living under statism are very aware of the freedom being experienced by their Agorist counterparts. The State has become weak enough that “large syndicates of market protection agencies” are able to contain the State and defend New Libertarians who sign up for protection-insurance. This, Konkin believed, was “the final step before the achievement of a libertarian society.” Society is divided between the larger Agorist areas and the isolated Statist centers.

The transition from phase 3 to phase 4 brings about “the last unleashing of violence by the Ruling Class of the State”. Konkin said that once the State’s intellectuals recognize that their authority is no longer respected they will choose to attack. Defense against the State will be managed once the counter-economy has generated the syndicates of protection agencies large enough to defend against the remaining Statists. The NLA should work to prevent the State from recognizing their weakness until the Agorist movement has completely infected the Statist society. Once the Agorist communities have successfully resisted the State’s attack the Agorist revolution will be complete.

As we move from Phase 3 to 4, Konkin notes that the first three changes “are actually rather artificial divisions; no abrupt change occurs from first to second to third.” However, he envisions the change from the third to fourth step to be “quite sudden”.

Phase 4: Agorist Society with Statist Impurities

Once the State has gasped it’s dying breath the counter-economy becomes the freed market where exchanges are free of coercion. Konkin predicts that “division of labor and self-respect of each worker-capitalist-entrepreneur will probably eliminate the traditional business organization – especially the corporate hierarchy, an imitation of the State and not the Market.” He imagines companies as associations of independent contractors, consultants and entrepreneurs. After the remnants of the State are apprehended and brought to justice New Libertarianism becomes the basis of ordinary life and “we tackle the other problems facing mankind”.

Whether the totality of Konkin’s vision becomes realized, the Western World has, at the least, made some slight progress through the phases predicted in the NLM. All signs point to the Counter-Economy and consciously practicing Agorist movement to be somewhere at the tail end of phase 1 and merging into phase 2. The internet (and technology as a whole) has greatly increased the chances for success of the Konkian revolution. While mankind is being exposed to the value of a life free of coercion, they have not yet been properly exposed to the tools with which to create such a world. If the Agorist movement and counter-economy continue to expand in equal rate to the violence and theft of the State, it will only be a matter of time before we see protection agencies with the capacity to defend the people. Once the people recognize the State is weakened and in decline it is inevitable that the Agorist vision of Samuel E. Konkin III will become reality.

In future essays I plan to expand upon the idea of mapping progress between the four phases of Statism to Agorism. For insight into this progression, please see Per Bylund's excellent essay "*A Strategy for Forcing the State Back*", or my talk "Creating Freedom with Vertical and Horizontal Agorism".

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