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Toward an Agorist-Syndicalist Alliance

Logan Marie Glitterbomb

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“Konkin’s entire theory speaks only to the interests and concerns of the marginal classes who are self-employed. The great bulk of the people are full-time wage workers; they are people with steady jobs. Konkinism has nothing whatsoever to say to these people. To adopt Konkin’s strategy, then, would on this ground alone, serve up as a dead end for the libertarian movement. We cannot win if there is no possibility of speaking to the concerns of the great bulk of wage earners in this and other countries.”¹

And so goes Murray Rothbard’s criticism of the philosophy of agorism to which SEK3 had a good chuckle before pointing out that many of those in the working class are already taking part in counter-economic activities from not reporting all of their income on their tax forms to paying someone under the table to mow their lawn. Despite this, Rothbard’s crit-

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¹ Rothbard, Murray, *Konkin on Libertarian Strategy*

icisms are echoed still to this day by some, especially within anti-capitalist circles. Ironic since many in anti-capitalist anarchist circles also take part in counter-economic activity in practice. However, these criticisms are not without some kernel of truth, which leads some agorists to wonder if agorism isn't in need of some updating. After all, Konkin himself believed agorism to be a living philosophy.

Agorist and journalist Derrick Broze speaks often of the concepts of 'vertical' and 'horizontal agorism'. Horizontal agorism is what most of us understand, traditionally, as agorism. It is the use of black and grey markets to out compete the state as outlined in SEK3's *The New Libertarian Manifesto* and *The Agorist Primer*. Examples of such include unlicensed businesses, tax evasion, smuggling, drug dealing, harboring undocumented immigrants, gun running, squatting, and alternative currencies. Vertical agorism is focused on localism and self-sufficiency and is inspired by such books as Karl Hess' *Community Power*. Such practice includes buying goods from farmers markets and community farms, rooftop gardening, personal and community use of solar power and aquaponic systems, community toolshares and skillshares, homesteading, urban farming, community protection networks, and free schools. While not all vertical tactics are strictly black or grey market activities (such as free schools and farmers markets), they are counter-economic nonetheless in that they challenge corporate and government monopolies and provide working alternatives that are much more libertarian in comparison.

So if not all activities have to strictly be black or grey to be considered counter-economic, then where does that leave such things as worker cooperatives and collectives or even classical wildcat unionism and newer forms of alt labor? Do these not challenge state and corporate power in significant ways, placing more power in the hands of the individual instead of coercive authorities? Rothbard himself pointed out that most, if not every, corporation rested on illegitimate property claims and

therefore should be homesteaded by the workers – the wage earners whom Rothbard claimed that agorism could do nothing for – who invested their time, labor, and energy into running the day-to-day operations but is this not just a form of syndicalism?

Karl Hess advocated a combination of such tactics as a practicing agorist, both vertically and horizontally, and a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, a 100+ year old labor union that offers a refreshing challenger to the exploitative business union model of groups like the AFL-CIO while advocating syndicalist tactics. And such tactics do seem to complement each other in theory and in practice, offering a significant challenge to state and corporate power, while also crossing ideological boundaries between free-market anarchists and social anarchists. In fact, many free-market libertarians aside from Hess have made such alliances with alt labor organizations and unions.

Consciously moving forward in building such alliances could prove to be quite advantageous. While agorists build alternatives to the white market within the black and grey markets, syndicalists could focus on challenging existing white market entities from the inside, eventually taking them over as Rothbard advocated. But it doesn't have to stop there. Agorists should indeed advocate that syndicalists go even further. Once a white market business is successfully syndicalized, agorist-syndicalists should help transition the business into the agora. The newly collectivized business should eventually do what all good agorist businesses do: ignore state licensing regimes, refuse to pay taxes, engage in the use of alternative currencies, and generally disregard statist interference with their business dealings. They just successfully ousted the boss, why submit to yet another authority? They just got rid of the corporate cronies who became rich by stealing the fruits of their labor so then why let the state do the same through taxes?

For those who object to such claims and scream #notall-bosses, I offer the following quote from Konkin:

“In an agorist society, division of labor and self-respect of each worker...will probably eliminate the traditional business organization – especially the corporate hierarchy, an imitation of the State and not the Market. Most companies will be associations of independent contractors, consultants, and other companies. Many may be just one entrepreneur and all his services, computers, suppliers and customers.”²

Even Konkin couldn't help but notice the exploitative nature of corporate hierarchy, believing it to be some of the lasting remains of feudalism and that if the individual were truly respected, bosses would slowly become a thing of the past. In the truly freed-market, labor unions would be allowed to operate just as any voluntary association and groups like the IWW show us a way to unionize without appealing to the state for favors.

Having an established local agora, no matter how small, can also provide comfort to union organizers who regularly fear losing their jobs because of their organizing activities. But the agora provides organizers the comfort of knowing that if they are fired for organizing on the job they can make a living outside of the corporate-capitalist structure. This will allow for organizers to be more daring in their actions, further challenging corporatist domination. Agorists who are excited by the ideas of direct action and civil disobedience may even decide to take corporate jobs in order to 'salt' them and help bring them down from the inside, which unlike in the dreaded political game doesn't involve taking a position of authority in contradiction to libertarian principles.

In the words of the late SEK3:

“Sometimes the terms “free enterprise” and “capitalism” are used to mean “free market.” Capitalism means the ideology

² Konkin, Samuel, *New Libertarian Manifesto*

(ism) of capital or capitalists. Before Marx came along, the pure free-marketeer Thomas Hodgskin had already used the term capitalism as a pejorative; capitalists were trying to use coercion – the State – to restrict the market. Capitalism, then, does not describe a free market but a form of statism...”³

So then why not openly challenge capitalism and the state? Why not draw from the combined examples of Rothbard, Konkin, and Hess for inspiration in how to make agorism more appealing to “the great bulk of wage earners in this and other countries”? Why not reach out and form an agorist-syndicalist alliance?

³ Konkin, Samuel, *An Agorist Primer*