

The Libertarian Groupies' International

LIBERTARIAN ALLIANCE POLICY STATEMENT

The "First World Libertarian convention", alias "Liberlocus 82", was projected to be held in Zurich this August. The convention's slogan, "From the Rockies to the Alps, Libertarianism is one peak experience after another!", of which the authors are so proud that they attribute it publicly to its author, one Linda Rader of California, is unfortunately only too characteristic of the so-called International's entire approach.

We reject this convention as a misguided allocation of resources, based upon a superficial and febrile notion of the tasks of libertarian propaganda. In order to avoid misunderstanding, we have to state that we know that several LA members have been approached by the "Libertarian International", and naturally it is entirely up to them whether or not they give it their support. But the Executive Committee has decided that the LA will not affiliate to the 'International' or formally support the Zurich convention. We advise our members to have nothing to do with it, and we request the 'International' not to mention the name of the Libertarian Alliance in any context which would suggest that the LA approves of the 'International'.

When it was first mooted that a Libertarian International was to be formed, with the immediate object of organizing a world convention of libertarians, we received the idea favourably. Our member Mark Brady, who currently resides in New York, took an active part in some of the planning discussions, and we urged through him that the location of the convention be in London, which would maximise the attendance of non-American libertarians. We now see that we were in error. The libertarian movement

has outgrown the stage, if it was ever appropriate, where libertarians should lend their names and approval to any venture merely because it is libertarian.

The first shock came with the announcement by the "International" that Chris Tame, Secretary of the LA, was currently arranging the hotel accommodation. In fact, Chris Tame had not even been asked. It subsequently became clear that this was no isolated gaffe, but that it exemplified the following consistent *modus operandi* of the "Libertarian international". They are eager to drop names, in order to give an impression of universal support within the movement, and especially of their connection with any well-known libertarian activists. This is part of their tendency to make statements optimistic to the point of inaccuracy about their plans and organization. Their principle seems to be to hype up the coming convention as much as possible, in the hope that they will take in enough people to justify the hope, *ex post*. If they can persuade libertarians that this will be one of the greatest events in our movement's history, perhaps (they seem to believe) enough people will pay up to enable them to afford to make it one of the greatest events in the movement's history. They have therefore contacted every libertarian that anyone has ever heard of, and in all cases where they get anything other than a hostile reception, they then proceed to use those libertarians names freely in their subsequent publicity. In some cases they practised a variation on this technique: they omitted the bit about contacting the people first.

Their blunder about Tame's alleged organizing of accommodation also suggested something else. The "International" (which only recently, we should point out for the sake of historical completeness, had rejoiced in the spelling Internationale - upon the LA Executive's mild protest about this little piece of revolutionary posing, the final "e" was instantly dropped) clearly conceived of the convention as a lavish event, and organization of accommodation is obviously a major part of the prior organization required. If they were prepared to leave all this, with little more than a year to go, to an organization and an individual with whom

they had not communicated, this suggested that, however mistaken the procedure they were employing, they were not very good at it. It was evidence that they could not organize the proverbial bacchanalia in a brewery.

As a result of this unfortunate experience, the Executive Committee took a closer look at the idea of an "International" and a "World Convention". There are many libertarian activities which would be marvellous if they were costless but when it comes to putting our paltry resources to their most productive use, we have to be careful to select the most effective activities per input of time and money.

The more the Executive discussed the 'International' and the convention the less we liked them. A comparatively large expenditure of time and money was envisaged, and the results were dubious. In fact, it became clear that the "International" had no clear idea of what the convention was intended to achieve, and was just muddling along, infatuated with the vision of a big event for its own sake.

Acting on the Executive's instructions, LA Co-ordinator David Ramsay Steele wrote to Vince Miller and Bruce Evoy, the inventors and proprietors of the 'International', expressing our doubts about the worthwhileness of the convention. The letter requested: "We would be grateful if you could inform us in writing of your conception of the proposed conference. What is the point of it? Who will pay for it? How many will attend? Who will be the speakers and what will be discussed? How many days will it last? Apart from ourselves, what other non-North American libertarians are involved in planning the conference?" The letter also suggested that a smaller and less ambitious convention would be more to our liking.

Vince Miller's reply confirmed our worst forebodings: "The role played by a convention, and particularly the U.S. conventions over the years ... has been one of recharging one's spiritual batteries. I don't know whether any of you have attended any of the major North American conventions [We have - E.C.] but they have been, to say

the very least exhilarating! Imagine for a moment being in the presence of up to 3,000 delightfully rational people for 3 or 4 days - it's like a visit to Galt's Gulch in Atlas Shrugged. I always come away from them on a tremendous high - filled with enthusiasm and new ideas ... at the first LP convention in Denver in 1972, two observers from Canada ... attended ... as an ultimate result of this and the following convention in Cleveland, Bruce founded the LP of Canada in late 1973."

Miller's letter added that the arrangements were now being handled by a travel agency and the location was "almost certain to be Lucerne, Switzerland - a point central to all of Europe". (The relevance of this geographical detail was unexplained. The 'International' announced shortly afterwards that Lucerne had been 'finally' settled as the venue). The format, incidentally, will be a mix of speeches by prominent libertarians, seminars on many subjects such as publishing a libertarian magazine, communicating libertarian ideas, public speaking, a mini-libertarian film festival, bus tours, etc."

So there was little attempt to answer the doubts we had raised, and the gist of the reply (the first written communication from the 'International' specifically to the LA) was that Miller and his friends were high on conventions, and conceived the affair as a sort of therapeutic orgasmatron. It should be pointed out that there are no organized groupings in Switzerland, or in most European countries. As for the formation of the Canadian LP, any two men and a dog can announce the foundation of a 'party'. No evidence was presented that the subsequent history of the Canadian LP has justified its foundation, though doubtless there have been many conventions.

One of the amusing features of the projected convention was the frequent changes of venue. London, Barcelona, Lucerne and Zurich have each been chosen to experience this nodal point of world history. We have probably overlooked a few, and we cannot guarantee that anyone visiting Zurich will not find that Pentecost has been re-assigned to Quito, a point very close to the Equator.

The Libertarian Alliance is an independent, non-party group, with a shared desire to work for a free society.

Libertarian propaganda is a hit-and-miss affair, and some good may come from a fundamentally misguided venture. We have refrained from making public earlier our rejection of this convention, so as not to endanger any possible fruitful outcome. It is conceivable that some individuals in Europe may be heartened by this gathering, and may be encouraged to form local activist groups. It is more likely that the convention will attract people with more money than sense, and that the few who turn up from Europe will be given a distorted view of libertarianism. Those who wish to contact the "International" may do so at P.O. Box 190, Adelaide St Postal Station, Toronto, Canada.

As the libertarian movement grows in more and more countries, international contacts will continue to grow, and perhaps some formal international body or bodies will be warranted. The libertarian movement is now non-existent in the majority of countries, puny and ineffectual in the remainder. Therefore the formation of an international is premature. (Membership of the LA, and of some U.S. organisations, is open to residents of any country.)

We reject this convention because:

1. It epitomizes the disastrous strategy which has wrought such havoc already in the U.S. movement: over-optimism, glamour, publicity and a sense of excitement, bereft of any sound basis or realistic propaganda goals.
2. As an instance of 1., we object to the obsession with movement 'names'.
3. As a further instance, we object to the general flavour of the 'International' bumpf, which suggests that having a good time and seeing the sights will hasten the millennium.
4. The organizers do not inspire confidence in their reliability.
5. The resources consumed by this endeavour could be far better employed elsewhere.
6. The formation of an International is premature.

7. The convention has been located by sticking a pin in a map, in an expensive city where there is no local libertarian activity.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE