

# Direct Democracy Not Parliamentary Rule

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**NEWSLETTER No.6**

**APRIL 2006**

## **WHY A POLITICAL PARTY?**

We need 550 members, although we only need 500 members to apply for registration as a Federal political party, we want to have an extra 50 in case some members are deemed to be ineligible to be on the Australian Electoral Roll. If we can register as a political party, we can:

- a) Have the name 'DIRECT DEMOCRACY NOT PARLIAMENTARY RULE' put next to our candidates name on the ballot paper,
- b) We can nominate for seats all around Australia without having the problem of finding 50 people to nominate us for that seat.

We currently have 98 members, 452 short of our total. If we want to be in a position to have candidates in the 2007 Federal election, we need to have 550 members by November 2006. We need the numbers by November 2006 because it can take some time to register a political party, especially if there are objections to its registration. That means we would need about 18 members a week to obtain the necessary numbers. Currently we are enrolling one member per week to 'Direct Democracy Not Parliamentary Rule'.

## **WHAT WILL YOU BE DOING FOR THE 2007 FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN? DO YOU WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN A MOVEMENT THAT WANTS TO PRICK THE PARLIAMENTARY BALLOON?**

Then get a hold of our application form through the web <[rulebythepeople.org](http://rulebythepeople.org)> or  
by post P.O. Box 5035, Alphington 3078, Victoria AUSTRALIA.

**JOIN US AND BECOME A BURR UNDER THE PARLIAMENTARY SADDLE**

## **ATTENTION MEMBERS!!**

**DIRECT DEMOCRACY NOT PARLIAMENTARY RULE MEETING  
TO BARNSTORM HOW TO INCREASE MEMBERSHIP**

**COMRADES BAR (TRADES HALL)  
54 VICTORIA STREET, CARLTON / MELBOURNE  
7PM WEDNESDAY – 12<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2006**

**ALL MEMBERS WELCOME**

**Joseph TOSCANO / National Convenor / Registered Officer  
Anthony MUNSLOW / Treasurer  
Mick DORAN / Secretary**

**Q. WHAT IS THE IMMEDIATE AIM OF *Direct Democracy Not Parliamentary Rule* (DDNPR)?**

Our immediate aim is simply to get 550 members in order to register as a political party. Beyond that it is up to members what they do. There is the possibility that DDNPR may evolve in the future into new areas of activity but that too is up to the members. Even if we do not succeed in getting enough members, we will have achieved something if we have raised the level of debate, caused some type of controversy or have been a thorn in the side of Authority.

**Q. WHAT IS THE LONG-TERM AIM OF DDNPR?**

DDNPR is a group of people who want to abolish parliament and replace it with a federation of community and workplace councils (local, regional, federal, international) - a free society in which all people have equal decision-making power directly in decisions that effect them. The organisational structure is 'flat' compared to the current 'top-down' hierarchy. Sounds easy? Of course it is not and we don't pretend it is. It requires a high degree of organisation, solidarity and participation. But then 'freedom and democracy' are useless concepts unless they are implemented directly by the people themselves. There are no shortcuts and there is no freedom without struggle.

Historically direct democracy has been used when the old institutions have ceased to fulfil their function or to be accountable. [1] Direct democracy is the living self-implementation of the wishes of ordinary people as opposed to the systems of domination (concentration of power) in the hand of various elites (political, economic, cultural, etc). Because of this it often accompanies what may be considered 'rifts' in history (a rupture with the previous order). When people turn to direct democracy en-masse and begin organising themselves it is usually portrayed by the elite as a 'crisis of democracy'. Of course it is nothing of the sort, rather it is a sign that the elite grip on power [2] is slipping and that their institutions are under threat. Therefore we will continue to enhance the 'crisis of democracy' [3] and embrace it as an opportunity for positive change.

We live in exciting times. Joining DDNPR is an opportunity for you to be a part of radical change rather than being a lab-rat in a social experiment controlled by the few. It is up to you; you can either be a conscious actor in history or be a passive slave to the dominant ideology.

**Q. IS DDNPR AN ANARCHIST ORGANISATION?**

Not specifically. Although there are anarchists in the organisation you don't need to be an anarchist to join - you simply need to be a citizen who is concerned about the dangerous concentration of power (political, state, corporate, religious etc) and who is determined to act in some way to countervail it. You might consider yourself to be a 'democrat', a 'liberal' a 'green' a 'socialist' or a 'conservative', (all of which incidentally, have historical intersections with political anarchism) [4]. But it matters not - all opinions are given equal hearing in the spirit of free debate and mutual respect. [5] Although this Q&A is written by an anarchist, I encourage other people to put forward their own ideas.

Ultimately there is no absolute 'right or 'wrong' there is only opinion, [6] but there are undoubtedly better and worse forms of government ranging from various types of tyranny and dictatorship to libertarian socialism/anarchism. Anarchists and others have every right to organise and to try to persuade the majority around to their point of view - the future is too important to be left in the hands of political and economic 'experts'. The current order not only puts an unfair burden of responsibility upon these elites, it is also unfair to the people they rule (i.e. claim to represent) [7]. We think it is more sensible to diffuse power into the hands of the many.

**Q. ISN'T THE IDEA OF AN ANARCHIST PARTY A CONTRADICTION? AFTER ALL I THOUGHT ANARCHISTS DIDN'T BELIEVE IN POLITICAL PARTIES?**

There is a fair amount of misunderstanding about anarchist political 'parties'. This comes from the different way the word 'party' has been understood during different phases of political history. Proudhon, the famous French mutualist (considered by some to be the 'father' of modern anarchism) had a different idea of the 'party' to what it is generally considered today. He did consider being within some form of 'party' but opposed the elitism and proprietarianism of the French parliament [8]. As Proudhon said, 'Parliament is a King with 600 heads'.

In a more general sense a 'party' is simply a grouping of people with similar interests and ideas. The real difference though is the structure of organisation and how they relate to the current institutions of domination. Pannekoek, [1873-1960] a member of the Workers Opposition during the Russian Revolution made the observation; "The belief in parties is the main reason for the impotence of the working class". This statement is still true today. People continue to disempower themselves by putting their faith in representatives who are already a separate class from the citizens. This 'bourgeois' democracy is simply a hang-over from British parliamentism mixed with the Jacobinism of the French (and Russian) revolutions. It is past its use-by date as far as any true libertarian spirit is concerned. Representative 'democracy' is democracy in name only - it should more accurately be described as liberal oligarchy (i.e. the alliance of elite politicians with big business). As somebody once said, "If voting changed anything they would make it illegal".

DDNPR follows in the tradition of Proudhon, Pannekoek and many others who have kept the autonomous tradition alive. We will use any means (even Parliament itself) to oppose the tyranny of any Party to assert itself over the vast majority. The traditional Party is concerned with attaining power and control at any cost. The traditional Party designs policies and then inflicts them on their 'electorate' (half of who did not even vote for them). The problem from the point of view of the traditional Party is not the concentration of power, but that THEY do not have control of state power. DDNPR is not interested in taking control of the State only to become like those which we opposed, but we ARE interested in the idea of mass people-power to effect real change from the 'ground up'.

**Q. DOES DDNPR WANT TO ABOLISH POLITICAL PARTIES?**

The abolition of all parties (except the one true 'workers' party) is essentially a Leninist doctrine which ultimately ends in tyranny. We do not believe parliament can be reformed, but neither would we (even if we could) abolish political parties. We either believe in free debate, freedom to organise and an open society, or we believe in the some form of Party or corporate dictatorship. We cannot believe in both. People should be free to assert their right to oppose Parliament and the 'party' system. Peoples have the right to oppose the growth of the corporate-state bureaucracy. We assert peoples right to oppose and to undermine any / all concentration of powers. [9] Upon this principle, DDNPR will assert our right to organise in any way we see fit to 'defend (and extend) our rights and liberties'. This is our right and our duty. Despite the giant raft of 'anti-terrorist' legislation in recent years and draconian workplace legislation, Australia is still a relatively open society and we want to keep it that way. At the very least those currently in power should be held accountable. Organisations such as DDNPR may be one way of achieving this. (Reformist outcome of radical politics)

**Q. IS DDNPR A 'REVOLUTIONARY' ORGANISATION?**

Yes, potentially, but not explicitly. Historically, change has usually come through a minority (which spreads to the majority). When opinions of the majority change significantly, the current order becomes obsolete [10] and a different form of 'government' comes into existence. Actually, if you look at the DDNPR Constitution, the aims are quite mild and reformist - to push the idea of recallable delegates and strict accountability (these are essentially conservative notions).

DDNPR is only a small part of the 'background static' that bubbles underneath 'mainstream' politics. DDNPR may have little effect or it may have a significant impact - this will depend upon various factors which are out of our control. We do not, like Rousseau, believe that "people must be forced to be free" [11]. We realise that we can't control what other people do and think. Revolutions tend to take on logic and a life of their own [12] - but this is exactly why organisations such as DDNPR are important - few people would want to go through something like the bloody episodes of the French or Russian revolutions. For tyranny to not rear its ugly head again relies on the ability of people to self-organise [13], build new institutions, and take full responsibility as citizens. If DDNPR helps achieve this then our efforts have not been a waste of time.

**Q. ISN'T THE IDEA OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY A REGRESSION? AFTER ALL THE IDEA OF DEMOCRACY HAS NATURALLY EVOLVED INTO WHAT IT IS NOW, (REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY) AND TO GO BACK TO THE IDEA OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY (E.G. AS IN ANCIENT ATHENS) IS SURELY A STEP BACKWARDS?**

This really depends upon our perception of history and 'progress'. Considering that both of these perceptions are dominated by political and economic elites, and that 'history' is written by the victors [14], then whether 'liberal democracy' is a step forward is actually debateable. If we look at history alternatively as better (more free) or worse (tyrannical) forms of government then there is no real evidence that humanity is on some permanent evolution towards 'freedom'. To assume that 'we' cannot fall into some form of tyranny [15] is foolishness. We're living at a point in history where there is unparalleled concentration of economic and political power - this is the logical end-point of capitalism which, far from creating a free society, naturally tends towards monopoly. Currently the corporate elite are involved in a world-wide war for resources fuelling an orgy of consumption based upon artificial needs. This is simply not sustainable either socially, economically or ecologically. Liberalism is now firmly enmeshed in the vast network of corporate monopoly in alliance with the political elite. Representative 'democracy' then, from this aspect, is democratic in name only and must somehow way be reigned in by the vast majority of people who want a decent world for their children and grandchildren to live in the future.

Opposed to this we put forward the idea of direct democracy which has itself evolved beyond the original Athenian conception (which was after all only a partial democracy mixed with other elements of slavery etc) [16]. We are not utopians. We don't assume that direct democracy is some magic bullet which will automatically make things right. However there are a growing number who believe that direct democracy (in self-government, in the workplace etc) is one key to radical change in that it holds the 'germ' of the idea of a self-instituting society [17]. Unlike representative democracy, direct democracy is inherently libertarian/egalitarian because it is based on the idea of all members of the society having equal decision-making power at the political, economic, and social levels. These, and not the continual growth of the state, are the real foundations for a free and secure society.

[1] "direct democracy has been rediscovered or reinvented in modern history every time a political collectivity has entered a process of radical self-constitution and self-activity: town meetings during the American Revolution, sections during the French Revolution, the Paris Commune, the Workers' Councils, or the Soviets in their original form". ~ Cornelius Castoriadis

[2] "Power is always gradually stealing away from the many to the few, because the few are more vigilant and consistent." ~ Samuel Johnson

[3] "Those who own and manage the society want a disciplined, apathetic and submissive public that will not challenge their privilege and the orderly world in which it thrives. The ordinary citizen need not grant them this gift. Enhancing the Crisis of Democracy by organisation and political engagement is itself a threat to power, a reason to undertake it quite apart from its crucial importance in itself as an essential step towards social change." ~ [Chomsky-Turning the Tide, p.251-2]

[4] See; THE POPULAR ROOTS OF POLITICAL ANARCHISM. ~ Yvgrvny. <http://www.geocities.com/penguinpiglet/>

[5] "Anyone who just talks and does not listen, ends up thinking that what s/he says is the only thing that counts". ~ Subcomandante Marcos - Zapatistas

[6] 'Tis therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular. ~ [David Hume's Principles of Government]

[7] When the masses are deeply sunk in their sleep, patiently resigned to their degradation and slavery, the best men in their midst, the most energetic and intelligent of them, those who in a different environment might render great services to humanity, necessarily become despots, oppress. On the contrary, in an intelligent, wide-awake society, jealously guarding its liberty and disposed to defend its rights, even the most egoistic and malevolent individuals become good members of society. Such is the power of society, a thousand times greater than that of the strongest individuals. ~ Bakunin, 'Power & Authority'.

[8] "We must make war on all the old parties' together, using parliament as a legal battlefield, but staying outside it." ~ Pierre Joseph Proudhon 1809-1865

[9] "We know that what is essential and undoubtedly useful is not just to kill a king, the man, but to kill all kings - those of the Courts, of parliaments and of the factories - in the hearts and minds of the people; that is to uproot faith in the principle of authority to which most people owe allegiance." ~ Malatesta

[10] See; WILL & CIRCUMSTANCE - Montesquieu, Rousseau and the French Revolution. ~ Norman Hampson, University of Oklahoma Press, 1983

[11] Revolution is the creation of new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships, it is the destructions of privileges and monopolies; it is the new spirit of justice, of brotherhood, of freedom which must renew the whole of social life, raise the moral level and the material conditions of the masses by calling on them to provide, through their direct and conscious action, for their own future. ~ Malatesta

[12] "...revolutions are never made by individuals, nor even by secret societies. They are, so to speak, self-made, produced by the logic of things, by the trend of events and actions. They are a long time hatching in the deepest recesses of the popular masses' instinctive consciousness, and then they explode, often seeming to have been detonated by trivialities." - Bakunin; 'Programme and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organisation of the International Brotherhood'. 1868

[13] "Organisation, far from creating authority, is the only cure for it and the only means whereby each of us will get used to taking an active and conscious part in collective work, and cease being passive instruments in the hands of leaders." ~ Errico Malatesta

[14] "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past." ~ Orwell

[15] "...neo-liberalism, because of the way it voraciously devours the commons, whether in terms of physical space, once-public services or even genetics, is frighteningly close to corporatist neo-fascism." ~ Michael Schmidt - Bikisha Media Collective (ZACF Gauteng)

[16] See; Direct and Economic Democracy in Ancient Athens and its Significance Today. ~ Takis Fotopoulos [www.inclusivedemocracy.org](http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org)

[17] The fundamental pre-condition for the creation of the consciousness of an active citizen is that the citizens themselves (and not others "on their behalf") should effect the political process. ~ Takis Fotopoulos [www.inclusivedemocracy.org](http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org)

The author of this article – JOHN COLLINS – will be at the meeting at the COMRADES BAR at 7pm on Wednesday the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2006. If you are not able to attend the meeting:-

Email him at <http://www.geocities.com/penguinpiglet/> or

Write to him C/- DDNPR, P.O. Box5035, ALPHINGTON, VICTORIA, 3078, AUSTRALIA.

## NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be posted out and placed on the website on July 2006. If you want to make a contribution to the next newsletter, email it to [supporters@rulebythepeople.org](mailto:supporters@rulebythepeople.org) or mail it to P.O. Box 5035, Alphington, 3078, VICTORIA.

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK.

REMEMBER –

**‘AN ORGANISATION IS ONLY AS GOOD  
AS THE EFFORT PUT IN BY ITS MEMBERS’.**

Joseph TOSCANO

National Convenor / Registered Officer Direct Democracy Not Parliamentary Rule

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