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## The Hi-Tech Gift Economy

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### Abstract

During the Sixties, the New Left created a new form of radical politics: anarcho-communism. Above all, the Situationists and similar groups believed that the tribal gift economy proved that individuals could successfully live together without needing either the state or the market. From May 1968 to the late Nineties, this utopian vision of anarcho-communism has inspired community media and DIY culture activists. Within the universities, the gift economy already was the primary method of socialising labour. From its earliest days, the technical structure and social mores of the Net has ignored intellectual property. Although the system has expanded far beyond the university, the self-interest of Net users perpetuates this hi-tech gift economy. As an everyday activity, users circulate free information as e-mail, on listservs, in newsgroups, within on-line conferences and through Web sites. As shown by the Apache and Linux programs, the hi-tech gift economy is even at the forefront of software development. Contrary to the purist vision of the New Left, anarcho-communism on the Net can only exist in a compromised form. Money-commodity and gift relations are not just in conflict with each other, but also co-exist in symbiosis. The 'New Economy' of cyberspace is an advanced form of social democracy.

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