

November 2009 ● Socialist Workers Party pre-conference

# BULLETIN 2

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## INDUSTRIAL PERSPECTIVES

1. The postal workers' strike has focused attention on key features – positive and negative – of the struggle in the workplace. It highlighted the potential of resistance, and the way that a fightback can become a focus for wider class bitterness in Britain. But it also shows the sharp political differences that emerge in every important struggle – and the need for the SWP to meet new challenges.

The working class faces huge assaults. Unemployment continues to rise, wages and conditions are under attack, and union rights are being eroded.[1] But much worse is to come. All the major parties are preparing an avalanche of cuts for after the election. A titanic battle is coming over who will pay for the costs of the crisis, who will foot the bill for the billions handed over to the bankers. But there is also another key factor – a qualitative shift in workplace resistance during 2009. The shift is about new (or rediscovered) methods of struggle, a new potential for militant confrontation with the employers and the state, and a new political mood.[2]

The initial effect of soaring unemployment was to panic most union leaders into abject surrender and to make many workers doubt their ability to fight. Unions nodded through job cuts, reduced earnings and worse conditions. The uncontested closure of Woolworths last Christmas, with the loss of 30,000 jobs, summed up the situation.

Even then the possibility of resistance was clear as class anger grew against the bankers, the bosses and the politicians who stood with them. It was a time when what individuals and groups in a workplace did at key moments could make the difference between resistance and surrender. It was a time of alternatives, of volatility, when the future was up for grabs.

2. Then came the fightback. In February Waterford Glass workers occupied their factory against closure. Although not wholly successful, the occupation won major concessions. For some groups of workers (and even some union officials) the idea that resistance was possible and could win assumed concrete form. This was one of the reasons why the Belfast Visteon workers occupied when bosses sacked them at a few minutes notice in April.

The Belfast occupation inspired the same at Enfield, and also a militant campaign by Basildon Visteon workers. Visteon workers did not win their jobs back, but they did humble Ford and showed that this method could succeed when less militant methods failed. Visteon was a model for Vestas workers on the Isle of Wight. The model of occupation travelled to Thomas

Cook workers in Dublin.

In each case the occupations had a big political effect, spread the message of fighting back and workers ended up better off than when they started. And the methods employed – unofficial action that ignored the anti-union laws, some independence from the union officials (Vestas workers, for example, were not in a union), and openness to arguments from socialists – were bold and militant.

The greatest danger in this situation is that we are too slow, or too half-hearted in our response.

The new sense of resistance has not been limited to a few high-profile occupations. At almost the same time as Visteon, socialist activist Rob Williams was fighting victimisation at Linamar – and he was reinstated through a combination of unofficial and official methods. Job cuts targeted at activists at the Lindsey Oil Refinery sparked walkouts by tens of thousands of construction workers. These walkouts won, and the dispute was much less marked by the “British Jobs for British Workers” argument that had featured so strongly in the Lindsey strike in February.

In September a four-week all-out strike by Tower Hamlets college lecturers won an important victory over compulsory redundancies and course cuts.

As we write, the Leeds refuse workers are in their ninth week of all-out strike against pay cuts, Brighton bin workers are about to join them, First Bus workers from Aberdeen to Essex have launched a series of strikes over pay, firefighters have taken part in the most sustained and confident industrial action since the 2003 strikes, Fujitsu workers are about to strike over pensions and job cuts, 3,000 British Airways workers came to a mass meeting to start a strike ballot and may walkout over Christmas, and Superdrug distribution workers are on all out strike. Not all of these will win (some may not even turn into strikes) but taken together with the earlier struggles they represent a new level of resistance.

And this even impacts on the bureaucracy. For example, GMB and Unison have each poured £25,000 a week into the Leeds bin strike. Partly it's because this is a Tory/Lib Dem council. Partly it's to maintain a grip on the fightback – so while backing the strike the unions have also sought to keep it within strict boundaries and to oppose militant tactics. But it's also because at a time of crisis sections of the union leaderships recognise they need some victories to prevent pay, conditions – and membership – being swept away.

3. But of course it would be wholly wrong to say the entire situation has been transformed. Trade union leaders continue to hold back struggle, and rank and file resistance is typically too weak to overcome them. Many workers lack the confidence that struggle will win. Too often planned strikes are called off or curtailed. The Unite

union officials waited for three months after a 20,000 march in Kilmarnock over the Diageo closure of the Johnnie Walker plant before they called an official strike ballot. Despite a big march in Redcar, steel union bosses have called no action over the threat to jobs. In the car plants any sense of resistance has been replaced by nationalist squabbling to switch job cuts from Britain to other countries. And of course there is the decision to halt the strikes in the post.

We have characterised the present as a battle between the old and the new. The new is the changed character of resistance. It can come from workers who have a long record of union activity as well as those not in a union; it can involve older workers as well as young, it can be expressed through official strikes as well as unofficial. The old is the bureaucratic inertia of the union leaders and the malign effect of their links to Labour. It is also shown in the lack of confidence among many who have held the unions together during the dark days of Thatcher, Major, Blair and Brown.

The old and the new are both embedded in the present. These two trends are not sealed off from one another. They mix and contest. Visteon was part of the “new” but workers at Enfield were not confident enough to defy the union officials and the law in order to maintain their occupation.

Diageo could not have seen more laggardly reaction by the union officials – a perfect example of the “old”. But eventually they were forced to call for strikes.

4. The recent postal strikes have showed the two trends. The national strikes came about through pressure from below. Local ballots grew so numerous that the union leaders were forced to call a national ballot.

CWU members then delivered a 76 percent vote for action on a 67 percent turnout. The national executive called a series of one-day functional strikes which built a big backlog. Picket lines were very well supported and the executive felt it had to escalate the strikes. Rank and file initiative demanding action over the scab centres led to sections of the union supporting protests at centres in Bristol, Bathgate and Dartford that would have seriously raised the temperature of the dispute.

And all the time the political ferment grew. Labour had to drop its attempt to privatise the post because of the general weakness of the government, the inability to find serious private sector bids, and the resistance of the CWU. Leaked documents, featured prominently in SW, revealed the way Labour and the bosses were working together to smash the CWU. London postal workers voted 98 percent to stop funding to Labour. Lord Mandelson has become as unpopular as Adam Crozier. Far from the public spurning the postal workers as the government planned, a poll for the BBC showed that while 50 percent backed the workers, only 25 percent supported management.

Then came the decision to halt the strikes and begin a period of talks that are planned to go on until Christmas. This is a disastrous strategy - throwing away momentum, the backlog built up by previous strikes, the growing sense of "us and them" and the workers' strongest card of traffic building up until Christmas.

The postal workers have not been defeated or crushed. They have been let down by their leaders. The old overcame the new, at least temporarily.

The decision to call off the strikes has provoked widespread anger - and no wonder. Royal Mail have made some concessions, but on key issues such as withdrawing imposed change the agreement only offers negotiations. However, the rank and file organisation was too weak to prevent the retreat. The local officials who have given such impressive leadership during the local strikes and built the national action have almost unanimously accepted the decision to sign-up to the "interim agreement".

This does not mean the outcome will satisfy the hawks in the government and management. They wanted much more blood, to leave the union in tatters, and to clear the way for swift privatisation. They wanted the "demonstration effect" of a strong union humbled. They have not got this. They have not cowed other workers.

Their views are best summed up by the Daily Mail, which under the headline "Christmas fudge" said of the agreement, "Nothing has been resolved - there's no consensus on modernisation... the long overdue reform of Spanish practices remains to be tackled. The major problems facing the business - militant unions, incompetent management, weak politicians, technological change and aggressive competitors - haven't been considered. Only privatisation can save the Royal Mail now."

The battle in the post is not over. Further outbursts and strikes remain possible, particularly if management push too hard. It is possible that anger at the deal may overwhelm the bureaucratic inertia, or a combination of small concessions by Royal Mail and the government plus the hold of the officials may stifle further strikes.

The post strike could have launched a national battle against cuts, and given another upturn to the fight over jobs and in defence of public services. Instead most workers outside the post will probably see the result as some sort of draw, but in the post (unless there is a swift return to action and real gains from the final agreement) the result can be demoralisation.

5. The increase in resistance, and the sharp political battle between old and new, requires every party member to raise their game. We cannot fight the battles of 2009 and 2010 with the methods of 2007 or 2008. We have argued for a long time that more militant tactics (occupations, all-out

strikes, walkouts etc) have a much better chance of being accepted by workers now and our job is to give a lead, not to trail behind. We have also argued for a model of political trade unionism where, for example, the fight against cuts in the public sector will be incomparably stronger when it is not simply a matter of workers' jobs and conditions but seen as a defence of services in alliance with service users.

One successful example was the Tower Hamlets strike where comrades combined militancy with a broad political response involving workers, students and the wider community.

Another good example is the way our rank and file members in the post led the resistance at branch level, held the line under massive management pressure but also were at the forefront of insisting that the strike had to be based on the defence of public services and as the first shot in a bigger battle over cuts and job losses.

6. We still want to contest for union positions, but our main focus is the rank and file. The most important arena for revolutionaries is the workers at the base of the union, not the top. The classic statement of what revolutionaries aim for was provided by the Glasgow Clyde Workers' Committee during a strike wave in 1915. The committee declared, "We will support the officials just so long as they rightly represent the workers, but will act independently immediately they misrepresent them. Being composed of delegates from every shop and untrammelled by obsolete rule or law, we claim to represent the true feelings of the workers. We can act immediately according to the merits of the case and the desire of the rank and file." Easy to say, not so easy to achieve.

Rank and file organisation is far weaker now than in the 1970s. Then networks of stewards had some capacity to organise activity independent of the officials, hold national conferences and coordinate solidarity. But the defeats of the 1980s and 1990s, the wave of closures in the most militant industries, the mass redundancies, the very low level of struggle, and the weakening of a socialist culture took a terrible toll on the activists.

It is no good appealing to mythical rank and file networks that do not exist, but equally we should recognise there are vital new opportunities to recruit workers to the SWP and to create wider networks of resistance. This is a key task, and we have to be alive to new possibilities.

For example, we have very few comrades in the FBU firefighters' union but they managed to hold a very successful rank and file meeting after the recent national lobby. Strengthening the rank and file involves doing collections for disputes, organising delegations of strikers, pushing for solidarity, visiting picket lines as a group from work. It also involves political work around the war in Afghanistan, the

fight against fascism, climate change and other issues.

Revolutionaries have to learn to work with and against the bureaucracy. But the test in doing so is looking at its impact on organisation among rank and file workers

As we have already explained, the union bureaucracy often acts as a deadweight, holding back struggle. We should not think that our own comrades are wholly immune to the pressures generated by holding official positions. The clash between old and new approaches applies to ourselves in the SWP as well. Revolutionaries have long recognised the pressures on good militants who take senior positions. Here's J T Murphy, a leader and theorist of the shop stewards' movement during the First World War writing in 1917 (forget for a moment his exclusive use of "man", "he" etc):

"Now compare the outlook of the man in the workshop and the man as a full time official. As a man in the workshop he feels every change; the workshop atmosphere is his atmosphere; the conditions under which he labours are primary; his trade union constitution is secondary, and sometimes even more remote. But let the same man get into office. He is removed out of the workshop, he meets a fresh class of people, and breathes a different atmosphere.

Those things which were once primary are now secondary. He becomes buried in the constitution, and of necessity looks from a new point of view on those things which he has ceased to feel acutely. Not that he has ceased to feel interested, not that he has become dishonest, not that he has not the interests of labour at heart, but because human nature is what it is, he feels the influence of new factors, and the result is a change of outlook."

Murphy was grappling with the way the social role of a union leader can impact on even very good activists. Our own comrades come under such pressures - and sometimes they buckle. Being in the SWP does not automatically inoculate you from becoming a union bureaucrat.

Some comrades want us to reject challenging for any executive and full-time positions. This would be a mistake. We cannot run away from the question of leadership inside the unions. Workers will find it strange if we are relentlessly critical of the way the unions behave but refuse to offer ourselves as an alternative when a serious challenge is possible. And winning executive positions can be useful. The 27 September demonstration at the Labour Party conference was a success because it brought together the support of sections of the union leaderships (UCU, PCS, NUJ, NUT, CWU, RMT) plus the energy of Right to Work, and the backing of Stop the War and Unite Against Fascism. Our comrades on the executives of the unions involved played an important role in stitching this alliance together, and we want them to continue to do so.

However we have to put in place better

mechanisms locally and nationally to ensure as far as possible the accountability of comrades in such positions. When someone takes a top position (locally or nationally) they will come under intense pressure, so there has to be a counter-pressure. It won't automatically come from the rank and file, so it has to come from the party. Comrades in these positions need to constantly assess their own actions, but it isn't just up to them. We need strong caucuses of our members in the unions to discuss the work of comrades in leadership positions, especially executives and in full-time posts. We should not forget our traditions of arguing to share out facility time if possible rather than having full-timers cut off from the job. We should continue to have special meetings aimed at comrades on the executives and in senior positions.

7. Serious and consistent workplace intervention is a matter for every member, not just for a few "experts". This always true, but today with the rise in struggle it is a priority. The party has done well round the post strikes with members consistently visiting picket lines, holding meetings for postal workers, building support groups, taking collections, selling SW, giving a lead in calling for action over the scab centres and arguing for escalation. We have kept up consistent work around the Leeds bin dispute.

There is a strong feeling for unity across the working class when workers move into struggles, so setting up support groups can often fit. In the 1980s support groups were sometimes used to drain away militancy. Today they can help to focus solidarity and a fightback. They can answer the desire to get involved with the flashpoints of resistance. That means we need to move quickly when disputes happen.

Groups of students did especially well around the post – from LSE's famous cakes at the Mount Pleasant picket line[3] to Goldsmiths providing the backbone for "scab-busting" at Dartford to Essex visiting the Colchester picket line on the way to the Another Education Is Possible conference.

Some supporters of the Left Platform think that the SWP did not call for a sufficiently militant approach during the strikes. A look at the leaflets we produced (available at <http://charlieswp.posterous.com>) should dispel that myth. Every one demands escalation and advises an all-out strike. Each counsels against stopping the struggle too soon. Most have a whole section on the political fallout from Labour's attacks. No doubt the leaflets can be criticised over this sentence or that, but they are essentially correct. Socialist Worker has carried excellent coverage of the strikes and the arguments around it. It has won deep respect from many activists.

The Daily Mail quoted a Royal Mail source saying, "The stumbling block to a solution was a small group of union activists in London who seemed to think they

were fighting a class war. They were being driven on by the Socialist Workers Party."

That's a travesty of course. But it is true that the stumbling block was the defiance of the great majority of postal workers, wider solidarity, and activists who did rightly think it was class war – and the SWP is proud to have played its part in that.

We are no longer in a period where districts will have to intervene around a set-piece battle signaled months in advance. In recent times some districts have had to deal with the post strike, a firefighters' strike and a bus strike at the same time.

It needs strong branches and districts to intervene around more than one dispute at the same time, build networks of workers around us, create a Right to Work meeting and win people to the 30 January conference, simultaneously whilst building the fight against the Nazis and against the war in Afghanistan. It can't be done by a small band of roving activists (well, it can but not for every long and not effectively).

So strengthening branches and broadening the participation in the party's work is crucial to more effective workplace intervention.

8. We need to develop three sorts of networks.

- Every comrade should develop a group of people around them who will give money to disputes, help when a delegation of strikers come to the workplace, reads SW, might come to a demo against the BNP, will support a march against the war in Afghanistan, might come to an SWP rally, might join the SWP. This list is not exhaustive, and not everyone in the network has to fit all of these criteria. But everyone needs to think about the people around them.

- When we have a group of comrades in a workplace they need to think concretely about who is in their individual networks and also who they can make contact with through their collective network.

- Every party branch and district needs to have a group of people it works with.

All three networks are the audience for the Right to Work conference.

9. Helping the new to win out over the old is inseparable from a political approach.

i) Virtually every dispute at present raises the issue of the Labour government and the Labour Party

Labour is in government and is imposing the attacks on pay and pensions and conditions – and encouraging the same in the private sector. Labour commands the war in Afghanistan. Labour refuses to repeal the anti-union laws and sides with employers in disputes.

It is therefore not surprising that in almost all strikes the issue of hostility to giving money to Labour will emerge. Raising the issue of a political alternative to Labour is a crucial part of solidifying the politics of rank and file revolt. It is the nec-

essary inoculation against the idea that we must not rock the boat because "it will let in the Tories". In several strikes recently we have highlighted the demand for the unions to play a part in establishing an alternative to Labour.

The need for such arguments will get stronger as the election approaches. Most union leaders have already dumped any criticism of Labour and concentrate on attacking the Tories. To take a gross example, see Derek Simpson of Unite reacting to Gordon Brown's speech to this year's Labour conference: "Get ready for a historic political come back. Gordon is off the ropes, he's fighting back and landing punches on the Tories. It's now time to get behind the prime minister to win the next election."

"We have a choice ahead of us, either a Tory government who would have led Britain into a depression, will make savage cuts and destroy jobs, or a Labour government which will not put Britain's economic recovery at risk."

This is wrong on at least four levels (Brown's comeback, supporting him will win the election for Labour, only the Tories want cuts, Labour is presiding over recovery for workers). But we can expect much more of this.

However, we should also recognise that the crisis of Labour, and the rise in struggle, means that it will be more common that sections of Labour will back workers' struggle. This can disorientate some comrades. If we think Labour is just one reactionary mass then how can we explain that the Labour MPs and councillors appear on the Leeds bin picket line, or back the Superdrug workers or sign a motion backing the CWU against the government? We should use the splits in Labour to workers' advantage.

It was right to push for the post support groups to invite Labour MPs to speak at their meetings. This offered the chance to broaden the groups, get more unions involved, and raise the political debate. It is absolutely no hindrance at a meeting to have a Labour MP or councillor denouncing Mandelson and Brown. It strengthens the arguments about workers' political representation.

ii) Many strikes raise inescapable political issues.

The most obvious example is the strikes at construction sites in February. They raised issues of genuine concern such as insecurity, job losses, the defence of national agreements against undercutting and the toxic system of subcontracting. But that was not the half of it. Strikers raised the slogan "British jobs for British workers" on virtually all the picket lines. This led to a major argument inside the working class about whether this was the right way to oppose the effects of the crisis.

From the first the SWP refused to ignore or endorse this nationalism - and we were right to do so even if sometimes it made us

unpopular. For those like the Socialist Party who claimed that the “British Jobs” slogan was essentially a media invention, it was instructive to listen to construction worker and NO2EU candidate Owen Morris speak at the National Shop Stewards Network conference last summer.

Morris very honestly said that the BNP “had tried to nick our slogan” and “we’ve tried to get as far away as possible from it now”. The slogan was real, it did harm, and it had to be rejected because unity and solidarity are critical to any recovery of workers’ organisation. It was particularly disgusting to see Unite leader Derek Simpson take part in a photo call for the Daily Star with models carrying “British jobs” placards.

The SWP, and others who agreed with us on this issue, played a role in changing the atmosphere in the unions. “British jobs” placards were actively discouraged both by union officials and the rank and file in subsequent disputes. In the June Lindsey Oil Refinery strikes (which spread like wildfire) there were far fewer nationalist arguments.

Of course this does not mean the issue has gone away. At an official level it is entirely normal to hear frenzied calls to slash jobs abroad in order to save jobs here. And at rank and file level it is commonplace to hear the same workers who say they are only concerned that immigrant workers are not paid less than indigenous workers also say that it is “common sense” that British workers must come first.

iii) Politics is a major source of radicalisation and union-building.

Union strength grows not just by militant struggle but by taking up political issues. This is important in pulling activists together, especially during years of low class struggle, as was shown by the positive impact of the very large numbers of trade unionists involved in the anti-war protests.

The trade unionists who did a collection for Medical Aid for Palestinians during the Israeli attack on Gaza will probably be the ones most likely to do a collection for the postal workers. And this approach is not just something to occupy activists in slow times. It is making concrete Lenin’s stress on the necessity for active socialist and working class support for political struggles: “Working class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence and abuse, no matter what class is affected”.

iv) The politics and ideology of the work we do is important.

Trade unionists cannot be indifferent to the politics of the work they do. Organising around these issues is the crucial mediating link between agitating around questions such as pay and hours, and the overarching political questions such as war, racism and climate change. It is also a way to make unions more effective. One obvious sphere

in which this is true is education. Narrow trade unionists who see their role as simply driving up pay and defending professional standards will be constantly outflanked by management and government who say that workers fighting over these questions don’t care about the children. Teachers have to engage at every level of the educational debate, and be firmly on the side of the children against the truncated and limited education they receive. Initiatives such as the “Rethinking Education” conferences have given parents and educators a chance to talk about campaigns against academies and trust schools as well as the issues of war, racism, community learning, testing and democracy in schools.

There are many other examples, but the point is that trade unionists have to fight around pay and the content of their job, and the national and global political questions. Missing out any of these limits the fightback.

10. The rise in the level of struggle and the potential for militant resistance means we have to reassess our work in the Broad Lefts. We do not want to be trapped in formations that are conservative when compared to the new possibilities or which turn away from militant strategy. For example, in the coming general secretary election in Unite we are discussing support for a rank and file candidate even if this means tension with the existing Broad Left. We need more discussion about such groupings.

11. A checklist:

- Every member must be an active member of their union and be pushing for militant and political resistance.

- Every member has to do collections, solidarity work and political campaigning in their own workplace. This is a good basis to start selling SW.

- Every comrade and every district has to build the Right to Work conference (see separate article).

- We need to set up or strengthen rank and file networks wherever possible.

- It is a good idea for a member of the District Committee or Branch Committee to have special responsibility for industrial work – but not if it means she or he is expected to do it all!

- Draw up a list of every workplace contact we have with their name, union, workplace, union position, email, phone number, address and space for notes. This should be kept in a book or on an excel sheet and regularly updated (and copied in case of disaster). Remarkably some districts rely on two or three comrades carrying all such information in their heads!

This is not a great method if they move away, go on holiday at the time of a key struggle or start to forget. The accumulated knowledge of activists in an area has to be centralised for the use of all. We shouldn’t start each dispute with a blank sheet, and how is a new student or young worker

member supposed to help organise solidarity with a dispute if the district has no record of who we know in the area?

- We need to continue to challenge for leadership at every level, from becoming a shop steward to contesting national executive positions (with proper regard to the many issues that can raise).

- Every branch and district must systematically and consistently plan workplace sales. We can’t throw away what we have built up in the past, and have to discuss seriously how we can maintain and increase our sales among firefighters, bus workers, council workers etc.

[1] One of the hidden processes of the recent past is the extension of anti-union laws by stealth under Labour. See, for example, the cases of *Metrobus v Unite* and *EDF v RMT*

[2] The official figures do not always give a sense of the shift. April, the month of the Visteon occupations and campaigns had very low “days lost” figures but it was a month that changed the way many activists thought about the possibility of a fightback.

[3] One postal worker complained afterwards that he was disappointed because, “As they were from students I thought they would have some drugs on them, but they didn’t.”

## Central Committee

# RIGHT TO WORK... THE ROAD FROM BRIGHTON

The recession has ripped through the lives of millions of working people in this country and internationally.

Mass unemployment has become a reality once more with the total at 2.5 million, including almost a million young people on the dole, around 1 young person in 5.

At the start of the economic crisis it seemed that British workers would not fight back. Many of us remember the YouTube video showing the angry outburst amongst workers at the Cowley plant as union officials explained why mass sackings would not be fought. But over the course of 2009 the situation has changed.

At the beginning of the year the strikes around the Lindsey Oil Refinery showed the level of class bitterness but also reflected the dangers of workers turning against one another as the “British jobs for British workers” slogan hit the headlines.

Then in the spring as street fighting flared around the G20 summit, the occupation at Visteon began. The victory at Linamar shifted things further as factory occupations and the threat of all out strike

action came back on the agenda for the first time in decades.

Since then we have seen the second wave of construction strikes, the occupation at Vestas, the all out strike at Tower Hamlets College, Leeds bins, mass strikes against the pay freeze on the buses, Superdrug, Fujitsu...the list goes on.

## Our side has begun to resist

All the complications of the weaknesses of rank and file organisation and the strength of the bureaucracy in holding back or calling off action have not gone away.

But militant resistance to job losses and attacks on terms and conditions are back on the agenda.

And these inspirational struggles have clearly put working class resistance back on the agenda in the minds of thousands of young people who up until now may have protested against war or fascism but have not seen workers struggle as an alternative to capitalism.

The occupation at Vestas, although small, put the working class centre stage as a force to resist the destruction of the planet in the face of climate change.

At the same time as resistance to the jobs massacre has grown the political crisis for the government has continued.

The MPs expenses crisis, war in Afghanistan, Griffin's appearance on Question Time and the growth of the BNP have all proved to be banana skins for New Labour.

There has been much debate in the SWP about how revolutionaries respond to the economic crisis.

The SWP leadership has argued that simply proclaiming a new mass united front against the recession, donning orange jackets and marching across Britain to protest against unemployment is no guarantee of success.

United front work in the face of the recession is complicated by the hold of the union bureaucracy on key decisions about the fightback.

We have argued to build alliances and networks of activists who will build solidarity for struggles and win support for any group of workers, students or the unemployed who begin to fight back.

There have been many attempts at bringing the resistance together, all of which have at best been limited in their success.

The SWP initiated the "People not Profit" charter in the middle of 2007.

But in the wake of the collapse of Respect and the "OFFU cheque" many in the party believed we were not in a position to simply kick off what some saw as an "over arching united front against the recession".

It seemed that any such initiative had to have real forces on board if it were to be seen as anything other than a "party front".

The "People's Charter" launched in the

Spring of 2009 by sections of the trade union bureaucracy (now backed by the TUC) was seen for a time as a mechanism that could mobilise sections of the movement. We have been involved with supporting the initiative. But it has taken eight months to see the first national Charter event. The charter has few roots on the ground and other than asking you to sign (a million signatures is the aim) it asks you to do nothing – hence the backing of the TUC.

Alongside these attempts at pulling together forces of resistance in the face of the recession a welter of other initiatives exist. The NSSN (launched in July 2007 by the RMT but now dominated by the Socialist Party with the RMT's blessing) and Public Services not Private Profit (initiated by Mark Serwotka and the PCS in Spring 2006 and still organising or supporting very occasional events) to name two.

Of course there have been innumerable local trade council, trade union and campaign meetings dealing with the recession and its effects as we saw with the growth of postal workers' support meetings (mostly on the SWP's initiative) during the dispute.

Some argue that if the SWP had "just moved quicker" we would have dominated the resistance to the recession in the same way that we were able to shape the anti-war movement.

This attitude seems to leave out the key question of the trade unions and the bureaucracy and its dominant role inside the workers movement.

But it is also true that simply getting SWP members to picket lines and collecting money for strikes (as important as this is) is not enough.

With growing workers' resistance we have to be at the centre of attempting to bring the fights together and in winning young people and political activists to see workers' resistance as the key factor in opposing the effects of the recession.

We want to create and unite networks of resistance and solidarity, the success of the postal workers support groups is evidence that the SWP can play an important part in doing this.

After much debate the SWP initiated the "Right to work" conference last June.

The event pulled together up to 300 trade unionists and young people on the day and set out a vision of resistance centred on workers' unity (with a heavy steer against the British jobs argument).

It was not the launch of a grand campaign, but a first step in building a wider campaign involving forces beyond the SWP.

The key decision of the conference was to prioritise work around the call by the UCU and NUT at their conferences (initiated by SWP comrades) to organise a mass protest at Labour's conference on 27 September centred around the issue of youth unemployment.

However it's important to note while some key groups of workers and students attended the RTW conference, most comrades would agree that the event was not broad enough to form the basis for a truly rounded national campaign.

The initial steering committee although including some important militants was far too heavily influenced by the SWP.

Over the summer we were successful in getting the backing of six national unions for the Brighton protest (comrades in the UCU, PCS, NUT and NUJ helped to pull together a planning group for the demo that included representatives of Stop the War, UAF and Right to Work).

An official slogan of "Jobs, peace and education" reflected the diversity of the groups we helped to bring together. "Right to Work" ran with "Rage against New Labour", a slogan that was very popular with the likes of the Vestas workers!

On the day some 3-4,000 attended the protest, headed up by delegations from Vestas, London cleaners and Tower Hamlet College. Some 75 banners were on the demo, including 53 trade union branch banners (more branches were represented but where were the banners!)

Flares burned, students ran down Brighton sea front, thousands joined the rally at the end of the demo and around 400, packed into an after demo meeting to hear Mark Serwotka and others (over a hundred couldn't get into the hall).

It was a good day but let's not exaggerate the success. While in London we packed out a train to the demo some areas mobilised little.

While, for example, among Vestas workers on the Isle of Wight and among Tower Hamlets College workers there was a good response, in too many places we got little beyond a close periphery.

And while the UCU advertised the demo, helped pay for transport and produced placards the NUT (after voting unanimously on its NEC to back the demo) wouldn't even advertise it on its website.

But the protest did show what was possible. It is possible to win support both from sections of the union bureaucracy and at the rank and file level of the movement for attempts to unify the struggles and bring the trade union battles and political campaigns together.

Since September 27 "Right to Work" is now on the map.

A joint meeting was held with the London CWU and Right to Work at the height of the postal strikes. Right to Work organised a successful protest at the Royal Mail scab centre in Dartford.

The UCU has agreed to back joint Right to Work/UCU meetings to tell the story of the victory at Tower Hamlets College.

In Sheffield comrades are going for a Right to Work fundraiser for the Superdrug strikers. But in many areas we are only just moving towards local events and local mobilising committees.

We have a national conference planned for 30 January in Manchester. We want every trade union militant, housing campaigner, anti-war activist, anti-Nazi, student, young unemployed person to see this as the event to come to if they want to hit back against the bankers and the politicians.

We want the event to be a rallying point for all those who want to resist the assault on the public sector that will follow the general election. We want to draw together those who back workers in struggle.

And we want to bring together activists who want to tackle the horrors of climate change, racism and war that go hand in hand with capitalist crisis.

Already a layer of key figures in the movement are booked to speak.

Brighton showed the potential for us to pull together a truly important event that brings every part of our class's resistance with workers struggle at its centre.

But the potential for such an event is not a guarantee of success.

Every branch and district has to move now to get local trade unions, student unions, community groups, pensioners' forums etc to back the event.

We need to be making sure that Right to Work materials are on every picket line and protest and that we have a target list of the 20, 40 or 100 activists we are approaching to back the event and sign up and come along.

We want to bring together a broad enough gathering of activists to allow us to elect a genuinely representative steering committee that can initiate campaigning activity into 2010.

Right to Work is not the "magic bullet". It will not immediately knock aside every other campaign that is attempting to organise opposition to the recession and of course it will not be an alternative to the fight inside the trade unions to win solidarity and support for struggles. It is not going to replace UAF or Stop the War.

But Right to Work can do something that nobody else does.

It can bring together a combination of the better parts of the union leaderships, key workers struggles and the energy of young people and students. We can build a vibrant campaign that centres its activities on building "solidarity and resistance".

In many branches there is an ongoing debate about "Right to Work". Some comrades are confused about how "Right to Work" fits in with campaigns like the NSSN, People not Profit and the People's Charter.

Some comrades have argued we are not strong enough to pull a broad coalition together (this argument is strongest where we were slowest to move over the post workers support meetings and haven't seen it in practice).

But the truth is we need every area fighting to build the "Right to Work" conference and "Right to Work" activity now.

It's in building for the conference and for activity that we will prove in practice the strengths and weaknesses of the perspective around "Right to Work".

● We need to make sure that every SWP branch and district is targeting trade union, student union and community groups to back the conference now.

● Every area needs to be fighting to get individual activists to back the event and sign up.

● We need to make sure that particular attention is paid to building the event in the Universities and at the FE colleges.

● Each area needs to be organising cheap transport now so that young people (who may sign up nearer the time of the conference) can afford to get to Manchester.

● We should be organising "Right to Work" meetings (that pull together key local struggles and campaigns) in every area.

● Organise "Right to Work" activity in your area such as pickets in support of disputes, stunts over youth unemployment, protests over public sector cuts, fundraisers for striking workers.

● We need to organise broad based local "Right to Work" committees in the build up to 30 January to help us mobilise for the conference and organise local activities.

## Central Committee

# BUILDING THE PARTY

## 2009 a year of growing resistance – 2010 a year of possibility

2009 was a good year for the SWP. The Party played a major role in building the protests against the Israeli invasion of Gaza and our students were central to the wave of occupations in solidarity with the Palestinians that swept the colleges in the second term.

However the political backdrop to the year has been the economic crisis ravaging working class communities. In March over 40,000 join the TUC's demonstration for jobs and thousands rioted in the City of London a few days later. Compared to many of our European counterparts the resistance to the jobs massacre in Britain was slow.

But as the pace of attacks on workers' conditions in Britain has increased, we have seen a rise in class struggle. There have been a number of occupations to save jobs starting in Waterford Glass, then

Prisme, Visteon and Vestas. Then there have been the strikes at Tower Hamlets College, fire fighters, bin workers and most important of all the national strikes in the post. There is a revolt against job cuts going on – militant all out strikes are back on the agenda.

Comrades played a prominent role in all of them and in some cases led the action. We also showed that it was possible to bring together in a small but significant way the different strands of the resistance on the 'Right to Work' demonstration in Brighton.

But it wasn't just upwards and onwards. At points the anger spilled out in a reactionary path, the SWP was right to make a political stand against the slogan 'British Jobs for British Workers' adopted by sections of construction workers. We started out in a minority on this question but we won over serious sections of the working class. And not all the political developments have been to the left. The rise in votes for the fascist British National Party and the resurgence of the Tories remind us that working class opinion polarises in a crisis – some blame the system, others turn to scapegoating.

The SWP, Unite Against Fascism and Love Music Hate Racism have done much to shape the resistance to the Nazi. LMHR organised a brilliant 20,000 strong carnival in Stoke in May. UAF hounded Griffin after he won his seat in the Euro elections, culminating in the kettling of the BNP's Nazi festival in Codnor. And in city after city UAF and the SWP has mobilised thousands of militant activists determined to stop the EDL/WDL/SDL protests.

The important thing is what the party does now. Over the coming months and years the key link in the chain for the party is going to be the economic crisis and the resistance to it. As the CC made clear in its document in IB1 any talk of "green shoots of recovery" for working class people is laughable. The Financial Times ran an editorial titled "UK will not be spared the axe" (19 August 2009). It boldly stated:

"Whoever wins the election – and however strong their reforming zeal – the next government will be remembered as a cutter. No reforms can save the British state from its coming re-sculpting: this is why most parties must unveil coherent political agendas."

And that is exactly what all the major political parties did during the conference season. They all tried to outbid each other to claim the title of the party prepared to make the most swingeing cuts. We have to be aware that growing unemployment and an intensification of the attacks on pensions, jobs and welfare provision are creating greater levels of insecurity and anger amongst workers. The crisis is opening up a prolonged period of political and ideological crisis.



The question for us is how are workers going to respond to these attacks? In the 1920s and 1930s Leon Trotsky wrote a number of important articles about the relationship between recession and resistance. He rejected the crude idea that recession automatically leads to a rise in class struggle. It is not always the case that when a worker is hit by a club they fight back, sometimes they are knocked politically unconscious. Under certain conditions improvements in the economy can generate more struggle than a downturn.

This was certainly the case of the US and British working class in the 1930s. Today in Britain, the resistance is growing because of the attacks on workers living conditions but other factors are coming into play and interacting with the crisis – the MPs expenses scandal, the war in Afghanistan and climate change.

These issues can feed resistance and strengthen the trend of rising industrial action. For example Vestas workers have been buoyed by the political arguments around climate change and the need for “green jobs”. The Tower Hamlets strikers resolve and militancy was strengthened because of comrades previous political campaigning around issues like StW and LMHR. Even the talk of ‘green shoots’ of recovery can lead workers to ask why should our jobs go now?

As a party we are going to have to prepare for growing levels of resistance to the cuts. Even the spectre of the Tories winning the next general election should not deter us. This is not a replay of 1979 and the Thatcher years. When the Tories were in power in the 1980s they had the full backing of the ruling class, they were driving forward the ideological debate about the need to restructure British industry and they had a plan to smash key sections of the trade union movement.

Cameron is not Thatcher; he will only get elected because of the failure of Brown’s Labour government. Cameron lacks the ideological and political conviction of his predecessor – his climb down over a Euro referendum demonstrated that. As the FT noted (12 October 2009): “A Conservative victory next year could see an intensification of union struggle, similar to the 1970s”.

If this perspective is correct, political implications for the Party must follow. Speed is the key. We have to learn from the comrades in Tottenham who worked around Visteon and the comrades who built our SWP branch on the Isle of Wight.

When the occupations broke out they moved fast to relate to those struggles and as well as providing solidarity they fought with great success to politically shape the disputes.

But we also need to create a network of activists who can generalise the fight and link up with other groups fighting back. The Right to Work Campaign has the po-

tential to do this. In the coming weeks we all have to build the Right to Work conference in Manchester 30 January 2010. We want to bring together 800 trade unionists, unemployed, campaigners and students and create a national body that can help shape the resistance on a national scale.

Whilst the resistance is the key arena of battle for the Party, we cannot afford to retreat from our work in StW (see IB2) and struggle against the BNP (see IB1). Both these United Fronts mobilise large numbers and help shape the political landscape. Also there is no Chinese Wall between the struggles against the crisis and the political fallout of a world in crisis. We also have to take the Climate Change demonstration in London on 5 December very seriously. This protest is going to be very large, we have to build and shape it.

To make it absolutely clear, this is not a perspective based on “retreating” into Party building. It is one, which requires the entire party throwing itself into strengthening our United Front work and building the resistance.

In just three days in October (22-24) comrades were faced with the task of organising around the post strike, building the UAF protest outside the BBC against Nick Griffin’s appearance on Question Time and building the national StW demonstration in London. It was not a pick or mix perspective. We had to do all three. We are going to face similar scenarios in the future and we can only begin to do this if we build strong SWP branches.

## SWP Branches: Centres of resistance

The tasks ahead are immense for a small party. It is not possible for the SWP to intervene in the struggles build the united fronts we are involved in, sell the paper, build our public meetings and the myriad of other activities we are involved in unless we have strong and well rooted SWP branches.

A small gang of activists running around a district will just not do. We have to try and involve as many members, new and old in our work.

There are two key features of political life at the moment. First, there is a high level of ideological debate and interest in socialist ideas. Second, comrades and activists want to get together to plan our intervention around demonstrations and build protests. That means that our branches have to have two linked halves.

The first should deal with the big political question of the day or a theoretical question – Why we say no platform for the BNP? Will Obama pull out of Afghanistan? Is Labour finished? Can Marxism explain the economic crisis? But they also need to be centres of resistance – places where comrades can plan and direct our interventions around strikes, united fronts, sales etc.

Our SWP branches should be a place

where we come together to debate, argue and disagree, but most importantly to act. Unless there is a major political event in your area branches should meet every week. Over the last year there are dozens of branches around the country that regularly get over 20 people at their meetings.

Every branch should try and encourage members to attend meetings. A text is not enough; we should phone comrades or visit them. Comrades have a right to know what your branch is doing and know what key activities it is involved in. Every month SWP districts/town branches should hold a SWP public meeting and twice a year we want districts to put on a rally. These meetings give us an excellent opportunity to reach out to all members and supporters.

They should be flagship events – places where comrades feel proud to take people and meetings we want to recruit new members at. We should use our imagination. Don’t put these meetings on in some dank and dark pub. Find a nice venue that is accessible and central. Make these meetings as interesting as possible.

Some districts now put on film shows before their public meetings, others food and some have even set up art and photo exhibitions! We have to put as much work into making our SWP public meetings a success as we would a united front meeting.

## Branch and district committees

Finally, for a branch to operate successfully it needs organisation. Speakers don’t appear by magic and sales do not materialise out of thin air. Every branch must have an organising team – a branch secretary, SW organiser, treasurer, membership secretary etc.

Their job is to organise the branch, direct and prioritise its interventions and fight for a local and national perspective. If that is true of a branch it is also true of a district. More and more districts have set up District Committees. Their job is to co-ordinate several branches.

For them to work successfully they must prioritise the key campaigns. Every month there is a large number of party and united front meetings. Far too often districts/branches stack up too many meetings. Branch/district committees need to draw up a calendar of events over a period of time.

Our DCs and BCs should not just be made up of party builders. It is vital that comrades involved in StW, UAF and industrial work come along. There cannot be a separation between party work and our campaigning activity. At different points districts and branches have to put greater or lesser emphasis on various campaigns. That needs to be discussed and planned fully. Lastly a DC cannot be a substitute branch or branch committee – its job is to direct the district and not be a substitute gang of activists.

## Fractions

We are campaigning and organising across a very wide field of battle. More and more of our comrades are organising strikes in their workplace, other comrades are organising very important united front campaigns both at a national level and a local level.

Anyone working with serious forces faces massive pressures to accommodate to the right or take a sectarian position. It is incumbent on us all to discuss with wider bodies and experienced comrades the strategies and tactics we are deploying in our work. SWP branches are not always the best place to do this.

Since last year's conference and the Democracy Commission the party has put a lot of emphasis on organising fractions in trade unions and united fronts like StW and UAF. These fraction committees should meet on a regular basis and discuss the political problems we face and strategy and tactics. If a fraction works well it can often pull comrades into party life who are not active in their branches.

## Recruitment

The registered membership of the SWP now stands at 6,417; this is up on last year's figure of 6,155. This year's Democracy Commission asked the Central Committee to publish on a yearly basis, the percentage figure of the number of members who pay subs to the organisation.

It currently stands at 51%, an 11% increase on three years ago. So far this year we have recruited 1,041 members of the SWP (we still have two more months to go). This compares with 1,021 in the whole of 2008, 590 in 2007 and 785 for 2006.

Every month we publish in Party Notes a breakdown of the recruitment figures (See table below) – by district, union, college and the numbers who pay by DD.

**Table 1.**  
**Recruitment to the SWP 2009 and 2008**

	2009	2008
January .....	158 .....	48
February .....	63 .....	85
March .....	74 .....	81
April .....	63 .....	144
May .....	71 .....	87
June .....	93 .....	76
July .....	147 .....	160
August .....	45 .....	44
September .....	156 .....	90
October .....	171 .....	118
November .....	N/A .....	74
December .....	N/A .....	14
Total .....	1041 .....	1021

Every district and branch has to make recruitment to the party a priority. Recruitment of young activists has rejuvenated many of our branches and districts.

Just reading the submissions in this IB from Essex, Brighton, Glasgow and Norwich demonstrate how recruitment and serious work around universities can pay real dividends. The same story is repeated in Manchester, Leeds, Central London and many other smaller branches.

People are joining the SWP for a number of reasons. Without any shadow of a doubt we are seeing a large number of young people joining the party. This has been clearly demonstrated at events like Marxism and on any of the recent protests. They are attracted to the militancy of the SWP and its ideas.

Whilst the majority are university based, many have joined from FE Colleges. In the last year we have seen 4 big spikes in the numbers recruited to the Party: around the Gaza protests, Marxism, the anti-BNP protest at their Red White and Blue festival in Codnor and the anti-EDL protests across the country.

Also over the last year we have organised two series of SWP rallies – “The Case for Socialism” and “The Return of Marx”. With very few exceptions they were well attended and we recruited well at many of them. In other words we are recruiting people because they see us at the centre of the resistance and an organisation that can provide answers to a world in crisis.

As we have argued time and again, recruitment is only the beginning of the process of winning activists to revolutionary politics. While continuing to fight to recruit as many people into the organisation we also have to put as much effort into retaining members. But there is no point in talking about retention if our branches/districts are not recruiting activists.

Every person who joins the Party should be contacted as soon as possible. They should be encouraged to come along to their local branch. We need to direct our new members into the campaigns we are involved in and arm them with the ideas to shape the struggles in their workplaces, college and community.

There has to be a dialectical relationship between the movement and the Party. It's important we get the balance right – if we put all the emphasis on revolutionary theory – we will create a generation of sectarians, unable to shape events. Likewise just building campaigns is not enough to build a revolutionary socialist organisation.

Finally asking comrades to pay subs is not a secondary question. We have to encourage every member to pay subs. Comrades who pay regular subs are by definition committed to the organisation and all our records show that they are ten times more likely to stick with the organisation.

## Socialist Worker

We now sell on average 9,800 copies of Socialist Worker each week (up from the 9,100 SWs we sold on average last year). The respect for the paper amongst workers, anti war activists and anti fascist campaigners is very high and over the last year we have seen increases in the numbers sold on public, workplace and personal sales (though with work still to be done especially on the latter two). It is worth looking at these three areas in more detail.

## Public Sales

For many years Socialist Worker built its reputation and sales around the war in Iraq. The impact of the economic crisis and the growing class tensions means that we have had to sell on a whole range of issues. Let's be honest, it took some time for many of our branches to readjust, but most districts are now comfortable with selling on fascism, the war, strikes, bank bonuses, MPs' expenses... and whatever other issues hit the headlines.

Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Camden and Birmingham have all had 100+ sales in recent weeks. Small towns too have proved capable of big public sales with, for example, Canterbury regularly selling over 40, while Dundee has had several 40+ weekday sales (some hitting 80) and Norwich are now routinely hitting 70+ and have moved from one shift to a two-shift sale.

Public sales are no longer the preserve of a few stalwarts - districts are involving a wider layer of comrades in public sales - new members, students and comrades who spend more time on united front or trade-union work have all contributed to bigger turnouts on Saturdays.

Norwich's 2-shift sale involves 12 comrades and in Glasgow we routinely have 15+ sellers on a Saturday, so that we now often have stalls on both Buchanan Street and Argyle Street.

We have seen a noticeable increase in the number of recruits from public sales and they have played a considerable role in building public meetings and raising the party's profile. It is much more common now for someone who is joining the party to comment that they have seen our sales before - a mark of the fact that more towns are selling and also that we sell on different issues each week so we attract the same people more than once. Our public sales have become a way of building the resistance to job cuts, fascism and imperialism.

## Workplace sales

Workplace sales have taken on an increased role in the Party's work over the past year. Many branches now have 5 or more workplace sales and there are a number of workplaces where we regularly sell more than 10 SWs.

It is clear that in a whole number of in-

dustries the paper has a huge amount of respect. We sold 80 papers at an FBU lobby of Parliament and 60 at a British Airways mass meeting. We still often sell 40+ on the buses in a week.

The best example of our workplace sales this year is the post. Most branches have done very well around the post. The numbers are impressive. We sold more than 250 papers around the country on the most recent strike days and over 80 on the morning after the strikes got called off. The London Region of the CWU bought 1,000 copies of the paper that exposed Royal Mail's scabbing operation.

Most districts had set up post sales before the strikes started meaning that we were already known on the picket lines. The sales fed into the rest of what the branches were doing. They helped us move quickly to set up post support groups and should contribute to building the Right to Work conference. So far districts are keeping up post sales despite the strikes being called off. The paper has acted as a bridge to draw workers closer to the party. In Ipswich reps photocopied and distributed our leaflets and in a whole number of offices non-members took extra copies of the paper in to sell.

The post is an example of what the paper can help us achieve in an industry or workplace. One of our big weaknesses in recent years though has been a lack of consistency. We should have been selling at the post since the last strike (2007) or the one before that (2003) - it was clear things would blow up again.

In East London we sold at Bow Bus Garage for a year. We dropped the sale in August when the post strikes started... and then the bus drivers came out on strike in November! We can't drop the post and go back to the buses - we have to involve more comrades.

The key to maintaining consistent sales is to draw more members into doing workplace sales and to move beyond the 'gang mentality' that a few comrades can do all the work. Some branches have done this and now have 5 or more workplace sales. Wherever we have asked them we have found students to be incredibly keen on doing post sales.

But too many branches still have the token 1 or 2 workplace sales despite having 10+ regularly attending meetings. Where you have 1 or 2 sales there is no choice but to move around from one workplace to the next, but where it has 5 or 6 a branch can have a serious discussion about the priorities and which sales need to be maintained.

Workers do not just buy Socialist Worker because they are interested in strikes. The fact is over the last 10 years or so workers and students have been attracted to Socialist Worker because of its coverage of the war in Iraq and the struggles against the BNP. We need to create a political mood around our sales. It is not true in the 1970s that workers just brought the paper on a

syndicalist basis, many were attracted to the ideas of revolutionary socialism and wanted to read about Ireland, the Portuguese Revolution and the coup in Chile.

Also our motto has always been "the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class". This cannot be an abstract idea, our job is to put it into practice. We want to encourage every member to do a regular workplace sale. This is especially true of our student comrades - by doing workplace sales and visiting picket lines they too can get a whiff of the class struggle.

In the last few editions of Socialist Worker there have been a number of superb photographs of our student comrades on post worker picket lines. A couple of the contributions in IB2 from student groups demonstrate the impact this has had.

## Subscriptions

There are over 4,000 subscribers to Socialist Worker. In the New Year - and in time for the Right to Work conference - we plan on launching a drive to get union branches to subscribe to the paper. We already have some significant CWU branches and a number of Unite branches subscribing but we feel that the role SW has played in reporting the strikes and occupations in 2009 mean we could be doing much better on this front.

## Personal sales and the fight to involve every member in the Party's work

One area that all branches and districts need to work on is encouraging comrades to sell the paper to workmates, people on their courses and key activists and socialists in their area.

These are very important for rooting the party - each regular buyer is not just someone who might join but also someone who might come to Marxism or the Right to Work conference or give to the appeal. More importantly we want to build a network of buyers of the paper, who can connect into all our areas of work. This not only deepens the roots of our party it strengthens its influence in wider sections of the working class.

There are stories of members who sell lots of papers each week at work and an increasing (but still small) number of members who start selling the paper to contacts as soon as they join. But all too often these occur in the background, disconnected to the rest of a branch's activity. There are too many key trade unionists that are not getting extra copies of the paper let alone selling them, and we are not good enough at training new members to sell the paper to contacts.

There are two ways to shift this: directly - by fighting harder for distribution and personal sales - and indirectly - by involv-

ing more members in sales that give them the confidence to try to sell at work.

Every district needs a plan for paper distribution. We cannot assume that only those comrades can make branch meetings each week can sell extra copies - we have to organise paper sales on Wednesday mornings and evenings and arrange drops to comrades who need the paper.

We need to sit down with both new and old members and talk through with them the importance of selling the paper to contacts and also advise them on how to sell at work. For example, leaving a paper in the kitchen and seeing who reads it, or starting with a collection for a strike and going back to those who gave with the paper. Branches should consider setting up sales outside comrades' workplaces to help them find people who will buy the paper.

Each week we need to make space in branch and SWSS meetings for a comrade to introduce the content of the paper and talk about how comrades can use articles to sell the paper and win arguments.

The process of building up our personal sales is inextricably linked to the need to show comrades how Socialist Worker can be used as a tool. Each week we also need to make sure nobody leaves meetings without at least 3 copies of the paper and that everyone (including those who can't make meetings) is asked for paper money.

Some branches have found it useful to have a comrade specifically responsible for tracking personal sales, as it is quite a big job and can require different skills to organising public sales. However we should be careful not to separate it too much. An important part of the drive to improve personal sales is the need to involve more comrades in selling the paper.

We can only urge people to sell at work so much. But by getting them on a sale we can increase their confidence around the paper and, especially with workplace sales, show how useful a tool it can be for relating to the best workers. The post strikes showed that it is possible to involve large numbers of members in selling the paper.

Our anti-fascist work has also drawn more members back into activity. We have to fight to involve these comrades in regular party work. A long-term member with family and job commitments may not be able to attend branch meetings or Saturday sales. But if we have 5 or 6 different workplace sales (and at different times of the day) and a weekday public sale (maybe a more local sale rather than in a town centre) there will be something they can do most weeks.

Equally a new member FE student shouldn't be prevented from doing paper sales because they have a Saturday job. Where branches have tried to involve more people in sales they have generally met with success - but there are too many branches that haven't asked.

## The ideological struggle

There is a recurring and fundamental element to Lenin's thought and practice: the stress on the role of theory and the party as the bearer of this. The most well known recognition of this occurs in 'What is to be Done?' Lenin writes that 'without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practise.'

This was not just something he argued in 1903, when the level of class struggle was low in Russia, but also during the high-points of class struggle 1905 and 1917. This was exactly the same time as he was cursing the party for failing to respond to the radicalisation of the masses that was taking place. If we are going to hold the young generation of activists who have been drawn to the SWP though our activity in anti-war, anti fascist and industrial work we have to ground them in the ideas of Marxism and our tradition.

Our job is made easier, because in the outside world there is a massive ideological debate – about the economic crisis and its impact on economics, the environment the growth of the far right. There are also a large number of people who reject capitalism as a system and are looking for alternative answers.

Marxism (which was bigger this year than it has been for several) is a key way of getting over our ideas to a wide audience. But over the last year we have also held a number of very successful educationals. They have all demonstrated the thirst for socialist ideas and have attracted a large number of young people.

This time last year we held a one-day mini-Marxism event in Friends Meeting House, Central London, it attracted just over 1,000 people. In the spring we held a day school entitled "Understanding Marxism in the Modern World", again over 500 people attended the event. And only last month 120 comrades attended a day school on 'Understanding Lenin'.

The Central Committee want to continue to hold more national day schools. The next one in February will be held in Manchester, in the hope that it will enable more comrades from our Northern Districts to attend. We will also be holding a 'women's day school' in the New Year. There is clearly a major debate going on in Britain today about sexism, feminism and how you tackle women's oppression. This is especially true in the colleges.

Where we have intervened and held meeting on the subject we have had a great response but we want to ensure that we hold on to the layer of new women we are recruiting and that they are grounded in our politics.

As well as the centralised schools we are encouraging regions, districts and branches to hold their own schools. We are asking districts to contact the National Office to ensure that we do not duplicate the schools. The National Office is more than happy to provide speakers and artwork for day schools.

## Conclusion

In the year ahead the Party faces huge challenges and opportunities. We have to deepen our roots and influence inside the working class. Branches and districts have to lay out a clear plan about how they are going to orientate around the resistance to the crisis, build and strengthen our United Front work and at the same time build the Socialist Workers Party.

### Central Committee

## STUDENTS: THE SHOCK OF THE NEW

Within the first two months of the new term, more students have joined the SWP (225) than in the whole of last academic year. Students have played a dynamic role mobilising solidarity with the post strike, come out in large numbers to fight the fascists and formed a visibly militant contingent marching against the war. The recent debate at Kings College between Martin Wolf and Alex Callinicos showed there is also an anti-capitalist feeling developing in the colleges that is more open to class politics and Marxist ideas than in previous years. So is something new emerging in the colleges?

We are not the only ones to ask this question. Earlier this year in the wake of a wave of occupations, the Vice Chancellors commissioned a report on how to deal with them. The Independent was moved to say "a seismic change is taking place in British universities". They were not wrong. The protests were impressive involving over 30 student occupations lasting from 24 hours to 31 days. They took place on a scale not seen for decades with students confronting University VC's across the country with a series of demands that they were to win.

But was it all just a flash in the pan? The spark for the occupation wave was the Israeli assault on Gaza which crystallised for many the barbarity of 7 years of the "war on terror". So against the back drop of major demonstrations, and battles with the police outside the Israeli embassy, students decided to "bring the war home" to the universities. In the process we contributed to an unprecedented isolation of the Zionists on campus and won real solidarity with the Palestinians.

But the new mood was also being shaped by a growing economic and political crisis. The university year started as Lehman Brothers collapsed. The world's rulers were visibly shaken and their moral and political authority in question. One student occupying for Gaza at Manchester

Metropolitan brought his own hand painted banner "capitalism fails".

Understanding this broader context is important. As students occupied over Gaza, construction workers were breaking the law with wild cat strikes. We rightly argued against "British jobs for British workers", but the tactics of the dispute were indicative of a volatility that has begun to produce a new mood of resistance; the resistance of Waterford, Visteon, Linemar and Vestas; of the G20 protests and the street confrontations with the BNP/EDL.

And of course there is nothing like success to breed confidence. So in the colleges we have since seen "the occupation" mobilised over other issues; from course closures and job cuts to the disgraceful immigration raid at SOAS.

The economic crisis is now hitting home to students in the form of university cuts, course closures, rising unemployment and a growing clamour from the political class to lift the cap on fees.

So although we have not seen a generalised explosion on the scale of Gaza yet; we need to understand the current confrontations over university issues, the provocation of the BNP and war in Afghanistan are part of a picture of resistance that could reach a scale not seen in Britain for a long time.

One of the most important lessons from last January is that there may have been a general mood of anger against Israel amongst students back then, but where this flared into occupation there was almost always a small minority able to galvanise this mood. Even an internal briefing document written to advise senior university managers on how to deal with occupations noted: "political activists.....have played a part in organising occupations. The Socialist Worker Party newspaper and other 'hard left' publications or posters have been displayed prominently."

That's why building a bigger socialist current amongst students and workers that is able to galvanise and shape the resistance will be a crucial ingredient in our ability to seize the time. So how are we doing?

## The return of class

The return of class in the colleges as a reference point for understanding the world and how we fight to change it has been helped by the run of militant disputes in the working class. This is significant because one major factor shaping the higher level of struggle amongst students across the channel in recent years, has been their experiences of workers fighting back and winning victories

The development of a new working class militancy in Britain has the potential to have a similar impact here.

During the Freshers Fayres for example, the Vestas occupation made our argument about class struggle and how we fight for an alternative to capitalism concrete. It meant

we got a hearing when we talked about the lesser known disputes such as Visteon, and we convinced large numbers of students to join the SWP and not just SWSS – on the basis of the need for students to unite with workers against the crisis.

The Rage Against Labour demonstration, came too early for many colleges to have a full scale mobilisation, but a number of colleges mobilised impressive delegations. At Sussex University, for example, the Student Union president advertised the demo in the Freshers pack and made attendance on the demo the first SU activity of the term. In Scotland students organised a cavalcade bringing with them a number of new recruits from Freshers fayre. On the day we had a student contingent hundreds strong which joined the Visteon, Vestas and Tower Hamlets delegations to the chants of “students and workers unite and fight” giving students a concrete experience of the kind of united resistance we need to generate across the country.

## The post strike: picket lines and cakes

Students have fought for this on a local level around disputes from the bins to the buses. But we were really put to the test during the national post strike. Our groups twinned with local Delivery Offices, built strike support groups, collected serious money, got posties onto campus, organised solidarity meetings and student delegations to go down to the picket lines.

At Manchester Uni 50 people came to a solidarity meeting and took money down to the picket line. At LSE a group of brand new SWSS members, afraid they would sleep through their alarm clocks, stayed up all night baking cakes and took them to the picket lines –setting a trend across the country.

Building support for the strike in the universities we came up against students lack of experience and history in supporting strikes; so we found a minority that were very positive about support but also a minority that were quite hostile. Collections worked better when we whipped up an atmosphere - using a megaphone, making giant post cards for people to sign, banner painting. At Essex Uni students organised a “Looking for Eric” film showing and outdoor solidarity rally. We produced propaganda linking Mandelson as a threat to our education and the post, plus SWSS bulletins making the case for the strike.

Students were one of Royal Mail’s targets for their scabbing operation. At Kent Uni, we responded by taking the Student Union President and student paper reporter down to the picket line –which resulted in a front page story on why students mustn’t scab. Goldsmiths organised a “scab busting” minibus of students to the Right to Work action at Dartford’s scab centre and we had been planning a series of flash pro-

tests at Manpower who were hiring scab labour before the strikes were called off.

Students bought a real flair and imagination to the solidarity work. This clearly enthused the workers they were relating to. It also helped us to win over a good section of the new recruits to class politics. At both LSE and UEA, for example, the involvement of a group of new students in the strike has transformed a small SWP core into a larger, dynamic SWSS groups which are leading on many fronts.

We should need to continue to unite students and workers in the resistance on and off campus. The links we made during the recent post strike should be maintained and the role students played in the dispute applied to all industrial disputes. Twinning with a local workplace where we sell and intervene every week, are part of making more permanent the links we have built up between students and workers in struggle.

Getting students, and workers we know, along to the district Right to Work public meetings and signing people up to January’s Right to Work conference is central to that strategy. We also need to find opportunities to talk through the theoretical issues raised by the strikes such as the role of the trade union bureaucracy and the rank and file, and the relationship of students to workers struggle. And recruit to the SWP.

## Anti-fascist struggle

The anti-fascist struggle has proven to be a major recruiting sergeant for students since the BNP’s election victories, and this term we have mobilised in big numbers against the EDL and Griffin’s appearance on Question Time. What these mobilisations have shown is both the huge potential to build big, rooted UAF groups on campus, and the crucial role of SWSS and the SWP as a militant core that can win the arguments on the ground around questions (such as “no platform” and the need for mass, street confrontation) that stems from a deeper understanding about the unique nature of fascism as a social force.

The potential was seen in the run up to Question Time, where transport and delegations were mobilised at very short notice in colleges around the country. Even in unis where we have struggled to get our groups going, we did really well. At UEA, for example, we linked up with the ISOC and filled a 24 seater down to the demo. At Swansea Uni the SU president showed up to our SWSS meeting on the BNP and got involved in UAF activity, helping to fill a mini bus. At Kingston Uni new members built a 60 strong SWSS meeting on the BNP in 24 hours! We also saw the importance of trying to work with groups and student unions we are not used to working with. At LSE, for example, we approached the campaigns officer to host a joint meeting on QT with UAF. Despite disagreeing with no-platforming Griffin he agreed, and in the course of the meeting, changed his

mind and backed the protest!

On the day it was inspiring to see so many young people flinging themselves at the robocops defending the BBC, chanting for 8 hours without a break, and joining the SWP in such large numbers in the process.

The experience of the protest won a layer of new activists to no platform. But the BBC has given the BNP a boost in recruits and support – and a green light to others to copy what they did. So Leicester University’s Hope Not Hate society put a motion to the SU calling for a suspension of No Platform in order to invite the BNP in for debate, with the Campaigns officer there stating “I’m with the BBC”. The ensuing outcry forced the motion to be ruled out by the SU, but we should be prepared for similar manoeuvres in other colleges.

That means we need to deepen and broaden UAF’s reach - consolidating relationships with supportive student unions and student societies and formalising UAF groups where we don’t have them. We need to relate to the current rise in homophobic attacks and make sure we work with the LGBT socs, as well as hosting big cultural events such as “Love Music Hate Homophobia/Racism” nights that embed us in the student population.

Within that we need to raise arguments about the nature of fascism, the history of our struggle, and the changing face of racism today. Coming off the back of Question Time for example, we held a series of SWSS meetings with Martin Smith on “Where next in the fight against the BNP?” recruiting some of the best militants to the SWP.

## Resisting Imperialism –the bull and the matador

The increasing divisions in the ruling class over the war in Afghanistan, and the rising body count, guarantees that the war will remain a major issue in British and global politics. The top US commander in Afghanistan recently likened the US military to a bull charging at a matador, getting weaker with each cut, until it falls. This is the nightmare haunting the American, and by extension, British ruling class. And it is why with each blow to the war effort comes further defections from the pro war camp.

The economic crisis makes these divisions and defections more fractious. It is also intensifying a class anger at those in power, shaping peoples political response to the war.

For all these reasons maintaining and building Stop the War remains important. This was underlined by the 24th October national demonstration which despite being one of the smallest StWC demos, got a huge amount of media attention, headlining every news bulletin and resonating with millions.

Splits in the establishment mean our ac-

tivities can have a disproportionate impact. But we also know that Stop the War's mobilising power goes up and down and is not currently the same as in previous periods.

This means we need a clear strategy for how we build a sustained organisation that is able to engage in the political debates around imperialism, respond to global events, and build for mobilisations big and small.

In the run up to the national demo for example, we found even though our meetings were not massive (varying from 25-70) we met very good activists, including a good number of students new to Stop the War who had never been on a StWC demo in their lives.

At Essex these people were key to getting round the student halls and selling tickets for the demo coach. At University of East London groups of students came out for leafleting and banner making sessions to build for the march.

At Sussex Uni a StWC organising meeting at Freshers of around 30 people got students motivated to fill a coach. This was followed through with a series of events including a joint StWC and Pal Soc gig Beats Beats Bullets that raised £1000, and a SU referendum on boycotting Israeli goods, which won. In Scotland, students at Strathclyde and Glasgow universities organised a protest at the local recruitment offices after their meetings.

The lesson is that where we get Stop the War right we can connect with a new layer of activists and help shape a broader political atmosphere on campus. The Sussex example, shows how important this can be in continuing to give a radical, anti-imperialist edge to the Palestine work on campus, which in too many places has a tendency to drift into charity work and letter writing campaigns.

So every Stop the War group needs to have a plan and be imaginative about how we connect with the political issues and organise activities. We should host debates and public meetings as well as cultural events.

At Manchester Uni and Manchester Met for example, students have organised a former soldier to introduce the film *Sir, No Sir*. We should make sure people know our plans for protests and activity when the 100th soldier this year dies – and think about how we link this up with organisation against military recruitment on campus – which has risen alongside youth unemployment.

Just in the last couple of weeks the political temperature around Afghanistan has intensified, and as we saw around Gaza, the current phase of imperialism makes for a very unstable situation which will generate other flashpoints. We need to lead and shape the anger over the war make sure we are in a position to respond to flashpoints as well as we did in January.

## Building the Party

Currently we have bases in around 50 universities which vary from one individual to large SWSS groups with a strong core of SWP members. We need to try and generalise the experiences of successful groups but we also have to push out into new places. At Leicester Uni where an attempt to get Griffin in was made, we do not have a group – we need to look at how local branches and districts can help to break into new universities, since any one of them could become an important flash point at any moment.

Well organised, ideological SWSS groups have proved absolutely key in our ability to build and shape a range of struggles whilst recruiting to the SWP.

At both Sussex and Essex universities, for example, faced with a week of demos and the first national post strike, our comrades were able to fill a coach for the Question Time and Stop the War demonstrations, organise solidarity for the postal workers, host well attended SWSS meetings, and recruit to the SWP.

So what was their magic formula? Key has been fighting for a basic routine of weekly SWSS caucuses, SWSS public meetings and SW sales that serve as structure for comrades to come together to discuss our political strategy, build a network around the SWP and win people to our organisation and ideas. Key also has been having a division of labour where comrades take responsibility for key areas of work.

This is a model that we need to emulate everywhere. In some places, there is a danger that we take a pick and mix approach – delivering brilliant solidarity with workers struggles but missing out on the anti-fascist or anti-imperialist struggle, or leading on the struggle but failing to tap into the ideological ferment. This is a serious mistake. The nature of universities makes them hot houses for all sorts of political explosions over different questions and we should not cut ourselves off from them. Rather we want to encourage a process of cross-fertilisation -winning ardent anti-fascists to seeing the connection with supporting striking workers and vice versa. If we don't do this, we limit our ability to deliver on the particular front we are focusing on and abdicate leadership on other important questions.

There is also a danger that having got students involved around an issue of the day, they will drift away. Students are not weighed down by the conservative pressures on workers (fear of the sack, narrow routine of work) and that means they can move very quickly into struggle. However, in place of the unifying hammer of exploitation in the workplace, students experience the fragmentation and isolation that comes with course work, exams and the pressure to outperform each other. That means having burst out very quickly, struggle can go down just as suddenly, as

students scuttle into the library to catch up on reading and write up late essays.

This underlines the importance of building SWSS and the SWP - consistent socialist organisation, which is consciously shaping a political strategy and recruiting and building a revolutionary current through the ups and downs of struggle.

## The battle of ideas

Partly how we do this is through winning students to an understanding of capitalism in its totality and the need to confront it – and that takes a process of political argument, selling our publications, getting people to our meetings and sitting and talking through theory and ideas. This is particularly important in the universities, since education under capitalism involves amongst other things processing each new generation to accept the ideological assumptions of existing society. When those ideas go into crisis, as they have recently, that crisis can be felt more intensely in universities. The growing anti-capitalist mood on campuses is something we have to connect with and shape – put simply we want to win the anti-capitalists to Marxism.

At Kings College, for example, our comrades co-organised a debate with the business society between Martin Wolf and Alex Callinicos. Not only did 300 students attend but the contributions from the floor from comrades and members of the audience showed a high level of engagement with Marxist ideas. We are now seeking similar debates with Stieglitz at Manchester and Meghdad Desai at LSE and are planning a number of other set piece debates around key ideological questions including climate change meetings and teach ins with Jonathan Neale in the run up to December demo and raunch culture and the new sexism with Judith Orr, Deborah Cameron and Zoe Williams around the week of international women's day.

These can compliment and feed into our weekly SWSS public meetings. So far this term we have had SWSS meetings ranging from 15-20 where we have small groups to 30-70 where we are more established. The quality of discussion is often very good. At Imperial College for example, 28 students including the environmental officer for the university came to our meeting on climate change. But there needs to be a greater consistency to overcome and unevenness in the attendance and content of our meetings.

An important element in developing and retaining the new members we are recruiting is developing a culture which encourages the political development of those who join. A number of SWSS groups now organise their own reading groups. This term we are also starting a London wide reading group fortnightly at Bookmarks. Simple things like encouraging new members to read around our tradition and encouraging students to do branch meetings can really help to develop the confidence

and theoretical level of our new members and is part of making sure we are integrating new cadre into the leadership of our organisation.

So we need to build the SWP & SWSS, seeing them as a small cog that can move everything else and in the process draw wider networks into a permanent relationship with us. That can be in a formal sense through united fronts such as UAF & StWC and in terms of a widening periphery that buys SW comes to our meetings and operates with us across a range of struggles. Through that we have to fight to win ideological hegemony.

This approach is particularly important because in the colleges we have seen another side to the political polarisation; one where a reactionary minority can begin to feel more confident to act or organise on campus. At City University three Muslim students were seriously injured in a racist attack. At Goldsmiths one of our comrades was subject to a sustained homophobic campaign. We need to have the roots and political influence to be able to respond quickly to these things and fight for an atmosphere where they can be driven back.

We also have to be able to shift our priorities at different points. With 5 weeks to go until the climate change demonstration we need to make a big turn to mobilising for and relating to the political debates around climate change. This is going to be huge. At Essex Uni the student union has booked 5 coaches and the Co-ops trains from the north are already fully booked. In the context of the Vestas occupation and the widening appeal of anti-capitalist politics our arguments about capitalism, the planet and class struggle can really cut.

## Whose Universities?

A central struggle this year is the battle for our universities and education. The UCU estimates that nationally 6000 jobs are at risk in the FE/HE sector, and a number of universities have announced big cuts this term. These include £20 million cuts at UCL, 10% across the board cuts at Kings and 400 jobs threatened at Leeds. The merging of the universities department with the business department under the tutelage of the Prince of Darkness also signals plans for a further marketisation of our education system and to lift the cap on fees.

Organising a generalised response to these attacks is not straight forward. The cuts hit differently in different colleges. Managements tend to introduce them in a staged way which hides their full impact and attempts to isolate students and departments most directly affected. The threat of a hike in fees, whilst bitterly opposed by the vast majority of the public, is something that will not be up for implementation till after the general election. It comes off the back of a decade of defeats over education attacks and in the context of a decision by the UCU executive to throw away the

possibility of a national strike for pay and jobs this term.

In this situation our comrades have sought to build serious campaigns that unite lecturers and students, and build the confidence of our side to take action. We are doing so with an understanding that things could blow up very quickly and the spirit of occupations return. At LCC for example a meeting of 200 students came very close to occupying over cuts. At Birmingham Uni a meeting of 50 was organised in a few hours after the closure of the sociology department was announced and a demo is now planned. At Kings College 100 students participating in a ten minute walk out were locked out of the building, showing a real fear amongst the university authorities that occupation might once again be on the agenda.

We are also building a national network around Another Education is Possible which aims to link together the localised campaigns, provide an ideological framework for understanding the attacks and promoting an alternative view of education, take initiatives on a local and national level and intervene in our local unions and NUS. Our autumn conference of 150 people was a good launch pad, pulling important delegations from those involved in local campaigns at UCL, LCC, Staffordshire and Kings. From this we have agreed to organise a series of teach-ins on education involving Terry Eagleton, Michael Rosen, Tony Benn and Tower Hamlets workers amongst others, support the Right to Work conference, build towards a national convention on fees in the new year, and look to taking a series of actions around the fight for free education.

## Whose Union?

A major obstacle to a national fight back lies with NUS which has given up the fight for free education. If NUS called a national demonstration over fees tomorrow it could be very big. Instead the NUS's approach has been to focus on getting a seat at the big table by showing *realpolitik* advancing their own "blueprint" for making students pay for their education—graduate tax.

The NUS's approach to education reflects a broader shift to the right which saw NUS disaffiliate from Stop the War this year, and attack the occupations over Gaza for being anti-semitic. It has gone hand in hand with a series of structural reforms on a local and national level which have formalised the leadership's view of the NUS as a ginger group to the New Labour government and squeezed out much of the democratic space available to student activists.

Delegation entitlement to this years NUS conference has been halved, and much of the policy discussion will be set in advance by unrepresentative zone conferences—to be merely ratified at annual conference. This means our ability to get

someone elected to the NEC and to influence conference decisions will be even harder.

The resulting gap between the leadership and students on the ground were for all to see during the Gaza occupations which were organised by and large outside of union structures and attacked publicly by NUS President Wes Streeting.

One by-product of this de-politicisation and corporate take over of our unions has been a culture in which racism and sexism can go unchallenged. At last years NUS training events, elected sabbs thought it was funny to call for a return to slavery and suggested increasing the intake of Black students would lead to an increase in gun and knife crime.

Locally we have seen the encroachment of the new sexism into unions with club nights themed Pimps and Ho's, lads' mags given out for free in Freshers packs and the promotion of Miss University events.

This has made life very hard for some comrades and supporters in union positions fighting to politically shape things to the left.

As a result a debate has developed amongst student activists about how to approach the NUS with some on the left calling for a campaign of disaffiliation and the setting up of alternative national network of SUs. This would require a huge effort involving serious bases in a significant number of Student unions across the country which we simply don't have.

But it also fails to understand the way in which the current climate is generating tensions inside the NUS which can force them into calling action. This year the NUS organised a series of "town takeovers" to highlight student hardship. Some of them were quite big (300 at Liverpool) and despite being used to promote graduate tax, opened up a space for us to put more radical arguments about education.

Having been refused a place on the HE funding review, Wes Streeting called an emergency protest outside parliament and has approached our members for advice on how to organise occupations. A surge in activity around cuts on campuses could force much more serious action—as could a growing mood against lifting the cap on fees—particularly since it is likely that a Tory not a Labour government will be implementing them.

That means nationally we don't ignore NUS. We expose NUS over failure to act, we put arguments forward about what the NUS should be doing, the kind of student movement we need. In doing this we should use what forums are left to fight to shape a different direction whether that's national conference, or activities called by NUS.

Locally there are many concrete examples of the how fighting to shape our student unions can feed into our ability to connect with much wider layers of people. We saw this most recently in the anti-fascist mobilisations, but we should also re-

member that at Manchester Uni they held a SU meeting of over 1000 people in the run up to occupying over Gaza, whilst at Strathclyde Uni the biggest union meeting in history, won their SU to backing the cuts campaign.

Our general approach should be to fight to shape our student unions where we can. The notion of reclaiming our unions is very popular amongst students and something we need to take a lead on.

When it comes to struggles we don't wait for SUs support, but we should pressure them to back them. We also need to make sure we know when elections are and have a discussion early on about whether we stand. In some places this might be just about using the election as a platform for our ideas, in others we might have a chance of winning. Where this is the case we must think about whether we have a strong enough base to support those who get elected.

## A period full of potential

Last academic year students responded well to key turning points in the situation. This term the attempts by their side to make us pay for their crisis are beginning to form into clear attacks and fuelling confrontations over a series of political questions from the BNP to the defence of our public services.

The new militancy displayed by some workers and students has the potential to develop into a pattern of resistance that will change the face of British politics and open up a chapter in our struggle the like of which we haven't seen for decades.

### Central Committee

## IMPERIALISM AND BUILDING STW

### Afghanistan war in Crisis

The crisis over the war in Afghanistan is deepening by the day. In Britain Gordon Brown is reeling from the crescendo of opposition he is facing.

Polls now show 73 percent of people in Britain want to see the troops pulled out within months. Ex-foreign minister and former warmonger Kim Howells has joined the calls to bring the troops home, and challenged Brown's claim that the war was keeping Britain's streets safe.

Most significant are the voices of the families of serving soldiers and of soldiers who have been killed in Afghanistan, who are now in the forefront of the calls for the troops to be pulled out. This mood is being expressed particularly within the working class where polls show anti war feelings are at their highest in society.

The question being asked by millions is why are we in Afghanistan? After the fiasco of the recent fraudulent elections in Afghanistan, "bringing democracy" can no longer be claimed as a war aim, so the government is falling back on the assertion that the war is keeping British streets safe. But it's not working. When an Afghan policeman being trained by British troops shot five of them dead it put into question all the government's claims that the training of the Afghan police and army was a resounding success and the way forward for ending the occupation.

In the US Barack Obama appeared paralysed by indecision about how to go forward, and debate among sections of the ruling class about an exit strategy is rife as General McChrystal demands 40,000 more troops.

### Obama and the new world order

This is a long way from how the year began for Obama when he was inaugurated as president. Alongside his promise to look after "Main Street" in response to the economic crisis, his opposition to the war in Iraq helped win him the election. He was the "anti war" candidate who famously said, "I don't oppose all wars. What I am opposed to is a dumb war". Then the dumb war was Iraq and he was trumpeting the need to pour money and soldiers into Afghanistan—the "good" war.

But for the West this "good" war has turned into yet another dumb war. Obama's election came on tide of desire for change from the electorate. But it also reflected the fact that a growing section of the US ruling class had turned its back on Bush's strategy

of shock and awe and the "everyone hates us and we don't care" attitude to international relations.

It had become a hindrance to the pursuit of US interests. Voters and political leaders were concerned that the US was perceived as an international pariah and needed to shift to a more multilateral approach to maintain their global hegemony. Obama's presidency was an opportunity to pursue the imperialist project with a different strategy. He talked of a "diplomatic surge" and emphasised working with the established international institutions.

There were two wrong positions that some on the left in the US and internationally took on Obama. One was that he was some sort of revolutionary that would transform the US into an anti racist, benevolent society. This approach led to disorientation and a partial demobilisation of the anti-war movement in the US.

The other wrong position was that Obama was no different from Bush, the "world's number one terrorist". In contrast the SWP recognised that Obama's presidency involved elements of both continuity and change with the Bush era. But as the year has gone on the continuity with the past has dominated the US's foreign policy. Obama never wanted to relinquish US global power, he is just using different methods to protect and expand it.

Those with illusions that the US might change its spots have watched as Afghan civilians are murdered in air strikes, US drones bomb the borders of Pakistan and Israel builds illegal settlements and assaults Gaza without retribution.

### Israel-business as usual

Israel's assault on Gaza at the start of 2009 was Obama's first test. From day one Obama and his secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, have regularly made clear their unconditional and enthusiastic support for Israel. In a recent visit to the Middle East Clinton pointedly did not call on Israel to stop the expansion of illegal settlements on Palestinian land. Instead, she praised Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, for his "restraint".

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas has threatened not to stand in next year's election as he has been so weakened by his closeness to the US, and the peace process has stalled, delivering nothing. Under pressure from the US he even withdrew Palestinian support for a UN Human Rights Council resolution endorsing a report that accused Israel of war crimes in Gaza.

Such was the outrage among his own ministers and supporters he had to back track and support the report.

A recent FT editorial pointed out that the US and Israel have humiliated Abbas and given him nothing to show for his years of pursuing a negotiated settlement. As a result it warned that the US and Israel may find they now face "a more radical and un-



compromising leadership". This at a time when the mood of international support for the Palestinians and their struggle is still high after the mass demonstrations across the world in January in protest against the Gaza attacks.

## US imperialism

US imperialism was never merely a consequence of a bone headed warmonger in the White House. It is still the dominant force on the world stage whether it is encouraging Nato to expand into the former Eastern Europe, backing Israel or deepening the occupation in Afghanistan. Imperialism is integral to capitalism, a system that has competition for profit at its heart.

When Obama cancelled the missile shield system in Central and Eastern Europe it wasn't about backing off from the aim of expanding US influence in the region. Instead it was about the different alliances and priorities his government sees as the best way of expanding and entrenching US global power. The US wants to keep Russia on board so as to better isolate Iran and pressurise it to halt its nuclear program.

The recent economic crisis only increases the possibility of interstate rivalry and political instability. Of course the US is still the world's greatest economic power, but the scale of the budget deficit it now carries means that it may find that it increasingly has to rely on its immense military superiority, or at least the threat of it, to impose its priorities on what it sees as the key regions of the world.

The war on terror is in part a reflection of the US's inability to maintain economic and geopolitical hegemony without resorting to military means.

The 9/11 attacks gave it the opportunity to use the role of wronged victim to invade and occupy Iraq, a country they wanted to force back into their sphere of influence. They wanted regime change, to demonstrate US power on the world stage and to control a region with essential oil supplies to stop rivals getting the edge.

## Iraq

They did indeed achieve regime change and demonstrated their military power, but at a heavy price. Not only in the damage done by the widely held view that the war was illegal and based on lies, but also the ongoing drain Iraq represents on shrinking resources. There are still over 100,000 US troops there and the recent bombings, which killed at least 155 people, show that the Iraqi people are still suffering a terrible legacy from the US intervention. This in turn means that the US is still carrying the financial, political and military burden of the occupation.

In Britain, Gordon Brown was clearly hoping that the official end to the war in Iraq and having a "special relationship" with Obama would help with his domes-

tic fortunes. However much he talks about Britain's important economic and political links with Europe he was never going to challenge Britain's long established role as holder of US imperialism's coattails.

But far from helping, the war in Afghanistan has become a bloody albatross instead. It is regularly coined "Obama's Vietnam" and Brown faces rising opposition to and questioning about the presence of British soldiers.

## Afghanistan— Obama's Vietnam?

The Afghanistan war is in deep crisis eight years after the UN invasion and seven and half years after we were told the Taliban was beaten. There has been a qualitative shift in attitudes to the war since the summer. There has been a majority of popular opinion against the war for sometime but now there is a widening and hardening of the opposition to Britain's role in the conflict.

The background of recession and economic crisis has created a deep bitterness in the working class about the government's priorities, and opposition to the war is being intensified and shaped by this class bitterness.

There are a number of reasons for this: the war looks unwinnable and the war aims keep changing. The deeply fraudulent re-election of Hamid Karzai make it look unjustified. The rate of soldiers' deaths is rising steeply; and the impact of the economic crisis has led to questions about resources and priorities.

But the stakes are high for the US in Afghanistan if it is to recover from the Iraq debacle and look like a force to be reckoned with around the globe. Obama is locked into a very public and drawn out debate with army chiefs about the way forward. There is the "go big" option of flooding in more troops for a counterinsurgency strategy, or the "go deep" option that pulls many conventional troops out of the countryside and leaves some in Kabul to train while US Special Forces to go after the Taliban. Yet the speed at which the war is unravelling means that every week Obama puts off a decision about sending in extra troops new events deepen the crisis.

One former marine acting as a civilian representative in Afghanistan recently resigned his post. In his resignation letter he sums up the quandary the US faces: "The bulk of the insurgency fights not for the white banner of the Taliban but rather against the presence of foreign soldiers and taxes imposed by an unrepresentative government in Kabul...I do not believe any military force has been tasked with such a complex, opaque and Sisyphean mission as the US military has received in Afghanistan."

Open talk of losing is rampant among the ruling class as they ponder their posi-

tion between a rock and a hard place. To pour 40,000 or more troops in would put enormous strain on an already creaking military and cost billions, and even then is no guarantee of victory.

Other national states are not keen to deploy more troops, though Brown has agreed a further 500 British troops on top of the 9,000 already there. But even he had to admit in a recent speech that British troops cannot go on dying in the name of "partner" that "has become a byword for corruption".

The numbers of casualties cannot be compared to Vietnam in scale (over 58,000 US soldiers died in Vietnam). But US casualties in Afghanistan have risen sharply. Almost 300 have died in this year, up 43 percent on last year.

Almost 100 British soldiers have died this year, the highest toll in a single year since the Falklands campaign 17 years ago.

Though this is a third of the total deaths inflicted on the US forces this year, as a proportion of the size of the respective military forces in Afghanistan the British death toll is higher. There is widespread fear that the trajectory of increased troops levels, rising deaths and the spread of the conflict to the surrounding region make the comparison with Vietnam not unreasonable.

The key for the US and British ruling classes is, do the public and military believe the sacrifice is worth making? What are the aims of the war and is there visible progress towards those aims? Right now these are still open questions.

## Is Afghanistanisation of the war a solution?

Brown has heralded the "Afghanistanisation" strategy as the way forward. Much has been made of the training and mentoring of Afghans in order for them to take on their own "security" in the future.

The US claims that the Afghan army and police force are each at least 90,000 strong, and US army chief General McChrystal talks of expanding the police force to 160,000 and the army to as much as 240,000.

Many badly trained and equipped Afghan police take on army roles. It has been revealed that 15,000 police officers received a mere three weeks training in the run up to the elections in August. Hamid Karzai's government does not inspire loyalty and the impact of years of war and occupation mean that thousands of impoverished and desperate Afghans join up long enough to get a gun and a pay packet before disappearing home to support their families. Many have done this several times under different names.

But the death of five British soldiers at the hands of an Afghan policeman in November exposed the myth that Afghanistanisation was a solution to winning the war.

Brown is struggling to convince anyone that a massive foreign occupation of one of the poorest nations in the world can be anything but destructive and unpopular.

The air strike by German forces this summer, which killed up to 100 civilians, shows that when an occupying army values the lives of its own troops (because of public opinion at home) then any pretence of protecting Afghan civilians goes out the window.

There is no possibility of the Western forces winning the "hearts and minds" of ordinary Afghans in these circumstances, and growing numbers of people in Britain are seeing government propaganda for what it is, justification for a brutal imperialist war.

## The expansion of the war

The US now treats the whole region of Afghanistan and Pakistan as one theatre of war: the Af-Pak strategy. This escalation of the war is now threatening the stability of the whole region. Under pressure from the US, Pakistan has been drawn in to the attempt to achieve victory in Afghanistan, whatever the consequences in its own society. As a result this year has seen the Pakistani military launch a series of brutal assaults on its border areas, while US drones bomb from the air, all in the name of crushing the Taliban.

But Pakistan is a nuclear state and a key Western ally with a population of 173 million—around six times the size of the Afghan population. The fall out from this strategy could be catastrophic. Over 2 million refugees were forced to flee the Swat region earlier in the year after an attack that involved 18,000 Pakistani troops, and now Pakistan's latest offensive in South Waziristan is wreaking more devastation on an already bitter and impoverished population.

This is a dangerous and risky strategy and is already causing opposition within Pakistan. One recent poll showed that 59 percent of Pakistanis view the US as their greatest threat against just 18 percent for India and 11 percent for Al Qaeda.

## Military families – crisis in the army?

Recent months have seen an increasing number of soldiers and military families speak out against the Afghan war. Comrades have reported from StW stalls across the country that since the summer, people with relatives in the army regularly come up and sign the petition and talk about how their views have changed.

We want to tap into these sentiments, which can be found in working class areas across the country. Lance Corporal Joe Glenton's refusal to be deployed back to Afghanistan has had a major political impact. When he defied orders not to speak out or

attend the StW demo in October, his defiance won the support of fellow soldiers.

The army seems to want to use his case to intimidate others from making a similar stand. The British Army is a volunteer professional army and for such cracks to be appearing in the military over this war is very significant. Up until the last few months military families and soldiers had only taken a public stand over the Iraq war, so this is a important development that has implications for our work.

We must be aware that military families' opposition to the government has also been expressed through calls for more equipment, helicopters etc. We cannot support such calls, which are effectively calls for a better equipped occupying army, all the better to oppress the Afghan population. We have to keep coming back to the fact that the best way to protect Afghan civilians and British soldiers is to bring the troops home.

Working with military families can be challenging and is not necessarily familiar territory for socialists, but the importance of StW's and the left's role in shaping the debate and directing it to a principled anti-war stance is critical so that the right, or even the BNP, cannot take advantage of the bitterness against the government over the war. We need to be aware that there are attempts to steer the debate and the anti-war mood onto a right wing agenda – for example the campaign being run by the Sun newspaper now it has an anti-Labour policy.

## The movement

The Stop the War Coalition, set up eight years ago, remains a very important united front and the SWP is central to StW groups in towns and colleges up and down the country. As the crisis over the war deepens it's vital that we maintain and invigorate local StW groups to relate to the mood of bitterness around the war.

Opinion polls showing big majorities hardening in favour of withdrawal from Afghanistan. However the size of recent national demo, around 10,000, shows there is a gap between the huge public mood of anger about the war and the willingness to mobilise and march against it. At the time of Israel's attacks on Gaza, and before that on Lebanon, there was more of a sense of urgency and outrage. People felt if they got out onto the streets then they could make a difference and stop the barbarism.

In contrast, the Afghan War has been going on for eight years. This has been a long war, and one that for some time appeared to many to have legitimacy that the war in Iraq never had.

However the march was lively, involved students and other young people who may only have been ten when the war began. Significantly, the march was led by military families and the demo had a greater impact on the media than other

larger demos have achieved.

Stop the War continues to be an important area of the party's work. At last year's conference and since there have been accusations from some of the party's ex-leadership, and most recently from the Left Platform faction, that the SWP is giving up on StW. This has never been true, as comrades who have been leading and building it for eight years can testify.

Our comrades have a proud record in StW and the SWP will remain central to StW groups right across the country. In order to take advantage of the crisis around the war we need to both inspire long time activists as well as attract new layers of people becoming newly politicised by the crisis. We will need to use a bit of imagination locally to do this. We can't just rely on public meetings in the same room as every meeting we have held over the last eight years.

We should:

- Organise pickets of army recruitment centres,
- Campaign to keep the military out of colleges,
- Host debates with pro-war speakers/academics or MPs if they will agree. Even if they don't that's a news story in the local press: "Local MP refuses to take on StW debate"
- Picket pro-war MPs
- Use new post card and final two months of StW petition on stalls
- Arrange collective delivery of the StW postcard to local MP
- Hold film shows and social events.
- Banner drops and die-ins on campus

The economic crisis also shapes and affects the opposition to the war and the debates that take place. We have about six months before the general election and in that time the question of why a Labour government is planning on cutting and privatising public services while it can find billions to fund an unpopular and brutal war will be a central one.

The war is also seen as one of the components in the rise in Islamophobia as the government targets Muslims. Just like in the German elections, we want to ensure the war and its impact are part of the national debate.

The global economic crisis has increased political instability as the role of individual states expands in order to prop up their economies and key industries and maintain competitiveness. Alongside the fall out from Iraq and Afghanistan, this will increase the likelihood of other flashpoints and conflicts internationally, such as those we have seen in Georgia and Gaza.

This is why it is essential that the SWP continues to play an important role in building and shaping the anti-war movement in Britain.

## Central Committee

## SOCIALIST WORKER: A TURN TO THE CLASS

1) As working class resistance has mounted, Socialist Worker has changed. But as with the class struggle it has not been a matter of ever onwards and upwards.

We gambled on the fight over local government pensions in 2006 only to see the union leaders cave in after Britain's biggest strike since 1926. We gambled on the strikes over pay restraint last autumn only to see it undermined by the union leaders' timidity and by the onset of recession (which officially saw inflation fall away).

But as argued elsewhere 2009 has seen a steady rise in resistance – from Waterford Glass through to the post strikes. At every stage the new spirit of resistance has clashed with the old timidity, pessimism and pro-Labour stance of the union leaders. But the general trend is of mounting combativity.

Socialist Worker rose to the challenge of Waterford, Prisme, Visteon and Vestas. We clearly identified ourselves with those struggles and became indispensable to those who were building solidarity. But we did not simply act as a cheer leader. We always argued what was needed to win, why solidarity was crucial and sent out a clear steer about what needed to be done.

That continued through the Tower Hamlets College strike victory into the post dispute. Building on the good work done round earlier disputes the paper has won a growing audience among postal workers and their supporters. On the picket lines during the last round of strikes we sold 250 papers. We also sold over 80 outside Delivery and Sorting Offices on the morning after the strikes were called off.

We argued clearly what was at stake for our class, what needed to be done, and we sent out a clear direction that solidarity collections, support groups and demonstrations outside the scab centres needed to be built. We also continued the debate as to whether the CWU and other unions should be funding Labour.

All this has to be done while also highlighting the growing tide against the Afghan war (not least among military families), taking up the arguments over the need to stop the BNP and why Nick Griffin should not be allowed on Question Time and much, much more.

At the start of this decade the paper saw its key audience as those who demonstrated against capitalism in the wake of Seattle and then those who joined the mighty protests against war. That was vital and feeds through into today's struggles. Today something has changed – although the factional fights over the last two years have acted to prevent that being fully de-

bated at our national conference.

In 2009 the paper became an organiser, at the centre of working class struggles, in a way which has not been the case or in such a sustained way for many years.

That has been reflected in a strengthening of our paid sales – the highpoint was selling out of all 15,000 copies of the four page special we produced round Gaza at the start of this year. Workplace sales have continued to grow to levels which were not seen in the upturn of the 1970s. At Dundee council we regularly sell 15 plus, at Mount Pleasant post office in central London the sale is always in double figures while we sell 40 a week at bus garages – with a weekly average of eight at Willesden, Westbourne and Cricklewood garages in London.

We also demonstrated that our internet coverage can help develop a readership for the hard copy of the paper (which is why bourgeois papers put so much effort into their web editions) with postal workers increasingly emailing in reports, stories and their views.

The sell-out of the post strikes does not mean that the growing tide of working class resistance has been halted – though it shows we have not achieved a decisive breakthrough. Nor does it negate the grim daily reality of work and everyday life for working people in today's Britain.

But it does mean we need to continue the work done in developing and improving SW in recent weeks and months.

2) John Rose and Mike Simons document in IB 1 contains a wealth of how to produce a successful revolutionary newspaper during an upturn, that of Socialist Worker in the early 1970s.

Some of those successes still stand the paper in good stead. Over three decades ago Laurie Flynn exposed the dangers of asbestos to ladders and construction workers. That still impacts today and we regularly get contacted by people about those and similar cases.

The need for short articles, humour, clarity and much else are all things we need.

But there is one important difference between the Socialist Worker of that time and the paper now. At that time the paper's core audience was readily identifiable – to themselves and to the ruling class – shop stewards who were leading the class in daily battles.

There was a revolutionary minority in that shop stewards organisation by 1974-75 (something SW fought hard to create) but the dominant politics was left Labour, thanks in large part to the Communist Party and its strategy of alliances with the left trade union leaders and left Labour MPs.

Such shop stewards organisation does not exist today. But the allegiance of the class as a whole to Labour is much more fragile.

In 1972 or 1974 there was no real argument over whether it was the working class

which had the power to fight and win as the lights went out, the trains stopped running and flying pickets shut down coal depots and power stations.

Today there is still an argument over whether it is the working class which can liberate humanity (though its easier to win than earlier in this decade).

Many of the key activists in battles like Vestas, the buses and Tower Hamlets College have been shaped by the previous period and the mass mobilisations against war, global poverty and neoliberalism.

When the paper interviewed some of the key activists at Vestas over what led them to occupy it was striking how many had taken 'green jobs' motivated by concerns over global warming and climate change. On the London buses many key activists got active round the anti-war demonstrations while in the PCS it would be easy to find young activists who've read Naomi Klein and other anti-capitalist authors.

Of course, the battles of the past year have not just involved new or younger activists. They have drawn in older activists – as at Visteon. But they also bring a legacy of the defeats of the last three decades and the arguments associated with that.

All of this, plus the continual relevance of Stop the War, anti-Nazi and other campaigns means the paper has to combine being a paper which organises solidarity, gives voice to workers and argues a strategy to win with a relatively high theoretical content.

Of course that was true too in the early 1970s when the paper carried brilliant columns on 'The Meaning of Marxism,' on Irish history and longer articles explaining there could be no parliamentary road to socialism and why Russia was not socialist.

But today we find ourselves having to argue with ideas often accepted as common sense. It was a truism at the start of this decade to say Marx was back but Lenin was off the loop for a new generation of anti-capitalists. That's changed as ideas such as that we shouldn't confront the state ebb away but it's not the case that they've disappeared.

A high emphasis on theory – accessible and clearly written we hope – is a legacy which should continue from the first half of the decade into the present. We also need to bring the lessons of past struggles into a new generation to arm a new layer of rank and file leaders.

We need to address the new upsurge in feminist ideas, in part a reaction to the 'laddishness' so evident on campus and in the media. The core arguments are the same as those of the 1980s but then feminists were retreating into identity politics, today they want to confront sexism. A similar spirit underlay the angry reaction among LGBT people to the recent homophobic attacks.

These were points made in response to John and Mike at last September's National Committee. That agreed to start a discussion on how the paper needs to change that

will continue to conference.

But it was also stressed that this debate cannot be separated from a discussion on increasing sales of SW and, in particular, encouraging greater workplace and individual sales.

There are other differences - negative and positive - from the early 1970s. There is nothing like the left milieu which existed then with left-wing pubs, bookshops and even cinemas and theatres in most towns and cities. But there is less of a barrier between students and political activists and organised workers.

The relative weakness of the Labour Party and the trade union leader's means the situation is more volatile. This means greater polarisation but also makes it likely that the pattern of class struggle can be more explosive.

Finally, we are not hiding a new generation of Paul Foots away. Paul was unmatched. Socialist Worker cannot compete with his achievements at the Daily Mirror with his weekly campaigning page. He had resources to fund a staff, research and stories we can only dream of.

3) Gramsci made the point that it is not enough to pump out ideas centrally and hope they are picked up by the masses. In order for those ideas to be carried into the class it needs a layer of people who can not just interpret them but generalise and build on them.

All of us need to be able to explain a world seemingly gone mad and suggest what should be done using everyday language, examples and arguments which connect with people's experiences. That's even truer for the revolutionary paper.

That's one difference between selling and reading Socialist Worker and reading it on the net. We can centrally urge people to collect money for strikers or set up a support group or to attend an anti-war or anti-Nazi demonstration but that is hardly ever a substitute for someone, a SW seller, talking to a SW reader about what needs to be done and how to do it. After all few of us came onto this planet knowing how to do a collection on the streets let alone at work or college.

Round the post dispute we fought hard to maximise the number of comrades collecting for the postal workers and selling SW. That is something which is ongoing.

On the blogs you are an individual contributing to a discussion where everything you say, however wise or stupid remains for posterity. In a one-to-one discussion or in a more collective gathering you can shift and change position and learn directly from others. You also learn what arguments cut, what tone to use and so on.

You can learn that from selling the paper, from talking to regular readers about what they think of the paper and from discussing after a workplace or street sale in the café.

Old tricks are there to be re-learned. Every one who gives to a strike collection

should be asked if they'd like the paper. If someone agrees or even half agrees Griffin should not be on Question Time point to a particular article in the paper and suggest they read it (if they like it ask if they'd like the paper weekly).

If you visit a picket line taking a collection or even a cake breaks the ice. Take a picture! If it's in next week's paper you'll get some sales as a result and if it's on the website people will still be chuffed.

The simple truth is that if we had maintained SW sales at 15 or 20 key depots over the last few years we would have recruited more postal workers this autumn. That applies to bus garages, civil service offices, fire stations and much else.

It's also the case that these sales are often comparable to street sales in size and of course you are more likely to sell to the same person each week and build a relationship with them over time.

That's even truer if you sell the paper to work or class mates.

Key to both increasing workplace and individual sales is distribution of the paper - ensuring comrades get it in their hands by Wednesday evening thus maximising sale opportunities. That is part of the party's push for stronger and more effective branch organisation.

Another side is getting those comrades who already sell the paper passing on their experiences and tips about how to sell it. If you know someone you can guess that it might not be the front page story which will get them to read the paper but a particular story or feature.

All of us came across people unsure about our No Platform position regarding Griffin and the Nazis. All of us had to learn or re-learn arguments, and refine them as we argued and debated. But that was true for thousands of others who would have found SW invaluable.

Street sales are the public face of the party. How many of us first came across SW outside a station, on the high street or on a demonstration? Many of us can remember the impact that first read of SW had on us. If we are to create new branches establishing such a sale would be the first step in that process. And those sales have in recent times become campaigning ones which help build a demo, solidarity or a local meeting

In the colleges we should press for at least one, weekly 'flagship' sale outside the student union, main canteen or wherever - hopefully accompanied by a vibrant bookstall. But door-to-door hall sales have also been effective this term in building our SWSS groups.

All of this is a central feature of our drive to construct networks of resistance in the coming weeks and months. In other words the paper is an organiser.

4) Socialist Worker ends 2009 in a stronger position. That does not rule out further and greater improvements and changes. These

flow from a developing situation.

Some experiments have worked, others have not. At the NC there was widespread doubts over axing the formal editorials (though the number of 'What we think' style pieces has increased).

At the NC some argued for more exposure type stories about the excesses of the rich at a time of crisis, financial scandals and so forth. These can and have been done brilliantly. They can also become repetitive.

However, we do need to sharpen our attacks on the Tories and their wealthy friends - the article about Simon Mann, Mark Thatcher and the attempted coup in Equatorial Guinea should be an opening shot in that. Of course the pro-Labour Daily Mirror will do the same but we need to be aware most working class people still see the Tories as the full blooded class enemy.

Some of the strongest articles three or four years ago were those on social issues like gun and knife crime, ASBOs, school exclusions and so forth. These have been crowded out of the paper more recently at a cost. Our international coverage is highly prized by our readers and should remain a priority.

To highlight just one example, the reports from inside Egypt of the strikes and the opposition to Mubarak have been one of our real successes.

There will always be arguments about things like our cultural coverage but this is much liked whenever we survey our readers.

The whole history of the revolutionary press and of Socialist Worker is one of evolving in relation to the class struggle and yet maintaining the continuity of the revolutionary tradition. It requires a constant dialogue and debate.

Tony Cliff used to say that the paper was the decisive test of democratic centralism. Every week we have to produce a front page which hits the right note and meets the demands of our members and our class. Sometimes we fail, sometimes we do ok and sometimes we get it 100 percent right. Round the post strike the paper did that. Its coverage, the shorter articles, the exposure of management's plans, Bertie's diary plus the more directional pieces provide a platform upon which we can expand and develop the quality and impact of our paper.

We require a debate in the Party on how we can improve SW and how we can increase the number of sales and sellers. But it can't just be internal - this debate is one which must also involve the wider networks of people we want to relate to, our readers and supporters.

## Central Committee

## **BUILDING THE PARTY: THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE LEFT PLATFORM**

The Left Platform is a faction of the SWP set up to argue an alternative perspective to that presented by the Central Committee. We set out below our perspectives for building the party and the direction of the left. If you agree with our document, you can join the Left Platform by emailing [leftplatform@gmail.com](mailto:leftplatform@gmail.com).

### **1. For a serious, political debate on the way forward for the SWP**

This is a defining moment for the left. The most serious economic crisis since the 1930s and a deeply unpopular imperialist war are causing profound problems for the ruling class. New Labour's loyalty to big business and US foreign policy has accelerated its historic decline. We face the likelihood of a Tory government and a huge assault on the public sector, set against the background of a widespread sense that the whole of the political establishment has failed the majority of the population.

The growth of the BNP is one expression of this sense of alienation from the mainstream. But there is a continuing mass radicalisation to the left, obvious in the spate of recent workers' occupations, outrage at bank bailouts and MP's expenses, the student occupations and demonstrations over Palestine earlier in the year, anger over war in Afghanistan and anxiety over climate change.

Despite impressive results building support for a series of workers' occupations and confronting the BNP, there is a widespread perception that the left has yet to find a way to adequately respond to this dramatic situation.

It is natural at such times of turmoil that there are real differences of opinion amongst revolutionaries. We know there are differences about how best to respond in the SWP today. What is needed in the next few months is a serious and open debate about the role the Party should be playing on the left and in the movements.

This debate needs to take place in a fraternal and tolerant atmosphere free from personal attacks. No one should feel nervous about putting forward their views for fear of being denounced as factional or, worse still, of facing disciplinary action. The real tradition of Leninism in such periods is of free and open debate in which all positions are ensured maximum exposure

and careful consideration in order that the most effective policies can be adopted in a democratic manner.

We should therefore avoid misrepresentation of comrades' political positions. The CC perspectives document (bulletin 1) unfortunately falls into that trap when it claims that those CC members who resigned at last year's conference 'argued (somewhat contradictorily) that building the Stop the War Coalition should remain the SWP's central focus and that responding to the recession required the launch of a national united front modelled on Stop the War'.

It might be contradictory if it were true. What was argued then was of course that the recession was the key question and that we needed a national united front on this question. Stop the War is, we believe, a good model but we were offered no model except piecemeal localised activity and waiting for events we could intervene in.

It is simply untrue to argue that we believed STW was more important than the recession.

Comrades might also be surprised to hear from the CC that last year 'the party underwent a fierce internal debate over its perspectives'. At the time the CC majority denied that there were political differences and told conference that the controversy was all about the behaviour of one member of the CC. This was clearly false. We hope that this time political differences will be debated honestly and openly, to the benefit of the whole party.

We urgently need to have this kind of debate in the Party to ensure that there can be a resurgent left with the SWP at its heart.

### **2. The political upturn since Seattle**

Ten years ago at the time of the Seattle demonstration the SWP made a sharp strategic change. Faced with an anti-capitalist mood becoming a movement, we decided the starting point for revolutionaries was to get involved with the movement and do what we could to give it direction.

In the process we felt we would grow in influence and numbers. We launched Globalise Resistance as a loose anti-capitalist network involving a number of leading figures on the left and had real success mobilising and expressing the sentiments of thousands of activists in this first phase of radicalisation. This new orientation led to a split with the International Socialist Organisation in the US who declined to take a leading role in the movement around Seattle, preferring instead to concentrate on propaganda and party building from the sidelines.

Our pivotal role in Britain's biggest ever mass movement, Stop the War, took this process to a new level. The SWP provided a good deal of the inspiration, the organis-

ing backbone and the political direction for Stop the War. We gained huge credibility in the process and recruited many of the best of a new generation of activists, many of whom have been central to the organisation ever since. We took this process a step further with the wider project of Respect, which had significant success until its crisis in 2007. No strategy is risk free, and like any other orientation, aspiring to lead mass movements creates many difficulties. However it is crucial we do not allow past setbacks to prevent us from taking future initiatives.

We believe that the decision taken at the time of the first radicalisation – that a crucial role of revolutionaries was to be fully engaged in building wider resistance – was the correct one.

The economic crisis has produced a new phase of political radicalisation. Popular disgust with bankers and politicians has reached new heights. Neoliberal ideology has collapsed and no effective or widely accepted ruling class ideology has taken its place. Many people are now questioning the very basis of our economic and political system in a way that has not happened since the 1970s.

This situation has produced a limited but real revival in industrial struggle, although its main effects at this stage remain political and ideological.

When we formulated the idea of a political upturn we always believed that it should be encouraged, articulated and organised in such a way that it would flow over into renewed economic struggle. But we also argued that any renewed militancy would not simply be a re-run of the industrial upturn of the 1970s. We thought that it would be thoroughly political and that it would depend for its success on revolutionaries relating to it in a political and not a syndicalist manner.

We are worried this is not the policy being pursued by the leadership at present.

We want to argue three main points.

1) The SWP should commit to spearheading a broad and political united front response to the economic crisis and its effects. Since the crisis began it has regularly been argued in the SWP, often by the leadership, that a united front over the recession is impossible. We believe on the contrary that creating a national campaign that can respond politically to the crisis is essential if the left is going to make an impact on the situation and relate to the scale of both radicalisation and potential militancy.

2) Twenty first century capitalism and imperialism are intertwined. The drive to imperialist solutions is being boosted by economic crisis. Imperialism remains the single biggest mobilising issue in British politics and right at the heart of the government's crisis. Building the anti-war movement has to be a central priority in every area and for every comrade. Since 2007, the SWP leadership's attitude to the anti-war movement has been equivocal, and

in too many areas we have dropped a serious commitment to building Stop the War groups on a consistent and systematic basis rather than with a stop-start approach. We need to recommit.

3) These initiatives need to go hand in hand with party building. We need branches which are interventionist, geared around the many demands of the class struggle and the movements, which can act as centres of resistance for socialists locally, rather than, as too many of them are, small and sometimes abstract discussion centres. We need a campaign of sustained recruitment. The ideological impact of the crisis means revolutionary parties are in a position to grow significantly. We should be organising more regular recruitment rallies that break out of the pattern of standard public meetings. But such a campaign will only work if we re-engage the whole Party in systematically building a nationally co-ordinated broad united front resistance.

### 3. The recession and the SWP

The recession has become a central issue in global politics and the cardinal new political development since we adopted the 'political upturn' perspective after Seattle.

The attempt to resuscitate neoliberalism through the transfusion of billions of pounds of public money into the collapsed financial system has, as best, simply shifted the economic crisis directly into a crisis of politics: from the fury over MPs expenses to the talk of national default and bankruptcy, and with huge cuts expected in public services for years to come, the political crisis is already biting. At worst, the British ruling class will be faced with both a weak to nonexistent recovery, and a fiscal crisis of the British state.

The wave of attacks on the public sector will deepen the already generalised anger. It is widely accepted that financial speculation caused the crisis, that the bankers and the speculators were bailed out by the public, that their behaviour has not changed and that far from challenging them, the politicians are dancing to their tune. If commentators are still talking of an economic recovery when the bulk of the cuts take place, the sense of outrage can only deepen. In this situation, action against the BNP is crucial, building solidarity with strikes is vital, but they are not sufficient.

In the last two years there have been a series of significant industrial disputes, including the teachers' strikes and the London bus workers action in 2008 and a spate of inspiring and relatively high profile workers' occupations and strikes in 2009. The disputes at Visteon, Vestas, the Lindsey Oil Refinery, Tower Hamlets College, and others have all been important expressions of workers' anger and frustration. They have also all been well-received by other workers. None of them, however,

have generalised across the class enough to provide a focus for the widespread sense of bitterness amongst workers and others in society. The dispute at Royal Mail, continuing as we write, clearly has the potential to generalise as a national confrontation between workers and bosses, with the government clearly on the bosses' side.

SWP members have successfully built significant solidarity for these disputes and influenced and recruited some key militants. But relating in a serial fashion to each strike as it arises will neither create a revolutionary leadership in the working class, nor allow that class to solve the immediate problems of generalised unemployment, wage reductions and public sector cuts: individual workplaces and localities may achieve localised successes, but these will not, alone, push back a generalised ruling class offensive. To do so requires political organisation on a national scale.

The recession, in other words, poses itself as a paramount political problem for the working class: though arising from an economic crisis, it cannot be solved by the economic struggle alone. The limited but real increase in industrial struggle demands much more than a propaganda response. And it also demands much more than organisations that are 'party fronts' that contain few figures beyond the SWP or only contain them as figureheads.

What is required is a broad, united left organisation on a national scale that can deliver solidarity to each dispute as it occurs on a far more effective level than the SWP alone is capable of doing. The leadership task of the SWP is to rise to the challenge of leading others in the class towards such an organisation.

The economic crisis demands that the left speak directly to as broad a swathe of working class opinion as we can possibly reach. Despite the tireless efforts of many comrades since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008 our response to the recession at this level has been inadequate and inconsistent.

At times the leadership has argued that a united front response to the recession is impossible and at other times they have taken up initiatives in an indecisive and hesitant way.

In autumn 2008, the People Before Profit Charter was promoted but only as 'one possible' united front among other options, and often the Public Services Not Private Profit initiative was promoted as an equally valid if not preferable alternative. This created confusion and a lack of direction.

Both these initiatives were then dropped in favour of the Bob Crow/John McDonnell People's Charter. But then we moved away from this initiative when these forces began to organise the No2EU electoral effort. Now the Crow People's Charter has organised a national conference at a large central London venue this November.

This left the SWP responding to the

recession through its own propaganda. Comrades have related with great commitment to a series of important disputes but we have done so generally using Socialist Worker and Party structures alone. This has meant that the paper has gained great respect amongst those in dispute and we have recruited a handful from amongst the best militants.

But it has also meant we have not been able to forge a much wider solidarity network which could have involved much broader groups of workers (and others), alongside us, so giving us the chance to shape the resistance and ultimately recruit much more widely. It is precisely such a middle cog between the party and the class for which Tony Cliff always argued.

In the absence of such an initiative we have had to start from scratch with every new dispute, instead of having a broad organisation that could carry forward the resources and support from one campaign to the next and help generalise the resistance.

To resolve this problem some comrades campaigned for the launch of a Right to Work Campaign. They were opposed in the strongest possible terms by the CC, and one leading comrade even described the idea as 'Guevarism'. The motion to establish a RTWC was defeated at the Party Council.

The next day the Democracy Conference reaffirmed the SWP's commitment to democratic centralism.

Yet 6 days later at the Right to Work conference, which drew 300 people, although they were mostly SWP members, the CC instructed comrades to vote for amendments to the founding document which called for local meetings to be set up and campaigning to start on a nationwide basis.

However, this turn to a RTWC has not been carried through in practice. The conference elected a steering committee but the full committee has never met, and the resolution for a nationwide series of public meetings has not been implemented. This has given the RTWC the character of a party front not a genuine united front.

If the second RTWC conference in Manchester is to become an effective vehicle which unites the left in the unions and beyond it has to be built on a completely different basis. It must both involve a genuine united front method and relate to the politicisation. It must have the capacity to take up and draw towards it all those wanting to fight the effects of the recession.

In this context it is unfortunate that the call for the conference was effectively issued by the SWP CC and that the original date of the conference was unilaterally changed by the CC.

We must now redouble our efforts in order that the conference attracts the best speakers on the left, elements of the anti-capitalist movement and so on. Such a movement has the potential to pull in large numbers of disaffected and radicalised

people. To pull it off, the Party would have to throw its full weight behind it and insist that every member builds it across the country.

We can already see the damage done to the movement by the absence of such a structure during the course of this year. The solidarity network for all the disputes from Visteon onwards would have already been in existence and would have been much wider if we had already begun the work of creating this kind of united front.

Moreover, as each dispute took place it would have been possible to broaden and deepen such an organisation so that by the end of the year we would have been at the heart of a very substantial organised network of militants and activists.

This network is all the more necessary since many of the disputes, especially Vestas, had a large element of community and political involvement way beyond the immediate workforce.

The truth is, however, that we have barely begun to build such a network.

In a non-revolutionary situation, under liberal, advanced capitalism, the method of the united front is central to any meaningful activity by a revolutionary party; but at the same time, working within a united front as a revolutionary organisation poses the problem of leadership in its sharpest form.

We must work with reformists and non-revolutionaries, who still command the great majority of support inside the working class. At the same time we cannot merely follow their lead: we must fight as organised, independent revolutionaries for the best available strategy inside the united front. Equally, however, we cannot fight as revolutionaries by ourselves, turning our noses up at reformists and their organisations. Failure on one side dissolves the revolutionary party; failure on the other produces sterile sects.

An effective response to the recession would both draw on the base we have in the trade union movement, but look wider to involve both long-established reformist leaders and new forces pulled into activity perhaps for the first time.

It would pose a series of immediate, concrete demands around which a mass political campaign could start to develop. Demands such as placing the nationalised banks under democratic control, for instance, and cancelling all bonuses and repossessions would resonate; making the rich pay for their crisis, whether through income or wealth taxes, would have wide support. Of course we have run these slogans in *Socialist Worker*, but the point is to use them as rallying calls that can unite sections of the movement and mobilise large numbers of people.

The exact content is something that can develop through struggle and discussion, much as Stop the War's core messages have developed. But turning a good idea on paper into political reality requires the SWP

to return to the best parts of our own tradition: a recognition that economic questions are also political, and a serious effort made to apply the method of the united front.

#### **4. The war and the continuing centrality of the Stop the War Coalition**

It is now clear to just about everyone that the behaviour of Bush and his neoconservative regime was not an aberration, but that imperialist intervention is hardwired into contemporary world politics.

Obama's attempt to project a new image for US foreign policy is already in trouble. A section of the US establishment want to 'draw down' their overseas commitments and take a more 'collegiate' approach to foreign policy, but they are unable to do so for two main reasons. First, as the US's economic position worsens in the economic crisis the premium on its military superiority grows. Second the failure to win in Iraq or make any headway over Palestine means defeat in Afghanistan and Pakistan is not an option for the major powers.

Failure in Afghanistan is not an option for the British because they have to prove themselves effective allies to sustain the special relationship, central to Britain's geopolitical strategy.

So we remain mired in permanent war. The war has stayed centre stage in British politics throughout this year. The Gaza demonstrations last January are the largest demonstrations this year – significantly larger than the still impressive TUC demonstration last March. The confrontations with the police outside the Israeli embassy remain the largest and most militant events of the political year so far.

The wave of student occupations over Gaza was the largest such wave for 20 years and were the immediate precursor of the factory occupations.

Throughout the summer and early autumn of this year the war in Afghanistan has dominated the front pages and news bulletins again and again. Afghanistan has turned from the 'good war', over which the British government thought it could win the battle for public opinion, into a standing disaster for the government.

Even the much vaunted political capital of Barack Obama has been severely diminished partly by the Afghan war, as a majority of Americans now demand that the troops are pulled out.

In this situation, the SWP should be shouting from the rooftops about the importance of the anti-war movement. It should have a continuous, stable and large-scale presence in the STWC and it should be sustaining and building the Coalition in every possible locality, union, workplace, and college.

We should be constantly drawing the connections between the recession and the war. We should be constantly deepening

the opposition to both by pointing out that capitalist crisis and imperialist war are two sides of the same coin.

This is the essence of the theory of imperialism pioneered by Lenin and Bukharin. But it must be made concrete by elaborating this understanding in the strategic and tactical thinking of the party.

And we should also be making sure the anti-war movement is a launch pad for challenging the growing Islamophobia in British society.

But this is not what is happening.

Unfortunately our attitude to the Stop the War Coalition work has been patchy and in some places very inconsistent. While in some areas comrades continue to provide excellent leadership of the groups, with good results for the movement and the Party, there are more and more areas where we have very little involvement in local groups where until recently we provided dynamic leadership.

This is no doubt partly because of the exacting demands of leading such a long-lasting campaign and of the ups and downs of the anti-war struggle. But if we are honest it is also because of an ambiguous attitude, at best, from the leadership.

In the run up to the last Party conference we heard for the first time a critique of the anti-war movement as being too 'top down' and 'too reliant' on notables. At the conference itself we were told that the Palestine demonstrations were not really a product of the anti-war movement but a more special case. More recently we have been told that the movement is past its 'heroic period' and we have been told that the question of war is now on the 'back burner' by a CC member. Worse still some CC members have now started to repeat the criticisms of the Stop the War Coalition first heard from the left sects – that 'Stop the War doesn't generalise enough' and that 'Stop the War failed to stop the war'. For two of the critical weeks before the national demonstration against the war in Afghanistan the paper carried, in one issue, nothing on the war and, in the second issue, only one short article.

The very successful demonstration of 10,000 plus on 24th October was greeted with surprise by some comrades who had been led to believe by some organisers and full timers that it would be very small. Many of our stronger areas did not mobilise large numbers of SWP members or put on their usual levels of transport. The argument sometimes given that 'it is easy to get people to sign petitions, but they won't go to demos or meetings' surely reflects a failure of our politics to engage with a new, often working class, audience on this question. Chris Harman's argument that 'it wasn't a million' can only be answered by saying, 'whoever said it would be?' What we argued is that Afghanistan is a key political question and that this demo was the start of a longer term campaign.

Such arguments have created confusion

about our long term, consistent commitment to Stop the War Coalition.

This confusion has been compounded, to put it mildly, by instructions from the centre to limit comrades' involvement in Stop the War. For example Party Notes in September instructed colleges to send only one comrade per university to the Stop the War Conference. At the SWP student meeting the CC introduction mentioned STWC but made it absolutely clear that building STWC groups, organising rallies in the colleges and mobilising for the national demonstration were not priorities. There were three sessions at the meeting but no session on the war. Those comrades who tried to redress the balance were told that they should 'bend the stick' against Stop the War by one of the student organisers.

In branches across the country comrades have been told that one comrade is sufficient to attend local Stop the War organising meetings. There has been a return to the practice of holding branch meetings at the same time as Stop the War events.

For example, branch meetings across London went ahead on the night of a major rally on Afghanistan in central London, which featured a rare appearance by Afghan MP Malalai Joya and was the first time that Lance Corporal Joe Glenton, who faces a court martial for his refusal to go back to Afghanistan, appeared in public. This was a crucial rally that helped to galvanise the movement in London over the war.

Such a self-denying ordinance on involvement in Britain's biggest ever mass movement is extremely damaging. It has led to the decline of some STW groups and the takeover of some others by other political forces, but, just as importantly, it has led to the isolation of Party members from the biggest single pool of radicalised activists in this country.

Of course we have to calibrate our involvement, but at a time of permanent war and deep imperialist crisis comrades should be fighting for the biggest and most vibrant anti-war group possible in every area, and every single comrade should feel themselves a part of this movement.

Agitation over the war is not an alternative to fighting the recession; it is part of fighting the recession. Work around the war is not a digression from the political crisis; it is a permanent and major part of the political crisis.

## 5. How to tell your left from your right. Is the United Front a 'right wing' strategy?

For Lenin and Trotsky the strategy of the united front was essential to advancing the interests of the working class.

A united front unites broad layers of people around shared demands and simultaneously provides the conditions for the revolutionary party to flourish and grow.

The united front is therefore integral to revolutionary strategy, unless the party is so small or the objective situation is so adverse that no such broad unity is possible.

But what happens when the revolutionary party stops pursuing a united front strategy? The lack of such a strategy can lead to revolutionaries accommodating to political forces to their right. This is because the party has no effective mechanism for changing the balance of forces in favour of revolutionaries.

At the same time the party is also prone to sectarianism and reliance on party propaganda. This is for precisely the same reason: no effective lever to change reality exists, so propaganda is all that is left.

In reality these two errors often co-exist. When propaganda manifestly fails to alter the real balance of class forces, panic sets in. Revolutionaries then collapse into accepting unity on terms dictated by other forces in the class. The alternative to this vacillation is a structured united front, with reformists, in which revolutionaries can provide political and strategic direction to the struggle. For the SWP in recent years, Stop the War has been the most successful example of this.

The absence of united front method produces vacillation. Revolutionaries alternate between bouts of sectarian party activity (and 'party fronts', consisting of members plus our immediate periphery) and adaptation to conditions created by larger or stronger forces. What is missing is a systematic approach to class unity - the united front - and consequently revolutionaries' capacity for shaping events.

To put it in Marxist terms, we need a dialectical unity of opposed principles. In this case it is the unity of building an independent vanguard party with the need for working class solidarity (irrespective of party affiliation or ideological differences) in the united front. In the absence of this dialectical unity we are left with two wrong but mutually reinforcing poles: sectarianism (or propagandism) and liquidationism (or adaptation).

There have also been more pragmatic objections to the united front. CC members have argued that 'we have no partners' for a united front. At other times we have been told there is no mood for united political action.

Both these arguments are demonstrably wrong. The wider left may be weak but, partly because of this, there are a number of trade union leaders, MPs, radical journalists, high profile academics and cultural figures who are ready to work with the revolutionary left. A glance at the impressive line up at Marxism is conclusive proof of this. The truth is we have not even tried to involve these kind of people in, for example, a Right to Work Campaign.

The idea that there is no mood for united campaigning sits uneasily with the general notion of an increasing tempo in the industrial struggle and a growing militancy.

It is also contradicted by the intense anger generated by the bail out of the banks and the MP's expenses scandal.

It has also been said that although the united front is right in principle, nevertheless it has 'pulled us to the right in practice'. But the experience of the STWC refutes this: our involvement has ensured a strong anti-imperialist core to STWC that has always prevented it from becoming a mere 'peace' movement. Our speakers have always made anti-imperialist, not merely 'peace' speeches, and they have always connected the war with wider social and economic issues, as you would expect revolutionaries to do.

The STWC commitment to direct action, most recently in the Gaza demonstrations and student occupations, marks it out sharply from other mass organisations where revolutionaries do not play such a central role.

On a string of occasions the Stop the War Coalition has been in confrontation with the state over particular demonstrations, and mostly it has won. And the movement can claim to have played a central role in removing a hated prime minister.

The truth of all this is that the application of the united front is the correct policy for revolutionaries in the current period. Failure to do this leads to propagandism and tailism, to passivity and conservatism. Consequently it undermines the possibility of recruitment and of building the influence of the Party in the wider working class and radical movement.

## 6. Building the Party

January's conference made recruitment to the Socialist Workers Party a central priority. It was argued that years of work in the movements, from anti-capitalism through to anti-war activity and on to Respect, had failed to build and develop the SWP as we would wish. Instead, we would now adopt a sharp focus on recruitment, aiming to reach out to what we correctly identified as layers in society newly radicalised by the crisis and looking for a serious political alternative. We would, as part of this drive, ensure that basic Party functions – the weekly branch meetings and the regular paper sales – were locked securely into place and central to our activity.

Nine months on, it is possible to offer an assessment of this approach. From what can be identified, in the branches and in Party Notes, it is not a happy picture.

The Gaza crisis in January put well over 100,000 people on the streets at its height, with mass rioting outside the Israeli Embassy in London. The SWP has played an outstanding role in Stop the War since its inception and, with the new focus on recruitment, might be expected to build well out of the protests.

Some local branches and student groups have demonstrated the potential for recruiting to the SWP out of anti-war and



Palestine activity. However, assessment of the membership figures suggests our membership declined during the first few months of this year, from a reported 6,155 in January to 5,800 in May. We doubt that this has been reversed since, indeed from monthly figures it appears the decline may have continued. The Party needs to radically adapt its structures and methods if we are to be more effective in recruiting from the movement.

Marxism this year was large, busy, and the youngest for some time. A new generation of radicalised students and young workers are out there to be won to revolutionary socialism. Yet recruitment at Marxism this year was reported as under 130 new members, contrasting with much higher figures several years ago. More generally, we simply aren't recruiting on the scale needed to even compensate for the numbers leaving the Party, which offers the worrying prospect of long-term decline in our membership.

Our experience, pooled collectively, would suggest that branches in general remain tied to a core of long-standing comrades with few new recruits beyond that. Despite our turn towards the Party and recruitment, we have stagnated over the year.

There are two responses to this. One is to blame the objective situation. Despite imperialism, capitalist crisis, and even a rise in working class militancy, circumstances are not favourable to socialists. Many on the left hold to some variant of that view – that with the Tories expected to win the next general election, and British fascists in the European Parliament, the tide is turning against the left.

Yet this does not explain the continued mass militancy over the issue of imperialism, centred on Stop the War's activity; it does not explain the protests over bankers bonuses and corruption; it does not explain the growing campaign against climate change; it does not explain the opinion polls that show clear majorities for taxing the rich and defending public services; it does not even explain the outburst of anger over attacks on the NHS by US Republicans.

Nor does it explain the fact that growing numbers of workers are willing to take industrial action in pursuit of their demands, and that there is evidence of widespread support for them among other workers, despite the usual media and government barrage against them. We are not simply witnessing a shift to the right in British society; rather we are seeing growing polarisation between a left- and a right-wing pole. The existence of a mass, broadly left-wing, broadly anti-capitalist consciousness is still evident. It is up to us to help shape, lead and give organisational form to that consciousness.

The other response is to look more closely at the method itself. And it is here that we will find answers to our problems.

We all agree that Party organisation needs to be strengthened, but what does this mean in practice?

We cannot pose the question of party building separately from the question of Party activity: what we do, and how we relate to the rest of society, determines whether we will grow as an organisation. It is impossible to build the Party in the abstract. Some will be attracted by propaganda, but the bulk of activists will want to see us leading activity and providing the best strategy for the movement.

It is notable, for example, that the areas of the Party that have avoided the party-isolationist method are ones that are growing. By working in united fronts – and in particular treating the issue of the war as central to their activity – they have recruited and retained members.

Those activists we have won to the Party after months – perhaps years – of argument in united front work are often activists who will stay in the Party. We will have argued and fought to win them; they will have seen that the SWP can apply its politics in practice, showing the best way forward for the movement; they will trust and respect the Party and what it stands for.

If we are not at the heart of building and leading the movement, it will be hard to recruit on any serious, long-term basis. Activists will – rightly – see us as only interested in building our own organisation, unable to contribute meaningfully to the wider movement. We can attract a few individuals through general politics alone, but they may well not stay with us long.

We are attempting to build the Party in an age of mass movements. We cannot do this if we are seen as separate from the movement, presenting abstract propaganda (and abstract criticisms) as if from a great distance. To build the Party, we will have to take seriously our own claims of leadership inside the movements and the working class. This does not mean dropping our ambitions for party growth: quite the opposite. It means taking those activists around us seriously enough that we argue for revolutionary politics with them.

But that means we have to have activists around us. That means the road to building the Party lies through the movements, including movements in solidarity with workers in struggle. We will need to be creative in our own activity, offering the Party as an attractive proposition for activists. This involves developing a dynamic programme of party events: whether putting on film nights, organising a reading group, or making our stalls miniature political interventions on the High Street. We can organise more cultural events, develop creative approaches to how we do our public meetings, and ensure educational sessions are set up for newer comrades. If we are serious about reaching out to the newly radicalised, using all the tools available, we should also be transforming how we exploit the Internet's potential for spread-

ing socialist ideas and promoting political activity.

The branch meeting should be the place where questions of strategy and tactics on a local level are thrashed out, becoming an organising centre, not just a place for discussion. The standard format of theoretical/political discussion followed by practical organising is a barrier to effective intervention. While appropriate to a downturn period, when we had less to intervene in, it is inadequate in a livelier, busier era.

This was illustrated powerfully by the Gaza crisis: it is no surprise we failed to recruit significantly, when branches were expected to merely carry on with their routine two-part meetings. In place of the artificial theory/practice divide, we might have 'activist meetings' – introduced, briefly, by a local activist outlining current priorities – focused on interventions, strategy and tactics.

Routine meetings which rush through organising tasks will not appeal to new members and contacts energised by the strikes and movements. Instead we need to develop meetings that are appealing by focussing on activity and genuinely theorising the political situation that we face. We can consequently develop meetings that are genuinely useful and appealing. These meetings would also enhance collective accountability concerning our work in wider campaigns and movements locally. Combined with fighting for leading roles in united fronts locally, this is a far more immediate and relevant way of learning our political tradition.

We need flair, and a bit of imagination. But most of all we need to show that we can lead and deliver for the movements.

We need to move with the times, become leaders within the movement again and ensure the continuity of the revolutionary tradition.

#### **Faction Committee:**

**Lindsey German (North East London), Penny Hicks (Manchester), Mark Smith (Home Counties) and Tom Whittaker (South London)**

#### **Initial Signatories:**

**David Hughes (Birmingham)  
Naz Massoumi (Bristol)  
James Hilsdon, Caron McKenna and Edmund Quinn (Coventry)  
Glenn Feeney, Joe Henry and Louise Harrison (Doncaster)  
Richard Allday and Kate Connolly (Harwich)  
Mark Ewington and Neil Faulkner (Home Counties)  
William Alderson and Jackie Mulhale (Kings Lynn)  
Jane Calveley, Margie Corcoran, Madeleine Hennigan, John Whearty (Liverpool)  
Ellie Badcock, Kevin Deane, Noel Douglas, Feyzi Ismail, Viva Msimang, Katya Nasim,**

**Jesse Oldershaw, Gabriele Piazza and Matt Richards (Central London)**  
**Sian Barrett, Jo Gough and Chris Nineham (East London)**  
**Elaine Graham-Leigh (North London)**  
**John Rees, Maureen Stephenson and Carole Vincent (North East London)**  
**Ady Cousins, Narz Massoumi, Brendan Montague and Guy Taylor (South London)**  
**Sam Fairburn (West London)**  
**Des Freedman (Southend)**  
**Will Bowman, Adam Cornell, Gary Duncan, Dave McAlister, Jack McGlen, Owen Taylor, Mark Tyers and Sonia Vandebilt (Sunderland)**  
**Alex Brooke (Teesside)**  
**Tony Dowling and Lindy Syson (Tyne-side)**

## REPLY TO THE 'LEFT PLATFORM'

### A conservative opposition

Lenin famously called 'the concrete analysis of a concrete situation ... the soul of Marxism'. He did so not because he thought studying things was interesting but because a grasp of the current economic, political, and ideological situation is the indispensable starting point for any practical orientation for revolutionary socialists. In our own tradition, one of the most important contributions Tony Cliff made was to develop his analysis of the downturn in the class struggle in Britain that set in during the second half of the 1970s. This allowed us to reorient ourselves in the face of the much more difficult, and defensive phase that was indeed opening up for the workers' movement.

Judged by these standards, the 'perspectives of the Left Platform' must be accounted an abject failure. In the past year, we have had to confront the worst economic slump since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the deepening of the crisis of US imperialism in western Asia, the continuing decline of New Labour and rise of the Tories under David Cameron, a real if limited revival of workers' struggles, and the biggest spike in anti-fascist mobilizations in Britain for 15 years. Any real party perspectives would have to start from an analysis of all this and more.

Yet the comrades have nothing of much substance to say on any of these subjects. At most they offer a few scrappy

observations on different topics in place of any kind of developed analysis. For example, they affirm that, despite the prospect of a Tory government and the electoral successes of the BNP, 'the existence of a mass, broadly left-wing, broadly anti-capitalist consciousness is still evident.' That's roughly correct, but it would still be good to have the coexistence of a rightward shift at the top and continuing ideological radicalisation articulated together into an integrated analysis.

What is even odder is that, when producing the final version of their document, the comrades of the 'Left Platform' had the advantage of having read the extensive analysis offered by the Central Committee in two substantial documents, on general perspectives and on fascism, published in the first pre-conference Bulletin. But, aside from quibbling about our account of the struggle inside the party in the lead-up to last year's conference, the comrades make no real criticism of that analysis. Does that mean they agree with it? If so, why on earth have they launched a faction?

There is of course absolutely nothing wrong with comrades who disagree with the position of the CC exercising their right to form a faction in the pre-conference period. But when comrades of the calibre of those who have formed the 'Left Platform' go to this length, we are entitled to expect that they do so on the basis of a serious alternative assessment of the situation to that offered by the CC. The confrontation of these differing perspectives could have helped to clarify our tasks.

But absolutely nothing of the kind is on offer from the comrades. Instead what we have is a litany of complaints informed by nostalgia for the recent past. This doesn't mean that no real questions are at issue. While the 'Left Platform' is not a homogeneous grouping, the dominant tendency within it is that of conservative resistance to the necessary adjustment in orientation commanded by the changed situation and the consequent refusal to reconsider the validity of methods that no longer fit. Hence the name the comrades have chosen for themselves – despite its grandiose resonances – is quite misleading.

But let us consider in more detail the comrades' three main demands:

(i) 'The SWP should commit to spearheading a broad and political united front response to the economic crisis and its effects';

(ii) We need to 'recommit' to the Stop the War Coalition; and

(iii) To counter a decline in the party's membership, we need a mass recruitment campaign informed by 'flair, and a bit of imagination' and an intent to 'lead and deliver for the movements'.

## United fronts and all that: or, is the SWP becoming 'party isolationist?'

The argument that the SWP should build a national united front against the recession was thoroughly rehearsed before last January's party conference.

Having failed to win this position then, the comrades of the 'Left Platform' have generally been thoroughly dismissive of the work the party has done around the new wave of workers' militancy that has developed this year. One member of the faction described this work as 'ambulance chasing'. It would be hard to imagine a more patronizing and contemptuous labelling of all the efforts SWP members and supporters have sought to build with struggles such as the Visteon and Vestas occupations or the strikes at Lindsey and Royal Mail.

The 'Left Platform' document tries to rationalize this dismissal of our practical work by arguing that the SWP is conducting a more general retreat from united-front work and is becoming 'prone to sectarianism and reliance on party propaganda'. We are even subjected to a little lecture explaining why it's wrong to regard the united front as 'a "right-wing" strategy'. Strictly speaking, if one consults the classic discussions of the united front in the early Communist International and the writings of Trotsky and Gramsci, these tend to refer to the united front as a tactic (or, as Trotsky sometimes puts it, a 'policy'). In other words, it is one of the methods used by revolutionaries, specifically to work with and against the reformists and thereby to win, over time, the majority of the working class.

Strategy, according to Lenin at least, is the totality of different methods (including the united front, but also lots of other things as well, among them the organization of armed insurrection) used by revolutionaries to achieve the conquest of political power by the working class. The elevation of a tactic, however important, into a strategy is an instructive slip of the keyboard on the comrades' part. It is symptomatic of their tendency to elevate the methods appropriate in specific circumstances into principle. This is a classic sign of a conservative grouping that resists the change in tactics required by a shift in the situation.

None of this implies, however, that the SWP has abandoned or should abandon united-front work. On the contrary, one particular united front has loomed very large in the past six months. Yet the very name of Unite against Fascism goes unmentioned in the 'Left Platform' document. Does that mean the comrades regard it as one of the 'organisations that are "party fronts" that contain few figures beyond the SWP or only contain them as figureheads'? If so, one has to ask what planet they inhabit, given that UAF reaches deep into the trade union bureaucracy and the race relations industry but has been able since June

to mount a series of mobilisations, most of them involving young Muslims, that have confronted the Nazis on the streets.

So the idea that we are retreating from united-front work into ‘party isolationism’ is complete nonsense. This is also true when it comes to resisting the effects of the recession. The particular difficulty with a national united front modelled on Stop the War that we pointed to during the last pre-conference debates still stands. Getting action against the crisis means engaging with the trade-union bureaucracy, which is both sectional and conservative. The collapse of one of the most left-wing union leaderships in the postal dispute illustrates the problem.

But then it has never been clear that the grand united front advocated by the comrades had much to do with action. They argue: ‘there are a number of trade union leaders, MPs, radical journalists, high profile academics and cultural figures who are ready to work with the revolutionary left. A glance at the impressive line up at Marxism is conclusive proof of this.’

This suggests that the ‘Left Platform’ approaches the problem of allies as that of the line-up for a series of big rallies. There’s nothing wrong with big rallies: in the heyday of Stop the War, they helped to provide the impetus for mobilization. They can help build other struggles as well. But getting people to a demonstration isn’t the same as mounting resistance to closures or pay-cuts.

There is a further problem with the comrades’ formulations. They talk about the need for a ‘political united front’ and ‘a broad, united left organization on a national scale’. What does this mean? Does it mean a new electoral initiative (a united front of a special kind, as John Rees put it)? Or maybe it means something like Globalise Resistance – which organized on a broad anti-capitalist platform?

Neither option seems very credible. The difficulties in reuniting the radical left electorally after the debacle of Respect will be discussed elsewhere in the pre-conference discussion. After the initial euphoric moment of Seattle/Genoa/Florence it proved extremely hard to sustain GR as a genuine united front bringing together real forces, and it was fatally damaged by a split during the very difficult preparations for the European Social Forum in London in 2004. A recent attempt to revive it, involving a couple of comrades involved in the ‘Left Platform’, has been more an exercise in nostalgia than a serious political project.

One final difficulty needs mentioning. It is quite false to claim that the SWP has been pursuing a ‘party-isolationist’ approach. But, in the wake of the collapse of Respect, we were isolated. We had to fight for our place in the People’s Charter, for example. And we shouldn’t forget the very promising start we made to building a united front of the trade-union left, Organ-

izing for Fighting Unions, was torpedoed by the affair of the cheque.

None of these obstacles are immovable. As we pointed out in the perspectives document, the Jobs, Education, and Peace demonstration in Brighton involved a real united front between us and sections of the left bureaucracy. We need to take this much further in building for the Fight for the Right to Work conference at the end of January (see the document elsewhere in this Bulletin). There are serious experiences and real tasks that require much discussion. The grandiose and vacuous vistas conjured up by the ‘Left Platform’ are no use in addressing these.

## A phoney war

True to their intent of restaging last conference’s debates, the comrades secondly charge the party with ‘a self-denying ordinance’ with respect to Stop the War. They even assert: ‘Since 2007, the SWP leadership’s attitude to the anti-war movement has been equivocal.’ (italics added)

This is particularly puzzling since three leading members of the ‘Left Platform’, all of them officers of Stop the War, were members of the Central Committee till January 2009. It seems very unlikely that they would have tolerated the backsliding towards Stop the War that, they now suggest predated the conflicts that developed on the CC. In fact the first time the anti-war movement became an issue on the leadership was during the last pre-conference discussion barely a year ago.

The ‘Left Platform’s’ attempts to justify their charges against the party is largely a compendium of specific grievances. The following passage, one of the very few added to the version of their document submitted to the Bulletin, is both representative and revealing:

“The very successful demonstration of 10,000 plus on 24th October was greeted with surprise by some comrades who had been led to believe by some organisers and full timers that it would be very small. Many of our stronger areas did not mobilise large numbers of SWP members or put on their usual levels of transport. The argument sometimes given that ‘it is easy to get people to sign petitions, but they won’t go to demos or meetings’ surely reflects a failure of our politics to engage with a new, often working class, audience on this question. Chris Harman’s argument that ‘it wasn’t a million’ can only be answered by saying, ‘whoever said it would be?’ What we argued is that Afghanistan is a key political question and that this demo was the start of a longer term campaign.”

Preoccupied with point-scoring, the comrades fail to recognize that the fact that an anti-war demonstration of 10,000 can be accounted ‘very successful’ effectively concedes the CC’s argument. This was not, as Chris Nineham asserted at January’s conference, that we want ‘to put Stop

the War on the back-burner’, but that we needed, as the comrades themselves put it, to ‘recalibrate’ our priorities in order to face the crisis, and to recognize that – outside exceptional explosions like the Gaza protests – the mobilizing power of the anti-war movement has seen a decline.

It is excellent that the 24 October demo received so much media attention, but 10,000 is small, not by comparison with 15 February 2003, but with the figure of 100,000 that Stop the War would routinely get for its marches around the middle of the present decade.

The truth is that there is a real gap between mass sentiment, particularly around Afghanistan (73 percent want British troops out within a year, according to a YouGov poll in early November), and the numbers of people we can get onto the streets against the war. Rather than acknowledge this gap and discuss both its causes and how to reduce it, the ‘Left Platform’ prefer to blame the party. But the comrades can’t have it both ways.

If Stop the War continues to be a flourishing and dynamic mass movement that we should devote our all to and the SWP is dwindling into a marginal, ‘party-isolationist’ sect, then how come we are able to prevent StW mobilizing to its full potential?

The truth is that the SWP remains strongly committed to Stop the War. We were deeply involved in the great mobilisations over Gaza last winter. In recognition of the importance that we give to StW, a member of the present CC joined its officers’ group after its last conference (where there was a very strong party presence). Party branches and SWSS groups up and down the country played a central role in building the 24 October demo. Stop the War is in our DNA.

It isn’t the SWP that has a problem with Stop the War, it’s the comrades of the ‘Left Platform’. This stems from their inability to adjust to a changing situation, and in particular to acknowledge the diminished mobilizing power of the anti-war movement at present (which is far from being a purely British problem: United for Peace and Justice, the main US coalition, actually disbanded a few months ago). So infatuated are they with the recent past, that they even propose StW as the ‘launch pad for challenging the growing Islamophobia in British society’ – even though one principal reason for the declining size of anti-war marches has been the much smaller Muslim turnout since 7/7 (aside for the great explosions of anger over Lebanon and Gaza).

So, for all their devotion to Stop the War, the ‘Left Platform’ serve it very badly. They stand in the way of the discussion we need to have about finding imaginative ways of continuing to build StW. Because they refuse to recognize changing realities, their response is voluntarism. In other words, if the demos are smaller, this is because of ‘a failure of our politics to engage with a new, often working class, audience’. So to

increase the size of the marches, all that is needed is to whip SWP members harder – to do more StW stalls, more leafleting, etc. When disappointments are put down to comrades' failure to work hard enough it is a sure sign of a perspective that has lost contact with reality.

This underlying voluntarism explains why, despite the predominantly conservative orientation of the 'Left Platform', it includes Neil Faulkner. Neil's arguments that the party should launch a Right to Work Campaign were rightly described by Chris Harman in *International Socialism* as tending in the direction of the ultra-left line taken by the Communist International in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This dismissed the entire trade-union bureaucracy as a reactionary mass and advocated united fronts only 'from below', by-passing the reformists.

Despite if anything erring towards the opposite extreme, the leaders of the 'Left Platform' supported Neil's call (incidentally, their feigned confusion that the party should reject this call but organize the Fight for the Right to Work conferences is easy to dispel: what we rejected was Neil's call to organize unemployed marches now, not agitation against unemployment). This wasn't simply opportunism. Neil shares with the other members of the 'Left Platform' the belief that the absence of sufficiently large struggles against both the crisis and the war is to put be at the door of the SWP's subjective failures.

Of course we make mistakes, and plenty of them. But all the great revolutionaries have been grounded in the realities of their situation. They saw what they could achieve as arising from the interaction between mass struggles and the organized intervention of socialists. They didn't believe that they could magic mass movements into existence. And they had a firm sense of their own limitations. This sense of reality and proportion was one of Tony Cliff's greatest qualities. It is completely missing in the entire approach of the 'Left Platform'.

## A distorting mirror

'We are attempting to build the Party in an age of mass movements,' the comrades write. This is a reference to a pamphlet by John Rees and Alex Callinicos called "Building the Party in an Age of Mass Movements" that was published by the SWP in 2004 and that supporters of the 'Left Platform' frequently quote. The implication is that nothing has changed in the party's tasks for the past five years.

But this is absurd. The main occasion for the pamphlet was the launch of *Respect*. It appeared before the antiwar movement – and indeed also the anticapitalist movement – began to decline. And, of course, the economic crisis was three years in the future. The idea that, as a party, we should simply continue doing what we did

five years ago in the absence of the conditions that existed then is the opposite of the political method we learned from Cliff. Despite the fact that the comrades make a cult of Leninist 'decisiveness', they seem to have forgotten that the practice of bending the stick is about sharply shifting our methods of work in response to qualitative changes in the situation. Instead they propose that we ignore the changes that have taken place and carry on regardless.

None of this implies that there is no continuity between our work in the recent past and what we are doing now. To repeat (ad nauseam), the antiwar movement remains an important part of the SWP's work. What we have learned in the united fronts we helped to launch in the early 2000s continues to inform what we do today. The relationships that we have built up with other activists in various fields of struggle remain of great value, and indeed need to be strengthened.

But, true to the Leninist method, we must bend all our strength to build the resistance to the effects of the economic crisis. More than that, we need to acknowledge and correct the mistakes that we made when we were 'building the party in an age of mass movements'. That was an important part of the process of renewal that the party has undergone in the past year, culminating in the Special Conference in June to discuss the report of the Democracy Commission.

But this whole process has passed by the comrades of the 'Left Platform'. They mention the Democracy Commission only as a means of scoring debating points. Indeed, they see the entire trajectory of the party since January as 'not a happy picture'. Indeed, they assert that the membership of the SWP has declined from 6,155 in January to 5,800 in May. This is no more accurate than their claim, withdrawn in the final version of their document, that 'Party Notes no longer provides [monthly] recruitment figures.'

The 'Left Platform' presumably base their claim of declining membership on the section on membership in the Democracy Commission report. This used the April 2009 figure of just over 5,800 registered members. That came just after re-registration, which branches use to clear people who no longer consider themselves members off their lists. Ever since regular membership figures have been produced, the number of registered members every October has been used as the reference point for the size of the party in the year concerned. Registered membership for October 2009 stood at 6,417. So the party has not shrunk since three leading members of the 'Left Platform' left the CC in January.

This is no reason for complacency. The party needs to grow, we need more branches, and we need more branches with real roots. The 'Left Platform's' contribution to addressing these tasks is to complain about the structure of branch meetings and

to propose a rearrangement that focuses on activity. This isn't a ridiculous suggestion, though if the change were to strip ideological discussion out of branch meetings it would be a huge step backwards. But whatever the merits of the comrades' comments, are they the basis of a faction?

The 'Left Platform' also, as we have seen, call for 'flair, and a bit of imagination'. They don't elaborate, but the implication is obvious: genuinely creative leaders have been forced out by small-minded apparatchiks obsessed with 'abstract propaganda'. This is, of course, a caricature of the great debate of last winter, which was partly about holding comrades to account, but mainly about the necessary reorientation of the party to face a changed situation. But it also ignores the much more dynamic and open style of Marxism in recent years, the enormous success of *Cultures of Resistance*, and the excitement of the anti-Nazi carnivals and mobilizations. Did all this lack 'flair and imagination'?

The truth is that the 'Left Platform' is led by comrades fixated on the recent past. Understandably, they would like to enjoy again the vista of the giant demonstrations that used to spread out from the speakers' platform in Trafalgar Square or Hyde Park. But they refuse to acknowledge that circumstances have changed. And so they blame their own party for not trying hard enough to recreate the mass movements of a few years ago. Caught in this intellectual trap, the 'Left Platform' has nothing to say about the present.

Their condition recalls the seventh age of man described by Jacques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*:

*... Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans  
everything.*

The 'Left Platform's' document fails to conceal the combination of nostalgia and personal bitterness that motivates its leaders. Offering nothing in the way of analysis or perspectives, this is truly a faction 'sans everything'.

## Central Committee

## COULDA, SHOULDA, WOULD'A: A RESPONSE TO THE LEFT FACTION DOCUMENT

1. This Left Faction document is long overdue given that its author and faction supporters refused to articulate any defence of or reason for their three resignations from the SWP CC at last year's SWP conference. But my honest first reaction is that this statement is so insubstantial and indecisive that it is difficult to see how their faction actually qualifies as such. I mean, they seem to want to both have the StWC as a core united front activity and bemoan that another one addressing the recession has not been built. Which is the more important then comrades?

2. As far as there is a coherence to this statement I do not see any substantial position or set of proposals which go beyond the customary range of views that we would expect to be raised at this time of year in the party's democratic cycle. Remarks such as;

"What is required is a broad, united left organisation on a national scale that can deliver solidarity to each dispute as it occurs on a far more effective level than the SWP alone is capable of doing. The leadership task of the SWP is to rise to the challenge of leading others in the class towards such an organisation."

are probably uncontentious as part of a mission statement. Therefore I hope that the SWP conference will not be dominated by this factional dispute because we do need to debate without fear or prejudice a whole range of issues.

That said, however, I find three key aspects of John's piece very troubling.

3. Firstly, to jump from Seattle 1999 to the Afghan war in 2009 without analysing the rise and fall of the anti-capitalist movement and parties, not to mention our internal party dynamics of juggling a variety of united fronts whilst simultaneously trying to build the party, simplifies the political contours of the recent past far too conveniently. John's subsequent postulations about the current and coming periods, especially his insistence on the primacy of StWC work, would not flow so smoothly from a more realistic and nuanced appraisal of the last ten years. Globalise Resistance did not, for example, morph into StWC, but tried to maintain a separate specific united front which has withered. That's no criticism of the comrades involved in that work, merely to note that we have to bob and weave as best we can in various choppy waters.

4. Secondly, there is a complete absence, still, of any account from John's privileged

perspective about the demise of our electoral united front Respect and the whole question of the political democratic deficit and workers' representation in the UK. At best he describes the accelerating polarisation of politics to the left and right, but has nothing to say about how we should respond from our side other than to posit some vague desires for an anti-recession united front.

Will we ever get an honest appraisal from him of the debacle which continues to haunt our work in establishing a broad electoral or combative front of the kind that he seems to think is simply achievable by an act of his faction's will?

5. This feeds into the third problem which is an arrogant insistence that the Stop the War Coalition is both the model united front and the one which is most crucial to the party's future. (Well, he would say that wouldn't he?)

6. But first let's deal with a complete red herring, promulgated by supporters of this faction such as Neil Faulkner in an e-mail to Home Counties comrades stating that, "We believe, in particular, that the Party needs to make a decisive turn towards effective united front work in relation to the economic crisis and the attacks on the working class, and that this requires a high level of politics and an orientation on a new generation of young activists." This has echoes of the little that was said by this faction at last year's conference, namely that the SWP is averse to united fronts per se.

7. If the SWP is averse to "effective united front work" per se what the hell have comrades been doing daily inside every major UK trade and student union, UAF, LMHR, DCH, the Anti-Academies Alliance, the Campaign Against Climate Change and other united front groupings – all involving an orientation on the working class in general and young people in particular?

Did Neil see the tens of thousands of white teenagers wearing anti-racist apparel and flocking to listen live to Chipmunk or Kelly Rowland at Stoke? Was he on the Isle of Wight during the Vestas occupation in August with hundreds of other workers? Was he in Brighton protesting the Labour Party devotion to neoliberalism with thousands of other workers? So, for the sake of those who need it spelling out, there is no rejection by the SWP CC, National Committee or rank and file members of the need for united front work for all the reasons that John claims only his faction is capable of understanding.

8. Returning to the post-Seattle balance of forces - if it is possible to do so at all in a paragraph – John's document implies that the only thing that has changed in the last ten years is the SWP CC's attitude to the centrality of StWC! This is unacceptably specious sectarianism.

Blair, Bush and Azanar were key bogeymen who recruited for the StWC's

early phase. But they are gone. Brown and Obama are no less imperialistic and war-mongering to revolutionary Marxist analysts but I do not think "No. 1 Terrorist" superimposed on their faces would motivate broader masses as effectively as the Bush poster and T-shirt version did. Also the 7/7 London bombings hobbled both the UK Muslim community's confidence and StWC's pulling power at demos and in local groups. The SWP has to reflect on these facts, but it sure as hell did not create them.

9. In Europe, the anti-capitalist mood has waned in terms of the socialist potential of the Social Forum movement, especially in its most advanced locus Italy, but taken some root in examples like Die Linke in Germany and the Anti-Capitalist Party in France. The general social democratic trend is firmly rightwards, probably to be confirmed by a Tory election victory in the UK next year, but all is to play for in terms of class combativity.

All governments are talking about making workers pay for the re-booting of capitalist business as usual but they have yet to get very far with doing so. The jobless "recovery" in the US will not dissipate class anger. Plus they are nowhere near addressing the issue which capitalism has never previously had to factor into any recuperation from crisis – catastrophic climate change. All of which means that we have huge opportunities for united front work in the coming period requiring a much wider discussion than one which simply says "StWC good, the rest bad".

10. On the question of Respect it must surely have been the experience of every party activist except, seemingly John Rees, that its demise has made all our other united front work more fraught and tortuous. Galloway may have been our preferred demon, with a couple of treacherous princes of darkness thrown in, but the whole project was so indelibly linked in the public mind with the SWP that it was our name that was besmirched in the eyes of people we relate to at work and in wider political contexts.

As far as we have been able to learn any lessons from that period, none seem apparent to John. But the very reason why we have had to be opportunistic around the People's Charter, as well as its preceding and succeeding variants, is that we have to forge some relationship with forces within the labour movement which can produce the very broad united front in which the SWP is a minority, whilst they are suspicious of us because of Respect's demise.

Finally on this point I see no critique from John of the inability of Respect to breach Labourist thinking and organisation to the extent that Die Linke has, and why or how his abstract call for a new anti-recession united front would do so now, especially in the very short term with pressure to vote Labour greater than ever from union leaders ahead of the 2010 election.

11. So, finally, I see no automatic po-

litical rationale for StWC being lionised as the most important united front work for the SWP. None whatsoever. Imperialism is of course endemic for capitalism. War is imperialism's most defining feature. But racism and ecological destruction are major capitalistic traits too.

SWP comrades deserve the right to evaluate all our work fully prior to and at conference and not to be told that one aspect of our work is sacrosanct because it is so perfect and expansive in John's eyes. More generally, a string of 'Coulda, Shoulda, Wouldas' doth not a faction position make. I sincerely hope that John and his supporters are more articulate about their real political differences in subsequent documents and statements. However I fear that they are just erecting two crossed lengths of timber on which a martyr can be crucified.

**Nick (West London)**

## TOWER HAMLETS COLLEGE LECTURERS STRIKE – A TRIUMPH OF POLITICAL TRADE UNIONISM

The Tower Hamlets lecturers' strike joins the ranks of Vestas, Prisme and Visteon as part of a new spirit of resistance to the crisis. It has put the idea that all out strikes are possible back on the agenda, and more importantly that victory is possible if you fight back.

Here we want to outline how we won so that we can take this experience into the struggles to come. In short this was a political strike to defend education; sustained by the solidarity and the unity we forged within the borough, and a bold militant democratic campaign involving the mass of the membership to hit the employers hard and fast.

We have included some background about our local union branch and the wider project of the left inside the UCU to demonstrate how the strike at Tower Hamlets is a continuation and realisation of a new political trade unionism. We were part of forming and developing the UCU Left to establish a democratic fighting tradition that has shaped the UCU as a small but militant trade union.

### The strike – "what we won"

- We stopped the 13 compulsory redundancies threatened for lecturers

- No compulsory redundancies in non-teaching posts
- Won greatly enhanced voluntary redundancy terms e.g. £7K to £25K
- Stopped cuts to A level hours - worth 150 hours per subject per year
- Saved a Mentorship post - 700 students have benefited from this.
- Saved half a dozen learning mentors' jobs and their pay through the summer
- Saved up to 300 ESOL places.

- We have rolled back the tide of the employers' local offensive.

The employer is now keen to work with us to create a 'staff development group' for our training and development. This is a concession. It gives us more collective control and the small steps towards teachers reclaiming a say in education that neo-liberalism has eroded. We had tried to negotiate this for at least two years. This fits with a wider project to democratise the curriculum and give it back to students and teachers.

The campaign has also created the pre-conditions for a much larger coordinated response to the year on year attacks on adult funding, in particular English language classes (Esol). Government policy continues to divide and counterpose adult and 14-19 provision, our strength was the unity we forged within our sector.

In East London we have begun to rebuild traditions of solidarity and the trades council. Evidence of this is the largest demonstration of trade unionists and the left in East London for some time -nearly a 1000 strong. In this sense there is hope that there exists some potential unity on the ground lacking in recent times from the fallout over the Respect project.

All-out strike inevitably becomes a fight for survival. We returned to work by marching in with our heads held high. We have a larger stronger union. The left is stronger, the role of socialists proven with more SW readers. Two members locally have rejoined activity and were important to the dispute. When the employer returns to take us on again they are more likely to face a confident group of workers convinced of their own strength.

### The start of the campaign – hit back hard and fast

In the spring we learned that the Government were cutting capital funding projects and there were threats to cut some 14-19 funding.

We went to see the Principal to judge how this would affect the college. He talked about 'the need for cost saving efficiencies' and his concerns about underperforming experienced teachers.

We were worried an attack was in the post. The Principal said he would present us with a discussion paper in a few weeks.

## Winning a ballot for strike action in advance of attacks

We discussed this with reps at work and the UCU fraction. More experienced UCU members explained to me how to initiate a ballot and remove barriers from within the union to taking action.

We talked to sister branch reps and we took the case to the branches winning a vote for strike action if education cuts should come our way as a result of the financial crisis. The understanding was that the architecture of the strike could span into the new academic year. We gave the Principal ten days to give us a guarantee.

Day 1 (Friday 4pm) – The ten day deadline was over. Union reps were called to meet the Principal. He presented a 20-page document called Securing the Future. He made sure every member of staff got a copy at the same time. Clearly they had spent months planning wide-ranging cuts and attacks on our conditions. The culture of the college was at stake and they were going to turn it into a business as opposed to a community-spirited college. In a context of national cuts we had a brazen employer attempting to get ahead of the curve and make his mark. This was in June and a thirty-day consultation period was timed to end at the start of the summer break to head off action.

A normal legal ballot takes more than thirty days to organise. Had we not secured a ballot in advance of attacks it would have made official strike action very difficult to organise as the ballot timeline would have fallen into the summer holidays.

Day 2/3 - The reps' committee met on Sunday night and we agreed to fight back with a campaign to 'Defend job, defend education: Save ESOL'.

Day 4 - The next day reps hit the offices to build a mass meeting and over 150 people marched out en masse at lunch 'unofficially'.

Day 5 - The following day we converged on the main site and held a mini-occupation 200 strong in the canteen ahead of talks.

For the next month - we held an action or mass meeting every other day including 'unofficial' and official strikes to trigger the ballot and prepare all out strike action for our return from the summer. Day in day out we visited staff rooms and leafleted locally to draw more and more people into activity.

## Mass revolt on training day

The highlights of this period include a mass revolt over CPD (training day). We had campaigned for two years to gain collective democratic control of our own teaching and learning training. In the middle of the dispute the employer was determined to hold a mass training session to meet a key development target set by OFSTED. UCU members were outraged. It reinforced our complaint that senior managers did

not listen. This also placed 150 staff from across the college into two huge rooms.

Members turned up early in the morning with T-Shirts and stickers calling for 'No CPD by Diktat' 'Save ESOL' 'Defend education and jobs.' We argued for CPD by the people for the people. There was uproar in the training session with teachers calling into question the whole basis of education policy, who controls training, education theory, democracy in the workplace and rallying against the cuts to education. Debates and votes were called and a mass walk out followed.

A few of us were in negotiation with the employer during this training session. A senior manager walked into negotiation and whispered into the Principals ear 'It's worse than we thought.'

Next we could hear members walking with slogans ringing around the building: 'No ifs, no buts, no education cuts.' And singing 'Only one CPD – there's only one CPD...' – an ironic reference to managements complete own goal.

This revolt fed into a delegation to and lobby of the Governors of 150 people the next day. And the following day into the first vote for all out strike action.

## Alternative curriculums

Another important project we launched involved the union collectively taking over the final two weeks of the A level programme. This was launched early in the academic year but coincided with the dispute.

We copied a project from a teacher in a school in Bristol called Alternative Futures. Education is contradictory. So the union promoted the Citizenship agenda and the need to develop a social conscious in students in contrast to the need to drill and test. The union has challenged and tried to show in practice glimpses of another education.

To do this the union created a working group that met biweekly drawn from across the college to plan a unique alternative curriculum. Ofsted love this kind of thing and SMT supported the idea of the project. We called it East End Futures. Small teams cutting across curriculums took up to 30 students for a series of 10 hour projects. This meant Maths teachers got to work with art teachers as well as reducing our workloads.

Students joined the working group as well as support staff. Each project was a celebration of life in the east end and challenged students to respond to the social fallout of the economic crisis. There was no testing and no need to tell or lecture students, but each group had to do or make something. The projects took up themes of racism, environment, poverty, homelessness etc one group was a Love Music Hate Racism film project and another called Guerrilla Gardening was ran by our environment rep who took students out to vamp

up a local cemetery.

Inside the week of activities we put on a film about Afghanistan called Afghan Star (the British Oscar nomination submission), LMHR Hip Hop training events for staff and students, and held an end of year party with LowKey. Inside the two weeks we put on ideological debates with UCU Gen Sec, Sally Hunt, about 'where education is going and what it is for.' This project then fed into another to democratise and collectivise our training (CPD).

Taken individually these initiatives and others are novel or interesting, but taken together they show our attempts to build the union around a vision of what education is for, and political consciousness of solidarity. By doing this we made the union relevant to a wider layer of people and get them involved in activity. It allowed the branch to mobilise quickly and to win all out strike action.

## The strike – how we won

We went back again and again to renew mandates and momentum for strike action based on unity in defending education. Through the course of the campaign we agreed to strike in enrolment.

Enrolment is the key window for recruiting students to the college in the first two weeks of the academic year in September. It is assumed that to strike during enrolment is impossible as it could potentially shut the college down for good if no students enrolled as a result of the strike and the majority of the annual budget is secured at this time. Enrolment immediately follows the summer holiday at the start of the new academic year. So employers often schedule cuts just before the summer holidays to undermine opportunities for real resistance. By targeting enrolment we broke with a tradition of being able to do little about end of year cuts and made a very serious threat to the employer. Striking during enrolment kept up momentum and pressure, but the character was still political – in reality this did not 'hurt' the college but certainly put the employer under massive pressure as well as senior staff who had to do our work.

While the strike began as a threat to the employer it quickly translated into the need for an all-out strike as the employer refused to back down. This was only possible to launch ahead of the summer break because we were able to condense the ballot timeframe down to the absolute minimum. Time was tight to trigger the ballot just before the summer and keep it live for strike action on our return in August. For example we shortened the ballot return window from the usual two weeks to 8 days and emailed 7 days notice of action to the employer on the same day as the result came in. This shaved 6 days. We crunched the ballot in other ways to save time and we had already mandates for action well in advance.

## Organising the strike

We were back at work for one day after the summer before we began all out strike action. We agreed the mass meeting would be sovereign, and set up a self selecting co-ordinating group to meet daily to respond to tactical shift in the strike.

On the 14-19 site we established daily picket meetings with a lead off on where we were at, time for reflection and discussion and then a sharp division of labour to push out and secure solidarity. We used the coordinating committee to generalise this to other sites and to call demos.

To sustain the strike we argued that the mass meeting should renew the strike mandate weekly to prevent a drift back to work. Meeting weekly was not a principle and at certain points in the strike discussions raged about the need to meet sooner to regain the initiative or meet later to put heat on the employer.

Some strike leaders argued this played into the employer's hands as he could wait us out for weekly meetings, or rushing to reconvene enfranchised those wishing to return to work early. It was true that the employer would wait on the outcome of mass meetings before making new offers and at times meeting sooner provided an opportunity for some to argue the strike could not be won and we should return to work.

Our position tactically was to ensure strikers controlled the strike and stayed out by winning the arguments and collective agreement to the strike. In this respect many tactical decisions reflected bigger questions about how we organise, leadership and democracy. The seed of reform or revolution is contained in every strike and ours was no different. Through SW regular bulletins, visits to pickets, the paper and the leadership of comrades inside the strike helped to fight for a strategy to win.

## Flying pickets

Many thought the strike would end after a couple of days, and that the employer would back down. Waiting on talks or for the employer to back down was very disorientating. This is where the role of socialists was vital.

We intervened arguing we should hope for the best but prepare for the worst. We helped shift the focus of picket meetings to systematically visit every college in London, every school, fire station and basically all workplaces in East London. This helped break passivity in the strike and keep our forces strong. We trained up pickets to do speaking tours with confident pickets taking out less confident pickets to visit workplaces. This helped to expand the base of people who were active in the strike. Soon we had a mass leadership with pickets confidently writing for the press, making speeches, setting up phone trees and e-groups, producing literature and banners, and organising delegation work.

We didn't get it all right. Early in the dispute an occupation was discussed. It didn't cut for a number of reasons. A minority rather than the whole workforce was threatened with the sack, and students lacked confidence or organisation. We were confident and we maintained pickets of about 150 despite police attempts to reduce us to 6. Pickets also went off to track down Governors at their place of work to shame them. The character of the dispute was or organised workers pulling unorganised workers, the unemployed and students around the banner of the campaign to defend education. All out was the best strategy, but with more ESOL cuts coming we should not rule out the possibility of seeing more occupations.

Pushing out with the defend education to build solidarity was our main strategy to sustain the strike with maximum participation – this is how we won.

## Solidarity

Through solidarity visits the pickets raised a hardship fund of £24,000. The large part of this came from visits set up by the left inside the colleges across London. In East London comrades in the schools visited picket lines and took pickets off to do delegation work and build demonstrations. We were visited by GPs, council workers, and many others workers. This helped win the idea that local trade unions were a source of strength, an idea that some felt was outmoded. Solidarity came in other forms. Postal workers refused to collect mail and fire trucks turned up to support us. A hundred people came to a support meeting and we had another large mobilisation.

## Winning the battle of ideas

Another key feature was to take on the propaganda war. The ideological arguments and political arguments were key to maintaining support especially with Unison and students – both groups showed us loads of support in practice.

For example, striking during enrolment and through teaching raised the question of whether we were harming students' education this could have alienated students and support staff from us.

We put out clear information to show that we were part of reversing the culture of cuts. Every debate was double edged and we had to unite our forces quickly and turn it back on the bosses. We produced an alternative document to the employer's cuts document.

We called it 'A Future for All'. This helped us to maintain the political and moral support of support staff, students and middle managers. Throughout the strike we had to isolate the employer and unite our side ideologically, politically and industrially.

## The relationship between bureaucracy and the rank and file

It would not have been possible to secure finance for an all-out strike without shortening the ballot and removing barriers within the bureaucracy.

By having a strong base in the college officials were more confident to back us, and we had the mass meetings calling for all out strike action to deliver action. And the UCU left was organised to deliver support and collections from other colleges and universities. We also walked out 'unofficially' when we needed to. Our influence within the NEC of the 12th largest union in Britain has ensured that it punches above its weight.

Through the London region UCU we launched a Manifesto for FE offering an alternative vision to the market which allowed activists to locate their disputes over jobs, pay and workload within a wider context allowing them to mobilise wider forces which made their campaigns more successful. This was taken up and launched in branches, and eventually taken up by the national union. We based our 'Future for All' document and East End Futures on the spirit of the Manifesto.

## Building a political trade union – be visible

While it is true that we fight in circumstances not of our choosing we can do much to prepare the ground on which we fight. Here I want to outline how we did that with a look at our work to build a strong base in the college.

A few comrades have worked at the college for many years and had led a mass walkout with students in 2003 over Iraq, and strike action in solidarity with Unison during their pensions strike in 2006. So a tradition of political trade unionism already existed and comrades sold the paper and Review.

In the last two years we had several more comrades at the college and greater opportunities to shape the branch. During the pay campaign of 2006 we integrated our political activity within the party's strategy inside the UCU via the UCU fraction.

We had established a culture of political trade unionism and high union visibility visiting workrooms every week. We made the war and solidarity part of the agenda of the branch. During quiet periods we built the union in weak sections leafleting and taking collections, and when the heat was on we went to our heartlands to develop new reps and build the left and sell SW.

We were also key to a campaign started by reps at the adult site to fractionalise hourly paid staff. This means getting casual staff onto proper contracts with the same conditions as everybody else. We argued it was better for staff, but the real win-

ners were students and the college because fractionalisation helps to retain staff and win loyalty to the vision of the college. Eventually the union secured 60 posts each with added security, pay and holidays. This helped to unite the adult and 14-19 sites and ensure our comrades proved their leadership in practice.

## Gaza

When Gaza was bombed in January we decided to test our forces and turned round a break-time rally of 300 staff and students to gather momentum for the national demo.

We followed this up with film showings and talks with a visiting Palestinian, a sixth form Question time with the UCU President, local councillors, the Student Union and an anti-Zionist Jewish local lecturer. The students went on to hold a day of action and raised £2000 for the Gaza appeal, and the Youth and Enrichment team put on a 5 a side football tournament for Gaza. The networks created by these types of action and the high level of politics helped to create a confidence in the union as well as broaden the idea of what the union is for.

More importantly a source of our strength has been to take on the ideological and political plane of struggle. When we needed to take strike action we raised the debate about an alternative vision of education and took on the market vision – isolating the employer ideologically.

All the solidarity we fought for was sustained by a political argument about defending education and public services together – this was its class content. Instead of saying save our teachers, we said defend education. Opposition to the war flowed into a confidence to take on our boss. We challenged the role of the teacher, the school and the society.

We have started a UCU + Right To Work Tour. Let us know if you want a Tower Hamlets Speaker.

Massive thank you for your support!

**Alison, Ian, Mark and Richard  
(East London)**



## BUILDING RESISTANCE

I want to respond to some ideas raised in IB1 by Steve from South East London ('A turn to the working class') and others. There are a couple of clarifications I think worth making.

Steve refers to the outstanding victory won in the Tower Hamlets College dispute and he highlights the crucial role played by socialist lecturers at the college. He is right to do so because in my opinion the outcome would have been very different had there not been a core of party members there. Hopefully the comrades at Tower Hamlets will contribute to the pre-conference discussion and produce a pamphlet which can spell out how the action was developed, solidarity sought, and morale maintained through to a victory.

One point of clarification though: Steve seems to suggest that the dispute was unofficial but in fact (unlike the oil refinery workers dispute) Tower Hamlets was an official indefinite strike won through a ballot for action and maintained by regular mass meetings. The fact that it was an official dispute made it easier to call for solidarity from other colleges and from the broader trade union movement and the local community and meant that UCU's national and regional facilities could immediately be brought to bear in support of the action. This is one advantage of having strong Left representation at regional and national executive level in the union.

### Union positions

Elsewhere in his article Steve refers to meetings at Marxism this year on workers' struggles where "debate was dominated by Comrades who were full time officials". I think this may be a misconception and I think it needs some clarification. It was not my perception of the meetings although Steve may be right in feeling that debates might have been dominated by long-standing industrial comrades.

Most comrades who are union activists are reps of stewards who get very little facility time, if any, to carry out those roles. There are some, however, who spend much more time on union activities as convenors, NEC reps, senior stewards and so on. In these cases it is important to distinguish comrades who are full time union officials (I know of only two although there may be more) from comrades who are on 100% facility time as stewards or convenors, and also from comrades who are elected to NEC positions.

We have always taken the view that it is politically unwise for a comrade to take a paid official's position in the labour movement. To do so immediately compromises their ability to agitate and organise

in the way that lay members of a union can normally do (unless you're in Unison, it seems!). You become an employee of the union and inevitably part of its bureaucracy. Selling SW and representing the party's politics, operating as a revolutionary, become incompatible with keeping your job. Hence the seriousness with which the party treats the issue.

Comrades in convenor or senior steward positions are very different. They are lay members of the union, not employees. They may be doing the job full time but that is usually on the basis of facility time agreements won in negotiations or through disputes with the employer. They are normally elected and therefore accountable to the union membership and would return to the 'shop floor' if they lost an election. They can, and should, be elected on the basis of an open socialist electoral platform.

Finally, comrades elected to national executives are different again. They are elected for fixed terms (normally one or two years), they represent a geographical or sectional base in the union, they generally receive minimal facility time from their employer. They are voluntary and receive no payment except travel and other necessary expenses for meetings. They operate on the executives in addition to their general political activity in the party's branches and districts and in addition to their day jobs.

### The pull of the bureaucracy

Steve does raise two more substantial and significant matters, though. The first is the extent to which comrades in these roles could be politically pulled by the union bureaucracy. There is no doubt this can happen and it can happen whether we have one comrade on an executive (or in a convenor's position) or seventeen (as is currently the situation in UCU). This can manifest itself in all sorts of ways, from becoming so involved in the minutiae of committee meetings and resolution-mongering that you drift from the strategic overview of how a revolutionary needs to organise in a union, to being pulled by the conservatism, pessimism and routinism inherent to trade union bureaucracies.

How do we guard against this? The answer is through having a coherent political strategy and through insisting that comrades are accountable both to the union membership which they represent and to the relevant party structures. In the case of the party that is primarily the union fraction but also the annual conference and the central committee.

In UCU it is no secret that since the electoral successes of UCU Left a few years ago (which resulted in a significant number of party members being elected to the NEC) there have been many discussions and sometimes quite sharp disagreements among comrades over tactical

issues where on occasions comrades in the fraction, and the Central Committee, have rightly insisted on holding the elected comrades to account. Such disagreements are inevitable in any healthy organization.

One of the key lessons we have learnt in UCU in dealing with an unprecedented situation, in which the Left (and the SWP as the largest organised force within this) can exercise a decisive influence within the union, is that the development of the party fraction is not an optional extra. It is essential if we are to avoid as many damaging mistakes as possible. While we have made a good start we still have some way to go in developing the UCU fraction although national fraction meetings have generally been well-attended and stimulating and a fraction committee is developing.

The second matter relates to the implication in Steve's article that the party has failed to put the working class at the centre of our politics. This is an argument some other comrades have also proposed. I think it is largely misconceived and is belied by the party's involvement in just about every strike and act of resistance in recent memory, for example by our active insistence, virtually alone on the Left, of resisting the class-divisive slogan of British jobs for British workers, by our launch of the Right to Work initiative, by our orientation on building organization in the workplaces, and so on.

### Political trade unionism

When it comes to the question of the party's industrial strategy the situation is more complex than some comrades seem to allow for. The party does have a general industrial strategy, that of political trade unionism which argues that workplace militancy is not enough.

A credible and vibrant industrial and political resistance can only be built through simultaneously addressing and mobilising around the ideological and political dimensions of the current situation (ie. the neo-liberal assault on education and more broadly, the drive to marketisation, the need to position the Left as the defenders of education) and through applying the united front approach to building networks of activists at the rank and file level.

What needs addressing is how we apply that strategy in particular unions given our influence, the level of struggle, our relative size and so on. That is something which each fraction organization needs to explicitly address on an ongoing basis. There is an urgency about driving this process forward because the political soil is growing more and more fertile and our interventions both from inside and outside of disputes can be a crucial factor. It is urgent also because out of this could emerge a viable left electoral alternative and the increased class combativity and confidence which could, amongst other benefits, reverse recent gains for the Nazis.

Our experiences in UCU since the Natfhe/AUT merger seem to me to fully vindicate the strategy of political trade unionism and to demonstrate the potential for building our influence as a socialist pole of attraction in other unions as well.

We need to address the specific strategies because the party can grow significantly in the coming period if we get it right and in doing so we can position ourselves at the centre of mass industrial and political opposition to the coming assault on the working class.

**Laura (UCU fraction convenor)**

## HOW HARROW UNITED AGAINST THE NAZIS ON 9/11

When I heard that the fascists and Islamophobic bigots intended to demonstrate against the Mosque in Harrow, my immediate reaction was outrage: How bloody DARE they? How DARE they invade a harmonious, united, diverse community like Harrow and seek to divide it?

We knew we had to build the broadest possible mass response, to involve the maximum number of people, to unite the whole community against the Nazis and bring them out onto the streets. That is the tradition we stand in. We don't believe that if you ignore the Nazis they will go away. Nor do we believe that you can debate them into the ground. We don't believe they have a legitimate point of view. Neither do we believe in limiting opposition to them to skirmishes in dark alleys on the one hand, or electoral opposition on the other, though both of those may be necessary at times.

This basic principle: that you oppose the fascists by building mass opposition on the streets, combined with a conviction that the vast majority of people in Harrow would share our outrage at the threat to the community, determined the way we organised and the tone of every leaflet and statement we put out.

We used simple slogans (no less true for being simple) appealing to people's sense of solidarity and decency, slogans like "An injury to one is an injury to all", calling on everyone – young and old, black, white and Asian, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh and Jew – to defend the unity of the community.

Time was short. The first fascist demonstration called for August 28th was cancelled, then a few days later the September 11th demonstration was announced. This demonstration, called on a Friday in Ramadan, was clearly intended to intimidate and

provoke the Muslim community.

While we in the SWP and the other people we were working with accepted that it is necessary to confront the fascists, there were plenty of people around trying to put forward alternatives – the local press reported that the Mosque elders didn't want any counter-demonstration, nor did the (Tory) Council. The police tried to get us to call off our demonstration on the grounds that the Mosque elders didn't want it. We had approached the mosque early on, when the first demonstration was announced and had not had a very good reception, but as our campaign continued, we became aware that there were serious discussions and divisions of opinion among the mosque committee and their close associates.

When we leafleted the mosque (which we did twice), no one asked us to stop or to move and we met a former member of the committee who had moved from Harrow to Birmingham and, having seen the EDL on the streets there, had come back to Harrow to convince his friends that he Fascists must be confronted.

The day after the demo we met one of the pillars of the mosque at our stall in the town centre. He showed us his mobile phone onto which he had copied our leaflet word for word and then texted it to 440 people!

### Building the campaign

The threat to the Mosque materialised a few days before the Codnor demonstration. I helped to organise the coach, so I had names and contact details for a core group of people we knew to be committed. Many of those who came to the first planning meeting came from that group. I'd also helped organise UAF leafleting before the Euro elections in June. I'd contacted everyone in my email address book I thought might help out. Some of those who turned up to leaflet then helped with the Harrow campaign and those who couldn't help organise were there on the day or, if they couldn't be there, sent messages of support.

Having been around for a long time and having been involved in a lot of local campaigns I've got hundreds of people in my email address book and on email contact lists. Other people who got involved had similarly lengthy list of contacts, so the networks grew exponentially and people we met in the course of the campaign added their networks.

Two people who were central to the campaign were Alf, a lecturer at one of Harrow's FE colleges and a long time campaigner against fascism and Martin, from the Green Left, a veteran of All London Teachers Against Racism and Fascism. Towards the end of the campaign, Tony McNulty the local Labour MP, London Assembly member Navin Shah, and some Labour councillors got involved. They were all there on the day.

## How we organised and what we could have done better (or done more of)

- We held regular, open organising meetings. They varied in size, but were all useful. We missed one week because of the bank holiday and regretted it. Road to hell department: our meetings had been held upstairs in a pub, central, friendly and free, but not the ideal place to invite Muslims to especially in Ramadan, so with great difficulty and at exorbitant expense, I booked a room at the teachers' centre. It turned out to be miles from anywhere, was the smallest meeting we'd had and, of course, no Muslims came!

- We set up a googlemail email address for the group. It was on all our leaflets and the UAF website.

- One of the young people from our Codnor coach set up a Facebook group for our demo. It was well used by young people and the discussion on it was impressive – serious and responsible. One discussion thread was between some Brothers who said that Sisters should not be on the demonstration and the Sisters who were determined to be there.

- We produced 3,000 photocopied leaflets (for speed) and 5,000 postcards, distributed them all and could have done with more. We had stalls in the shopping centre on Saturdays and were exhilarated by the excellent response from Harrow people. We also leafleted the stations and the Harrow and Wembley Mosques. Leaflets/cards were taken into schools, an FE college and bus garages. With more time, we could have got them into more workplaces, other colleges and community organisations.

- We drafted a statement of support for Harrow Central Mosque which we used on street stalls, in workplaces, emailed round, managed to get in the local paper, and it was put on the UAF website. Hundreds of people signed on the street and many others emailed in either simply to add their signatures or to send messages of support. The last email I opened before leaving the house to go to the demo was from the Bishop of Willesden.

- We contacted every local trade union activist we knew to get their support and involvement. The rep at Harrow Weald bus garage and the convenor of the Harrow and Edgware garages were magnificent. Bus drivers from these garages came on the demo with their Unite flags. Many had asked for a shift change so that they could defend the mosque and their families from the fascist threat.

The president of Harrow NUT helped build support among Harrow's teachers and we also hope that eventually we might get some funding from the association. The NUS at Harrow (FE) College arranged for students to finish lectures early on the day.

- We kept up with information in the local press and on websites. Health warn-

ing: too much time spent on Nazi and associated websites can seriously warp your perspective on life.

## The role of UAF and the party

Throughout the campaign the help and support of UAF was crucial. Weyman spoke at the first organising meeting and helped set the tone. Bat and Donna came to subsequent meetings, Bat tweaked the statement and leaflets we'd drafted and negotiated with the police. On the day, placards, stewards' vests, megaphones and UAF banner all had to be brought from the UAF office. UAF contacted the Muslim Association of Britain to speak to the people at the mosque and help convince them that it is essential to stand up to the fascists.

As well as giving us invaluable practical help, the comrades at UAF helped boost our confidence and put our demonstration into the wider context of the threat from the EDL and BNP.

It was the Party's politics that made me absolutely clear about the aims and direction of our campaign and demonstration. We held weekly branch meeting in August and the discussions in the branch were extremely helpful. Comrades played a large part in the campaign throughout. Many of the trades unionists we were able to call on were party members or people we knew through party activity.

## The power of the grapevine

We used all our own networks and contacts, but we also managed to tap into networks we didn't even know existed. Leafleting the tube station we met a student from one of the local high schools. She took a postcard, read it and said, "I'll be there." I said, "Great, bring all your friends," to which she replied, "I'll bring the whole school." I said to the others leafleting with me, "It'll be really good if she brings a dozen or so", but judging by the turnout of school and FE students on the day, she probably did bring the whole school.

There were blogs telling people they should go. The electronic media, mobile phones (see above) and old fashioned word of mouth undoubtedly played an enormous part in building the demonstration.

## The day itself

We had fixed the time of our demonstration at 1.30 pm, to coincide with Friday prayers, before we knew that the Fascists planned to arrive at 5.00 pm. We decided to keep the original start time for our solidarity vigil but to emphasise 4.00 pm for the start of the main demonstration.

I wasn't convinced and was terrified that there would be a tiny number of us hanging around trying to occupy the space for two and a half hours. I needn't have worried.

More worshippers than usual had chosen to go to Harrow Central Mosque that day and as they came out, large numbers crossed the road to join the demonstration.

As schools and colleges finished, students came straight to join us, many in mixed friendship groups, many still in uniform. One school student told me that it felt as though they were attacking her home. The woman in charge of policing, quoted in the local paper, said, "The young people outside the mosque behaved disgracefully." She didn't come anywhere near the mosque. They behaved superbly.

The numbers around us grew, and grew as people finished work and came to join in. There was a carnival atmosphere. The police had first said that we were to assemble on a tiny strip of grass across the road. We made it clear that there would be a serious risk to health and safety if we were put there, so they divided up the wide pavement where we were demonstrating with metal barriers, intending to march the fascists into one pen with us next to them. If they'd done that, who knows what might have happened.

As our demonstration grew, reaching somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000, it simply flooded the whole area leaving no room at all for Nazis. From time to time a rumour went out that EDL had been spotted and a few dozen demonstrators broke away to try and chase them, but near the mosque we saw neither hide nor hair of a single fascist.

We achieved what we set out to achieve. We had mobilised such large numbers that they couldn't come anywhere near. We think there were at most 60 EDL broken up into four or five small groups. One group was filmed Sieg-Heiling outside a flat where a BNP poster had been displayed during the elections. The organiser was arrested for his own safety. He's planning to return for another demonstration on December 13th. So see you in Harrow then.

## Postscript

A hundred placards were taken to the demo. At the end there were fewer than a dozen broken ones lying about, but we could only find two whole ones. There must be an awful lot of teenagers' bedrooms in Harrow decorated with UAF placards.

I've met so many people since who were in Harrow on September. Cycling through the park near my home the other day, I saw three students on their way home from school. The boy waved at me shouting "Anti-BNP". One of the girls asked him how he knew and he told her he'd seen me at the mosque. I called out, "And I was outside the BBC yesterday". "So was I", he replied.

## Sarah (North West London)

# STOPPING THE BNP – DO WE JUST CONTAIN THEM?

We want to argue two points. First, the BNP are in fact making inroads into formerly Labour supporting sections of the working class, and there is more to their support than 'petty bourgeois bigots and working class Tories' (CC document IB1). Second, if we are going to defeat them, we need to put effort into campaigning on the ground in the areas where they have support.

In the early 90s, after Derek Beacon got elected as a BNP councillor, we successfully contained and then isolated the BNP, to the point where they were on the fringes of British politics in the early years of New Labour. It is now clear that they have made huge strides to the point where barely a day passes without some mention of them in the media. We are concerned that our strategy for dealing with them is too much orientated towards simply containing them.

First, their base of support: The YouGov poll referred to in the CC document does indeed show that Tory middle or working class voters are a large component, with 59% of BNP Euro-election voters saying that they'd prefer a Cameron government after the next election compared to 17% (still a significant number) preferring Brown. However, some of the other figures paint a different picture.

When asked whether Labour or the Tories 'used to care about people like me but don't nowadays', 54% said Labour used to care about them compared to 17% saying the Tories used to care. When asked who their parents had voted for in the past 47% said Labour compared to 25% for the Tories. These figures show that the BNP are making small but significant inroads into sections of what used to be Labour voting workers, and we ignore this at our peril.

Second, tactics: Many of the strategies outlined in the CC document are both necessary and to some extent effective, but they are not sufficient on their own. (The effectiveness can be overstated, for example the Stoke LMHR concert clearly had a big effect on the confidence and hegemony of anti-racists, but Simon Derby's vote in the West Midlands region still went up from 108K to 122K in contrast to Grifins decline).

We can and should disrupt BNP events, and organise large scale anti-racist concerts and initiatives of all sorts, as well as maximizing the anti-fascist turn-out at election time. However, we need to actually start to do some work in the areas where the BNP are building a base, and counter-acting their poison by building a political and campaigning alternative where they are.

In the early 90s we did just that. One of us was in Newcastle at the time, and can

remember how we set up Saturday sales in a number of very downbeat working class areas (Cruddas park and Blakelaw stick in the mind) in order to make sure that there was a visible socialist presence on the ground. In Birmingham in the last few years, however, we haven't done any consistent work in the working class outer ring of the city since the Socialist Alliance.

There have been possibilities, for example the NUT did a lot of work in Weoley castle (an area with a significant BNP vote) over academics, but we have never related to this except by one or two NUT comrades being part of it. The sales that we used to do in Erdington and Northfield in the 90s haven't happened for many years.

In addition, we need to think about how we react when we do come across people who are, or have been, influenced by the BNP. It was worrying to read Ben's excellent article in IB1 about building a DCH group how he reacted to an ex-BNP member turning up. Now we may be wrong on this, and there may be other details that makes it clear that Ben made the right call, but to us it's not obvious that if someone *used* to be in the BNP, but didn't agree with the racism, that we shouldn't try and pull them further towards the politics of the Left.

The BNP can put on a left face (on bread and butter issues) when they choose which will pull some people. The work Ben has done is clearly excellent and just what we need to do, and we don't want to sound like we don't recognise that, but when comrades meet people who have been pulled by the BNP there needs to be an attempt to win them back (not the cadre members of course, they're lost to humanity).

The experience of the Communist Party in the Thirties gives insights into how this can happen. Phil Piratin was a CP member in East London and he describes in his book 'Our Flag Stays Red' how they came across British Union of Fascist (BUF) members about to be evicted from council flats:

'One day we were told that two of the families were to be evicted the next day... I was curious to know why these people had done nothing themselves in the matter, and why they had not referred the matter to the Tenants Committee. I discovered that in both cases they were members of the BUF and obviously wanted no truck with us.

One family would have nothing to do with us whatsoever that evening. The other was prepared to listen... we asked this member of the BUF about to be evicted what the fascists had done for him. He said that he had raised the matter, but they had no intention of doing anything. This was a very valuable piece of information to be used by us in disillusioning many of the BUF supporters' (p28-29)

Piratin then describes how they physically resisted the eviction of this family, seeing off both bailiffs and police using barricades and flour bombs, and successfully win a postponement of the eviction.

As a result:

'The lessons did not require being pressed home. BUF membership cards were destroyed voluntarily and in disgust ... news went round ...explaining not just what had taken place but the fascist demagogic attitude and the Communist Party action in the matter' (p32)

Doing that kind of work in communities is hard, its time consuming and it creates difficult decisions about priorities, when we also have STW, industrial struggles bubbling away and so on. But if we don't do some serious work in these working class areas then the fascists will go unchallenged.

**Andy & Doug (Birmingham)**

## ANGER AND REGRET ABOUT THE DEBATE ON UAF IN THE PARTY

This contribution is written with anger and regret, as a reply to the contribution on anti-fascist work "Holding the Line on No Platform" by Dean et al in IB1.

It is appearing in the IB on the recommendation of the Disputes C'tee as the best way of resolving a serious question of fact.

This contribution revolves around the opening paragraph of the article (which appears on p13 of IB1).

Before going any further on this, I wish to make it clear that I welcome and fully support the CC contribution on our anti-fascist work, which is clear, creative, and concise. It places our historical position clearly, and adapts it to current tasks.

I wish to make it clear also, that it is perfectly possible to be a sincere and committed anti-fascist, and oppose the position of no platform. I believe that it is a mistaken view, and, in the words of the CC article, reflects "a liberal idealist common sense" view [p9, column 3]. Nevertheless, it is entirely possible to be a revolutionary socialist, and argue for the dropping of no platform. What is not consistent with revolutionary socialism is to be dishonest or deceitful about your views, and this is the nub of this contribution.

At Party Council, in October, a resolution was proposed by a number of comrades re-affirming the party's position on No Platform. This motion is reproduced and appended to the end of IB1. It was drawn up because of concern that there was a move to drop this position, being argued by leading comrades involved in

UAF. Specifically, those comrades were alleged to be Martin Smith and Weyman Bennet.

The mover of this motion (the longer of the two) explained the reasons for proposing it, the concern felt that there was a covert attempt to get the party to drop no platform, and her desire that Party Council re-affirm its support for our existing policy.

Julie proposed an alternative resolution (also appended to IB1). Comrades may be wondering what the difference is between these two, and why the fuss. Julie made it abundantly clear from the platform that she was opposing the longer motion because it was – in her words – factional and disruptive. She made a number of intemperate remarks about the motives of the (unnamed) comrades behind it, and said not one word in favour of the motion she was supposed to be proposing, nor how it differed in result, from the original motion.

Weyman seconded Julie's resolution, and here is where the most serious concerns are raised, about whether Party Council was deliberately deceived. Weyman started by pointing to the personal track record of himself and Martin in heading up the party's anti-fascist work. He then used the time-worn rhetorical device of "How can you believe that comrades as dedicated as this could possibly want to argue to drop No Platform", the implication being that to raise this suggestion is both insulting and false.

Leaving aside the fact that the number of times a cde gets arrested proves little (it is a silly and immature argument), the very clear impression conveyed by Weyman, deliberately, to Party Council was that there was no basis to the concerns raised by Kate and Neil, and that the allegations of dropping no platform were false and malicious.

Now read the opening paragraph of the article on p13 signed by Julie. "A discussion has been taking place in the party about our stance on No Platform" – no it hasn't. There has been a return of the "not in front of the children" school of debate where,

if you are not on the NC, or in the loop, you are completely in the dark.

More worrying is the statement in the same opening paragraph that "there have been calls from comrades centrally involved in UAF to scrap our opposition to debating with the BNP leadership in the media." This is, in the understanding of every comrade I have spoken to, taken to mean dropping No Platform.

I am not interested in legalistic logic-chopping sophism; what I want to know is, is that statement true? Did Weyman, a member of the CC, get up at Party Council and consciously mislead Party Council by deliberately giving the impression that there had been no attempt to get No Platform dropped? Did Martin, another CC member, collude with this, by staying silent

when he knew a false impression was being created? Or are the “comrades centrally involved in UAF” referred to by Julie not the CC members with responsibility for UAF work? In which case, who are they?

Did two CC members deliberately mislead one of the most important of the democratic forums in the party, to score points in what they regard as a faction fight?

The only and strongest weapon socialists have in debate, is the ability to look reality in the face, and speak the truth as we see it. Once we start justifying untruths in the name of some higher purpose, there is an end to democracy. This is why I originally raised it with members of the Dispute Committee, and have reluctantly accepted the chair’s advice to raise it here.

**Richard (East Anglia)**

## BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL SWSS GROUP IN SUSSEX

In the last year, there has been a qualitative change in the level of struggle in Britain. It has put the party in a situation of high activity with a necessity to find itself at the heart of the different struggles in order to bring them together, organize the most radical elements in those struggles and generalize the best examples of resistance across the country.

At Sussex University, we have had to shift our tactics and position in the movement, as comrades have had to do up and down the country. This has truly become apparent in the first weeks of this academic year. This piece aims at looking at our activity in this period and sharing these experiences with comrades. We’ll look at our involvement in both the movement and the Industrial struggle as well as how we brought all this together to build the Party out of it as the centre where all the struggles meet.

### The movement

The political situation at Sussex is one that has been favorable to the building of movements. It is a university with a certain political awareness, even though that awareness is expressed mostly by autonomist formations and students preferring to see their political involvement as being personal, describing themselves as non organized.

In this atmosphere, the setting up and building of united fronts and single issue campaigns has been a first important step to build a political relationship with students and staff members.

### Palestine

We started the year with a strong Palestine Solidarity Campaign both in the level of its militancy and the very close political relationship Sussex SWSS had with the campaign. Indeed, we were the 5th university to occupy over Gaza last year. Our occupation drew in hundreds of students, collected thousands of signatures of support and secured 5 out of 6 of its demands.

This first terms’ focus of the PSC was the following up of the occupation by the calling of a referendum to Boycott Israeli goods in our university. To do so we started immediately by pulling the movement back together as well as drawing more people. We organized a ‘Beats beat Bullets’ concert entitled “FREE PALESTINE” with the help of the Stop the War coalition. We managed to get about 250 people at the concert at which, apart from the music, they found a large amount of STWC, PSC, SWSS and UAF material.

The concert was followed by a rally calling for the boycott addressed by Tom Hickey (a party member and member of the national exec of UCU), Naomi Idrissi (member of Jews for the Boycott) and a Sussex student who just came back from the occupied territories. The rally was attended by 150 to 200 students and created a real energy and excitement in the room.

Out of these two events we gathered a pool of students wanting to be part of the campaign and canvassed with us during the voting. The vote was won by a 150 majority.

### STWC

The link between the movement for Palestine and Stop the War is easily made and during the build up to the ‘Beats beat Bullets’ gig we also mobilized for the ‘Troops out Now’ demonstration that was happening during the same week.

At the end of our Freshers’ fair we had a STW meeting on Afghanistan, addressed by Lindsey German and attended by 30 freshers. This was followed a week later by a meeting on Hamas and Hezbollah given by John Rees and attended by double the amount of students. Both events, the Palestine gig and regular stalls allowed us to capitalize on the existing anger around the war and to bring 20 students on a coach leaving from Brighton to the demonstration on the 24th.

### UAF

Although, both the STW and the Palestine campaigns were vibrant, the real militancy and attraction in one of our united front lay in UAF this beginning of term.

In the first week of term 60 students attended a meeting on ‘How to stop the BNP’ brought 60 students together and electrified the room. At the end of the meeting no body left and all present asked to be involved in the campaign. By capitalizing on that as

well as by having a continuous presence on campus and at events (alongside SWSS and STW) we managed to fill a coach with 50 students for the demonstration outside of the BBC. The atmosphere was militant and inspiring. The Sussex delegation was the first one to arrive on the day and stayed incredibly energetic all along the demonstration, pushing the police, chanting, taking the street and making as clear a statement as possible that at Sussex we were ready to fight the rise of the BNP and to do so with all our strength.

The reason we were able to build all those campaigns and united fronts in 4 weeks is that we made sure that SWSS was the place where the most militant elements of those campaigns could come together and draw links between them. When someone came to one demonstration or event our comrades were able to make the links with the other ongoing movements and draw people from one to the other, creating a real feeling of resistance in this group of people. Not on one issue separately but on all of these issues at the same time. The party was seen to be the heart of all those movements and the organization leading the resistance but I’ll come back to that later.

### The industrial struggle

First of all, it is worth noting that I have decided to address our involvement in Another Education is Possible, a student united front, in the section on industrial struggle. This is not because I somehow believe that AEP is not a movement but because it is the movement that has allowed us to make the links between students and workers as well as between the movements and the class struggle.

Also, the first activity that involved students and workers for the Sussex branch was the ‘Rage Against New Labour’ demo. In the build up to this demo our members took part in stalls at colleges and in town. This allowed us not only to build a base in FE colleges (and recruit three FE students) where we had no one but also to make the link very clearly: both students and workers were touched by the crisis and wanted to voice their anger.

### AEiP

The main involvement of Another Education is Possible has been the ‘No Cuts Campaign’. The first meeting of this campaign was called by AEP and was attended by 60 students and a couple of staff members. We have had three other meetings attended by 30 to 60 students. One of those meetings, bringing together 40 students and a few staff members, was a meeting that had a GMB rep, a CWU area rep and the SU president share a platform. They talked about the cuts and how to fight against them.

We stood 6 AEP candidates in council elections and got 4 of them elected.

## Industrial agitation and solidarity

The 'No Cuts Campaign' allowed us to start raising money for the postal strike fund and the local bin strike fund. Quickly we made it a habit to collect at our stalls, in our SWSS and UAF meetings by making the links between the struggles. We collected £107 the first week for the posties and 42 the next. This week we collected £85 for the Bin strike fund.

Our SWSS group did paper sales at both the postal office and the bin depo in the run up to the strikes.

Once the strikes had started we had a presence on the picket lines and made sure that we had the arguments about students facing the same cuts as workers. The meeting we organized with the union reps strengthened this argument.

Both the anti-cuts movement and our SWSS branch were able to start building solidarity with workers on our campus and starting to polarize our campus on what our position as students in society is. Also staff members see SWSS as being the group that is building a serious movement of resistance.

## The Party: town branch

The Sussex Branch has been involved in building the Party both on campus and in town. As I touched upon earlier we were heavily involved in building for the Rage demo. Also, when the town branch organized the first Marx Rally we got involved in building it. Not only by publicizing it on campus but also by taking part in fly-posting in town regularly and making sure that there were a sufficient amount of posters up at all times.

The meeting drew 93 people together and a significant amount of students.

## Brighton Uni

Unfortunately, we only had one comrade at Brighton uni. This year, the Rage demo, the Marx Rally and the demonstrations in London allowed us to increase our activity at Brighton uni too. We recruited two new members, pulled people around us in the united fronts and brought Brighton students to most of our events. The relationship between Brighton and Sussex will need to strengthen in the past.

## Sussex

At Freshers' week it became clear that there was a real mood around SWSS. Most students felt abandoned by mainstream politics and were looking for an alternative. SWSS did just that.

Since then or activity in the movement and in the class struggle has allowed us to keep this up. But more importantly, it is our constant physical and political presence on campus that has allowed us to build for all

our actions. Selling the paper and talking to people on our stall twice a week as well as having weekly public meetings is what helped us keeping our finger on the pulse of the campus community. Our weekly caucuses also enabled us to plan our intervention and make sure everyone in the group knew exactly where we stood.

Since we were very clear on bringing back all our activity in the movement and in the struggle to our stalls and meetings we were able to recruit 8 new members in 5 weeks not to SWSS but directly to the party. The greatest example of that was in the last week where Martin Smith gave a meeting about After Question Time – how do we fight the BNP to which 55 students came. 2 joined, with 4 leaving with recruitment forms.

In conclusion, it seems that activity attracts activity. The more we do and the more people we draw around us, the more we are expected to do and to more we are able to achieve.

This situation is putting SWSS more and more in the heart of the political struggles on campus and it is to us that people come when they need political support.

Sussex SWSS is an image of the party as a whole. It is the consciousness that all our energy put in struggle needs to come back into the party and vice-versa. It is by keeping this going that we will build the party and become the organization that will lead the class in changing the world.

## Sussex SWSS

# BUILDING BRIGHTON BRANCH

It is generally accepted that the Branch was able to respond very well to the challenge of having the Right to Work Demo in our city. A high percentage of comrades were involved in some way.

It was mainly comrades who had been doing a bit taking on more, rather than inactive ones being suddenly spurred into action. I want to argue that it was mainly down to the changes in Branch life and particularly establishing effective weekly Branch meetings over the last two years.

Before that change, Branch meetings were called each week but if they happened they consisted of a handful of comrades talking about our United Front work. Public Forums every six weeks were a decent size but didn't bring new people. A very small percentage of branch members were active in any way.

The key to change was having a political discussion each week. Word began to spread and comrades who had either dropped out of membership or activity

came back. The other important thing about the meetings was the atmosphere - upbeat, comradely but not cliquey. This increase in attendance to 10-15 was at the height of the discussion about democracy in the organisation which was part of the reason some comrades came back. I had established a 90 minute limit for the Branch meetings. This became difficult and still is.

The necessity for a Branch Committee became obvious but met with some resistance in the Branch as undemocratic because decisions may be taken away from the Branch. I put forward a minimalist committee dealing with organisation while another comrade suggested a more strategic one. We have established an Organising Committee but it is still not working in a way that matches our increased size.

There must be a spreading out of responsibility for more areas of our work. The increase in the importance of the Branch meetings devalued our Public Forums. We advertised both publicly and although we had different venues they were not treated as special by comrades, sometimes had no new people and had barely more comrades than at Branch meetings.

The increase in activity came slowly - at one point I joked we must have the best discussion group in the country. The Saturday (and only) sale grew in comrades and papers. This surge in activity was initially centered on United Front work, i.e. LMHR, setting up a UAF group out of a fantastic routing of the BNP in Hove, establishing a Stop the War branch out of the ashes of a Sussex Peace Group and establishing friendly links with other local groups including PSC and the Smash EDO (arms factory) campaign.

The relationship with the PSC has meant joint activity highlighted by a 400 strong meeting at the Brighton Hilton after the invasion of Gaza. Industrial work was the last thing to fall into place - a regular Post depot sale was only established a couple of months ago. However now we are trying to establish regular sales at 4 workplaces and were able to respond to the Postal Workers picket line with numbers and confidence.

In the two weeks before the Demo FE colleges were targeted, extra street sales organised and flyposting carried out systematically for the first time in years. We used petitions to connect over Public Sector cuts and raised the profile of the Demo so that a sizeable contingent was local. This resulted in 13 new members from the area being signed up on the day.

This level of activity was only possible because a full timer spent several days here organising sales and ring rounds. There is general agreement in the Branch that a District Organiser should be appointed for Sussex but they are conscious of the costs (national & local) of this...

At the Branch meeting after the Demo there was no sign of burn out or exhaustion. 18 enthusiastic comrades turned up. It was only the experience gained in the

run up to the demo that gave us the confidence to build a fantastic Return of Marx Rally in October. We had been booking a room holding 25 for our Public Forums. We agreed to go up to 60 for the Rally. No one suggested that we go for the hall that holds 150 which, with a turnout around 100, would have been perfect in hindsight.

The result was a packed meeting with some comrades forced into the corridor to allow in all the new people. The audience was mainly new and young with people from 7 Sussex Universities or Colleges and a number of new local Trade Union activists including a GMB steward now involved in industrial action. There were two new recruits who have been active since the Rally.

The lively discussion reflected the newness of the audience with the emphasis on Q & A rather than long contributions.

The Sussex University student Branch prospered alongside the City Branch. Some city comrades helped out on campus and students came to branch meetings particularly in the holidays. For the first time in years there was a beneficial two way relationship with the students bringing vitality and invention and them benefiting from the considerable experience in the City Branch.

Our urgent and effective response to the Demonstration and the successful Rally has inspired comrades while also exposing organisational limitations. To deal with these we are strengthening the Branch Committee, discussing a new member's day school and are involved in support work for the two local disputes,

In summary the Demo came exactly at the right time for the Branch because of the progress in the last two years and following it we are in a much better shape to deal with future challenges.

**Mike (Brighton)**

## BUILDING IN A COUNTY BRANCH

A fair amount has been written in previous years about building in a small branch, but when that branch is spread over 80 miles of a shire county, with few major towns, the problems are multiplied.

The experience of Dorset Branch is a good example. The branch was established about 6 years ago, when an experienced comrade moved to the area and started to try to get active. What existed was the wreckage of the old Bournemouth Branch: one or two comrades active in Bournemouth around a sporadic paper sale, 2 retired comrades in Swanage and a number of young contacts in and around Weymouth, spread over about 20 miles.

Most of the latter dropped away, leaving a weekly paper run of 4-5, over a distance of 15 miles. The active Bournemouth comrades dropped to one, who did a sporadic paper sale by himself. The old Bournemouth list was used to bring some organisation to bear, but with comrades spread over 50 miles; the traditional format of a weekly meeting and paper sale simply was not possible.

A routine of a two weekly sale was established, varying between Weymouth, Bridport and Poole. These were very low yield (usually 4-6 papers) with occasional peaks and this seemed to have no reflection on the size of the town – the highest sale to date (16) was in Bridport, a town of 3 or 4 thousand people.

The very strange experience of the Dorset Stop the War Coalition allowed a monthly focus for a number of comrades, but it was quite short-lived. The real breakthrough happened with Respect. Dorset Respect was a genuine united front and quickly attracted a membership of up to 50 county wide, and its monthly meetings, alternating between Dorchester (West) and Wareham (East) provided an organising framework. At this time, the Swanage comrades were able to play a significant role in a successful local struggle against the closure of day centres.

The collapse of Respect hit us hard. Key DR activists split and, although the party initiated a unity motion to maintain the monthly meetings irrespective of the split (passed unanimously) no further meetings took place. We wanted to maintain our contacts with DR comrades, who would not have attended SWP meetings, so a regular monthly meeting was established under the title of Dorset Socialists. This was in Dorchester on a Saturday afternoon, following a paper sale, and was announced by leaflet, in SW, and by adding interested parties we talked to on to an e-mail or a text list. Group texts are

sent to announce meetings and to carry interesting snippets.

A small increase in the number of available comrades, via recruitment or moving house, meant we could establish a regular Saturday sale, alternating between Dorchester and Bournemouth. These had been chosen by trial and error as the best places.

In May this year, we established Dorset Socialists as a local membership organisation. The constitution allows joint membership with other bodies and is explicitly directed at left unity. We maintain an open invitation to members of Respect Renewal and have recently gained the adherence of 3 former Respect members (from Lyme Regis and Wimborne) 2 of whom have decided to join the party as well. A website is about to be launched and a contribution to the left unity debate is to be sent to SW, the Morning Star and the Socialist. Meetings around the Afghanistan War are planned in Bridport and Swanage for the autumn. Meetings attract between 7 and 11 people and formal DS membership is 12.

The Dorset SWP Branch comprises 12 (not all in DS) based in Bournemouth, Poole, Wimborne, Swanage, Weymouth, Dorchester and Lyme Regis: about 80 miles of Dorset. Nine are active in some measure: paper sales (4-5), union reps (4), community politics (2-3) or attending DS meetings. An additional week night meeting between DS meetings for party members is being considered to increase paper dissemination.

By maintaining an unswerving commitment to left unity we have established a niche in Dorset communities and unions and gained the respect of unaligned individuals, like the Secretary of Yeovil TUC. We were the only ones to raise support for Vestas at Dorchester and Weymouth TUC and we are in touch with a CPB member in Blandford Forum.

It is never going to be easy: paper sales are usually 4-6, but can slump to 1 or surge to 9 or 10 but we have good contacts and recruit slowly but steadily. Papers are sold inside Jobcentres in Weymouth and Bournemouth and inside Bournemouth Hospital. It is hard to establish workplace sales when no weekly SW distribution is possible and when SW delivery by post sometimes does not happen until Saturday morning. We try to get people together for major demos and we always turn out for Tolpuddle. An innovative use of media and a lot of hard work has put us in a much better position for the following year.

**Tim (Dorset)**

## SWSS, STOP THE WAR AND UAF

The new academic term began with tests and challenges for our group which had lost some of its most experienced comrades. On the one hand, we had to build the demonstrations – Troops out of Afghanistan and Pull the Plug on Nazi Nick – on the other hand, we had to re-build the group and its core after a 4 month summer break.

Our SWSS group is rooted in the campus community but we know we need to win this ‘rootedness’ in every political battle anew. That is why we made sure that the party was at the core of mobilizing for the two demonstrations but still maintained party activity such as paper sales, caucuses and our weekly SWSS rallies. Having Alex Callinicos’ meeting ‘The return of Marx’ one day before the demonstration outside the BBC put to the test whether we were actually building the movement and the party at the same time.

50 people attended the meeting which was vibrant and raised many questions around the crisis of social democracy. For newer comrades in our group it highlighted the need for unity of theory and praxis as revolutionaries.

We took 35 students to London to protest against Nick Griffin’s appearance on QT. However, we didn’t manage to get many people in our periphery active on the issue. For a number of years our comrades have won the argument of ‘No Platform’ inside the Union but on this occasion we had to win it again. At Essex, we drew the lesson that we have to win arguments against the BNP at every level and that it is simply not enough to have a ‘no platform’ policy in the union. We needed to have the arguments again and again.

Even though we tried to connect the two movements and made the point to come to both demonstrations the movements did not converge and we ended up relating to two different sets of people. The fact that our Stop the War group had sustained activity throughout last academic year and had called for local ‘Anti-Imperialism’ demonstrations meant that we alongside 10 activists managed to sell 50 tickets in 4 days. We went to student halls and sold tickets in kitchens. In one of the flats we sold 7 tickets on the spot all of whom came along to the demonstration.

The fact that we are rooted in the campus community helped but more importantly we followed the perspective that came out of party council, namely, that we had to take both demonstrations equally seriously. This argument was won within the group.

## Postal Strike

Initially, we were slow on the postal strike which meant that we didn’t make it to the picket lines for the first national strike day. However through delivering on both the Stop the War as well as on anti-fascism we now have a periphery outside the party which we can take along.

These networks meant that we could take 10 people to the picket lines on a Saturday morning before going to London to the ‘Another Education is Possible Conference’. When we arrived at the picket line the shop steward greeted us warmly and gave us all the ins and outs of the strike. Over and over he referred to Socialist Worker and the work it has done on the strike. It impressed some of the students who had been to the picket line for the first time. And it also meant that we had no problems selling the paper.

Especially the newer comrades have gained confidence in doing further accommodation runs and drumming up donations, signatures and support for the postal workers. In one hour alone two of our comrades collected £35 by doing this. We have been holding meetings and speeches in people’s kitchens, collecting donations, selling the paper. Doing these as the party works and we plan to do keep on doing these as one of our regular activities.

We have discovered a clear class element amongst student’s support for the postal workers. Supporting them and defending education are seen to be one and the same fight. That is why we are going into the new week with a public meeting “Essex students support workers fighting back!” on the day that both the bus workers and postal workers are out on strike.

## Students’ Union

In the last two years our group always has had influence within the Union and held executive positions. In the past we have managed to recruit a number of comrades out of the Union. However, at times our work lacked focus and direction.

At our first General Meeting we had put important motions forward however the meeting was inoperative. We could have concluded that the Union is no longer worth fighting for. Instead we stood in the elections on a clear left-wing platform of ‘Defend Jobs, Defend Education’ with other forces such as a Green Party member and an Afghani student who really was the driving force alongside us in the Stop the War mobilization.

We got our comrade elected as the campaigns officer (part-time) onto the executive committee. This means a) we can use union resources such as the photocopier etc. b) and we can put him on the ‘Essex students support workers fighting back’ platform with a certain legitimacy c) but also build the party as an independent force within student politics at Essex Uni.

## The Party

As mentioned before we have maintained a high level party activity by building for weekly meetings and having paper sales.

Two weeks after the demonstration at Question Time we had a meeting ‘After QT: How do we stop the BNP?’ with Martin Smith. Not only did we get 40 people into the room who wanted to talk about the BNP but we got a young radical ‘punkish’ guy along to the meeting who is building the UAF group on campus and wants to organise gigs.

He doesn’t see himself as a socialist but after the demonstration we took quotes off of people for Socialist Worker and he saw himself being quotes the week after in the paper. We also got a musician along to the meeting who had seen the SWP flags at the demonstration on television and got in touch with us and will be helping in the building of a vibrant anti-fascist movement.

We drew important lessons from the big meeting. There are new people who are coming into anti-fascism. These are not always socialists. These are people who want to see militant action around anti-fascism and clearly identify us in being the driving force. It is up to us to give a clear analysis of fascism and how to fight it so we can lead these people in struggle.

We have a broad periphery of people who buy the paper on a weekly basis. These are also the people who work with us, respect us and whom we can lead. We have been sending a lot of reports and photos in so we can show these people that we give them a voice. This has helped to expand that base of core readers. Our paper stalls become a point of contact and attraction for people who want to discuss politics with us but also go away with a paper, pamphlet or a book in their bag.

Ever since the occupations in solidarity with Gaza at which we recruited most of the people who were key in the movement we have adopted a systematic approach to recruitment and retention. We managed to bring them along to the weekly SWSS rallies around a series of topics and Marxism Festival.

As we have had a systematic approach to recruitment it has meant we can recruit at big public meetings like the ‘the return of Marx’ or ‘How do we stop the BNP?’ but also in personal discussions with people in our periphery. One activist who identifies himself as a socialist came up to us after the meeting with Martin Smith and asked us to call him during the week-end so we could have a chat about joining the party.

Our experience shows that students can fight on many fronts. But things are still very uneven. Many groups have been able to build campaigns around cuts whilst we at Essex have failed to win the argument for a campaign when the Latin American Studies Department faced closure. On the other hand our group has built a campaign



of staff and students against privatization – and won!

Education will be one of the key battlegrounds of who is to pay for the crisis and there is clearly great potential for students in this period. We need a serious assessment of the state of the students' movement and how revolutionary socialists relate to this. This document should be seen as a beginning of this.

**Mark, Dan, Elizabeth, Nathan  
(Essex)**

## THE ROAD TO BRANCH BUILDING IS THROUGH THE MOVEMENTS

We were interested to read the article in IB1 by the comrades from King's Lynn about their admirable efforts in building a small branch from scratch. We have, in a similar way, gone from no consistent organisation and very small numbers in Sunderland to having a small and imperfect but nonetheless very active and promising Sunderland branch.

As with the King's Lynn example we have done this through a high level of involvement in united fronts - Respect (previously), Stop the War and also UAF - and we are very anxious about the current direction of the party at district and national levels, which seems to be quite different. We are being encouraged to apply a 'party building' model - one which downplays united fronts - that has no supporting evidence to suggest it actually works. Our experience is in fact that the road to party building is through the movements.

We now have eight active members in Sunderland. None of us have been members for more than a few years - and two of our group joined earlier this year. Almost all of us joined through activity in wider campaigns. The party's reputation as serious and committed activists, working well with others outside the party, was crucial to us joining, becoming active and remaining dedicated members of the SWP.

It is only in the past year or so that we have organised ourselves as a separate branch, if still tentatively and erratically (a number of us would still often go through to nearby Newcastle branch meetings).

We have maintained regular Saturday sales, selling as many as 40 papers on some occasions, and held some well-attended public meetings.

We've had strong political discussion in our branch meetings, with all members

feeling able to contribute and comrades' political confidence developing well.

We've been absolutely central to building a successful Sunderland UAF group, which genuinely brings together a range of people from different political backgrounds. We made a major contribution to a 100-strong North East-wide public meeting in Newcastle, organised our own public meeting in Sunderland of 40 people, and were responsible for around 20 people travelling to Codnor (out of a total of 40 or so from the whole North East region). We are proud of these achievements.

However, there have been a number of problems. These fall into three

areas: UAF, Stop the War, and branch organisation. Taking UAF first, the intervention of the wider Party has been problematic. Leading comrades in the district insisted, several months ago, that we should argue for Sunderland UAF to transfer almost all its funds (several hundred pounds!) to a centralised North East pot. Tyneside, nearby, had no money in the account, so this was to benefit the comparatively weaker UAF organisation in Tyneside.

It will be no surprise to learn that non-members in Sunderland UAF were unhappy with the proposal and we - this is extremely unusual - actually lost the argument. We hadn't been comfortable with the idea ourselves, but according to party discipline we argued strongly for the change. Losing the argument damaged our authority, and frayed relations with a couple of key activists, but we're pleased to say we bounced back. A less forceful approach over time eventually won us the debate and the Sunderland steering group agreed to contribute a significant sum to Tyneside UAF.

Secondly, there's the bizarre hostility to Stop the War from the district organiser and a tiny number of leading members. We have been told directly that we must not build a Stop the War group in Sunderland, and instructed not to do Stop the War activity at Sunderland University. Comrades were discouraged from going to the national demo on 24 October. A couple of weeks earlier there had been no attempt to help build an important Stop the War public meeting in Newcastle. It feels like anyone who associates with Stop the War is viewed with suspicion, even as an 'opponent'.

Yet, following the 24 Oct demo, we took the initiative to relaunch Sunderland Stop the War, arranging a planning meeting which attracted

21 people from Sunderland (all 8 of us plus 13 non-members) at short notice. This served as the launchpad for building a public meeting, which we're currently doing, with Clare Glenton as main speaker on 10 November. The people who joined us for the planning meeting were clear that they want a permanent and active group that meets regularly. This is what we now intend to do, alongside things like raising

solidarity with the postal workers, continuing UAF commitment, etc.

Finally, there's a number of problems concerning how the branch is treated. The district organiser has adopted a domineering approach that makes it harder for newer comrades to develop confidence, and harder for all of us to organise effectively. We want to organise collectively and democratically, not have things imposed on us without consultation. At its best the branch works in the way we want - the result is enthusiasm from members, successful sales and good interventions. But this has been significantly damaged by developments in recent months.

This is not helped by the disorientation and lack of direction at the top of the party. This can be seen in the downplaying of Stop the War, the lack of any consistent united front approach to the recession's effects, the stale branch routines and the low levels of recruitment.

We will build if we re-commit properly to united front interventions across a range of areas - UAF, Stop the War and in response to the crisis. This is the way to build the SWP and strengthen left wing politics, in Sunderland and elsewhere.

**Adam, David, Gary, Jack, Mark,  
Owen, Sonia and Will (Tyneside)**

## GLASGOW SWSS GROUPS: A BALANCE SHEET AND WHERE NEXT

### Post intervention, a good place to start

The key to the post strike, now postponed, was to act fast and get everything possible out of the dispute.

The 3 SWSS groups in Glasgow twinned with delivery offices and carried out post sales in the week running up to the strikes. Our student members had been involved in a series of workplace sales before this to fit into a general strategy: that each group would be involved in one workplace sale a week. This experience served our comrades well for the post strike.

Students covered picket lines to a good response. Strathclyde SWSS, for example, delivered their collection to St Rollix postal depot where they received a round of applause from the picket, the reps number, agreement that he would come to the university and an official letter of thanks.

Campus collections and general student

activity around the post filtered through to the city Post Support Group which had representatives from each of the universities in attendance feeding back into our SWSS caucuses. We produced leaflets explaining why students should support the strike, distributed stickers, made banners and collected petitions.

Glasgow Uni made contact with a part-time student postie who did a public meeting on the campus. The students found out that there were up to 40 student posties at Glasgow Uni alone and made plans to carry out joint collections and lecture tours. Both the speaker and another student postie who came to the meeting took away copies of Socialist Worker and recruitment forms. We are now looking to recruit these post workers and continue to develop relationships with them and others with the view that the post dispute will blow up again in the near future.

At Strathclyde we went round student halls on the eve of two strike dates collecting donations, arguing for support, selling the paper and getting students to put up support the post workers posters in their halls. Students are now planning to produce a halls bulletin to act as an activists news letter carrying the latest on cuts, loans, movement events and SWSS activity.

Students were also part of huge Saturday sales around the post including one of 186 SW which underlined the public mood around the strike and fed in to discussions in our caucuses.

Our activities attracted a small but significant layer around our groups. One student who started attending our caucuses on the back of the post joined on direct debit while those who didn't join have committed to activity on various campaigns and are future recruits.

Apart from recruitment, the experience of this national dispute has impacted on our students. There is now a clearer understanding of the crisis, the role students can play in industrial struggle and the possibilities of bringing the workers struggle into the campus.

Had the strikes gone ahead we had plans to picket scab centres and set up real support groups on campus getting support from lecturers, clubs and societies and individuals to form a student network of solidarity.

## Covering all the bases

While the post provided the central theme of our recent work other poles of attraction have opened up. The Scottish Defence League plan to march in Glasgow has meant a huge increase in anti-fascist activity which we have had to relate to, shape and build.

The strategy of feeding UAF student contacts into city activity has provided a base for transferring this onto the campuses. One UAF activist meeting in the city attracted 75 people including a rep from NUS Scotland, the Glasgow Uni equalities officer students from Strathclyde, Glasgow

and Stow College.

As well as students playing a central role in the BBC demonstration we have followed up with the first ever UAF meeting at Strathclyde which has provided a model for the other groups.

From a small base our comrades pulled together sponsors for the meeting including the LGBT society, Strathclyde Muslim Students Association, the race relations officer, equal opportunities officer, Show Racism the Red Card and had the meeting chaired by the SU President. Of the 40 in attendance, 22 people signed up for activity, the majority of them non members.

This provides an excellent base of activists who are planning to officially launch UAF at the university to create a permanent on campus network which can react to the threat of the BNP at particular moments of high anti-fascist activity. We now need to replicate this model at Glasgow Uni where squadist elements have started to organise.

Keeping up StW activity has also brought new students into our periphery. Glasgow Uni signed up 200 students to the society at Freshers week and the Strathclyde delegation to the Afghanistan demo included 5 new students who all attended our first StW organising meeting.

Although our StW public meetings have been smaller (25 at Glasgow, 35 at Strathclyde) the quality of people we are meeting has been excellent which has led to limited but successful action. We had a day of action across the campuses where we picketed a military recruitment centre and leafleted passers by, something which we hope to turn into a campaign in the second semester.

As a result of these activities, students are planning a Glasgow wide teach in on Afghanistan to revitalise our entire network and strengthen our campus coalitions.

In amongst all this we need to be making links between the various campaigns and the political and economic crisis. The question of class is foundational to our discussions with potential recruits who are starting to make the connections between war, racism and the crisis.

The potential is clear in terms of recruitment and in, for example, building the Right to Work Conference. We are already shaping up a broad delegation with non-members signing up, including the President of Glasgow Met College (and member of the NUS Scotland executive) who has been working closely with our members against the fascists.

## Retaining new recruits: Building the party

Throughout these activities we have seen growth in our party organisation and levels of recruitment. Growth and sustainability is always important, but if we are to cover all the elements of the crisis we need to be growing at a much faster pace in this period.

Recruitment at Freshers fayres was heavy,

Glasgow Uni, for example, recruited 31 students. Not every recruit has integrated into the party but a big section have thanks to the detailed work of chasing up direct debits and throwing the ourselves into meetings and action.

Glasgow Uni holds weekly caucuses with political introductions and organisational second halves of 15-22 people. New recruits were central to building a 50 strong SWSS meeting with Judith Orr, a meeting of 24 with Chris Harman, a meeting on fascism with 20 people, a StW meeting as well as Brighton, the picketing of a military recruitment centre, the BBC demo, a serious post intervention and consistent paper sales.

This has led to yet more direct debits and a new layer of students revitalising the group. Keeping up regular activity has also meant that new people regularly turn up to caucuses as the term goes on.

## Further expansion: a new group at Stow College

During the summer students committed themselves to breaking through to the FE colleges, not for one of special events, but to build lasting groups. They hit four colleges with sales to see who we could pick up.

At Stow College we had recruited a few and we had a member in the college already bringing together a loose base to start consolidating and building.

The college had a record intake of almost 3,000 full and part-time students this year. The recession has seen enrolment at further education institutions rise by up to 35% in Scotland alone this year, with many young people enrolling in the hope of getting a foot on the employment ladder, or returning to retrain through necessity following redundancy.

Stow's student body is made up of school leavers, adult learners, and many of the students are registered as refugees and asylum seekers making it an important place to build.

We now have an active SWSS group of seven comrades. This is a testament to how one committed member can build from scratch. Katherine Stewart had to battle with the college management even to get a room booked. After fighting with the authorities for 3 weeks we now have guaranteed rooms whenever we want, agreement on setting up and LMHR gig and she has been co-opted onto the student executive.

The new group can out perform the more established university groups showing the potential that the FE's hold. For example, they were the first SWSS group in the city to twin with a post office, carry out a collection and sell at a delivery office.

FE's do have particular limitations. The main problem is that FE students must attend a rigid set of classes throughout the day leaving less time for activity. Courses are also far shorter making it more difficult to establish a left wing culture in the long term. They go

‘up like a rocket, down like a stick.’

Our task is to turn this problem into a structural pressure around the branches. FE recruits need to integrate quickly into party work outside the campus to ensure lasting retention. Our comrade leading up the group has made special attempts at bringing new recruits to sales, branches and city wide events. One new Stow comrade has, for example, translated our UAF leaflets into Polish, something which would not have happened had it not been for a focus on expansion.

Stow looks to have a bright future as an operating SWSS group, but in reality it is only a glimpse of what is possible in FE colleges. There is no reason why we can't have more groups in the city and we need fit building SWSS at the FE's into a general strategy of expansion coinciding with setting up new branches and sinking deeper roots with more sales than we currently have.

## Where next?

Many of our student cadres have now left university for the workplace. This requires a constant process of training for our new generation of student leaders working with extremely fresh recruits. In this context the phrase ‘marathon not a sprint’ is important.

While there is an urgency for big meetings and sales, fighting on all fronts and focussing on key battles like the post we also have to think long term in relation to retention and caderisation. If a group of new students build a meeting which is too small, we come together and assess politically why the title didn't cut, what organisational matters arose throughout building it and how we can improve.

Students who join the SWP, sell the paper and come to caucuses are serious about building socialist politics. What has become clear throughout our work is that we need to fuse the ideological battle with action. We need to look for possible campaigns we can start up and be involved in, prepare for cuts and go for more action than we have managed so far this term. Running through our activity we want a culture which aims for action as well as winning people through our ideological commitment to socialism. Snap demonstrations, pickets and rallies all help to encourage a feeling that the crisis is hitting home on the campus.

Alongside this, building ideological coherence within our own ranks and especially with very new recruits is vitally important. In blunt terms, people we have met and recruited may not survive this period unless they are armed with our politics.

In relation to this we plan to role out a series of ‘educational evenings’ on strategy and tactics, Trotskyism after Trotsky and so on with experienced comrades from the district speaking. This performs two important functions: training up a new generation in our tradition and building working relationships between our students and long term party cadre.

On the whole we have made a positive start to the year, but we need to keep driving forward. Going into the rest of the term is a push to keep up high recruitment levels on the one hand while integrating and caderising new members on the other. We need to start punching higher above our weight with bigger meetings and higher paper sales as well as increasing our activity around StW and UAF. This is to be achieved through the range of activity mentioned above. We want to generalise the model of Stow College to other FE's in the city.

Continuing in this way will keep the district as a whole moving forward and contribute towards building a new generation of student and party leaders.

**Jonathan (Glasgow)**

## USING THE WOLF TO OPEN THE DOOR

The economic crisis is causing fractures to develop in the ideology of the ruling class. There is a growing audience willing to discuss the future of capitalism as a system, and to pose questions about their own ideas of ‘common sense’. This creates the possibility for revolutionaries to open up new spaces in which to challenge the prevalent neo-liberal dogma. There is also a growing number of people, particularly students, who are seriously beginning to study Marxist economics and the ideas in Marx's Capital.

In February, members of SWSS and a layer of activists from the occupation over Gaza helped to set up a Capital Reading Group at King's College London. This was partially inspired by the Capital reading movement in German universities, and the on-line lectures of Marxist geographer David Harvey ([www.davidharvey.org](http://www.davidharvey.org)).

We launched the group with a meeting of over 50 students who came to hear Alex Callinicos speak on ‘Why Read Capital? Marx in the 21st Century’. Around 20 students then met fortnightly during the second semester to discuss the main issues in Volume I of Marx's Capital.

Following a session with Joseph Choonara on ‘Commodities and Values’, the group began to introduce its own discussions on ‘The Fetishism of Commodities’, ‘The transformation of Money into Capital’, etc. The group re-launched this year, now an official Student Union society, with Ben Fine giving a meeting to around 40 students. Recordings of a number of the group's sessions are available at [www.kclreadingcapital.blogspot.com](http://www.kclreadingcapital.blogspot.com).

The group was able to use academic networks and email lists to attract new

students, but was also useful in drawing a layer of more academically-minded students towards active political engagement.

This is important, but the group is certainly not a substitute for SWSS meetings, united front work and campaigning. It does however provide a broad forum for serious debate about Marxist theory on campus. With a strong SWSS group that is able to root the debates firmly in practice, the Reading Group can draw in new forces, and help to reinforce and deepen our theoretical clarity.

One of the consequences of setting up the group was that we were approached in early summer by the King's College Business Club about arranging a joint event this autumn. The Reading Group proposed that both societies host a debate between Alex Callinicos and Martin Wolf (chief economics commentator at the Financial Times). It was certainly the most bizarre political alliance I have ever had to engage in, and some sharp arguments were necessary to organise the event.

The Business Club has very different priorities to SWSS and the Reading Group – prestige and networking being the Business Club's main themes. However I think their involvement was an important factor in Wolf agreeing to participate, and allowing us to use the Student Union's global email list to reach the entire student body. The result was a packed meeting of around 300 people, mainly King's students, engaging in a debate about the Future of Capitalism. The results can be seen on youtube.<sup>1</sup>

On the day of the event, SWSS organised a party intervention (we sold 33 papers), a Bookmarks stall, and mobilised numbers of activists beyond our ranks in the No Cuts at King's campaign with placards and a banner displayed behind stage.

This helped to frame the debate in the class struggle, and pose the alternative of a real campaigning fight-back to the Business Club's vacuous entrepreneurship. At points in the debate, Wolf fell back on the idea that humans are inherently selfish. For me the most inspiring part was to see students new to politics seriously questioning this ‘common sense’ notion of human nature. The debate saw many young people considering the arguments for a planned economy and how it might work.

The effort and planning paid off, and we are planning a similar event for the spring term. As part of our wider work as SWSS, these large events are an important aspect of building a political culture on campus and starting to drive a wedge into debates far beyond the left's current reach.

1) *Alex Callinicos*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6CZAQvAMaY>, *Martin Wolf*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXKqgWAIEIQ&A>: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYpHLnlUrFg>

**Rob (Central London)**

## GROWTH IN NORWICH

The Norwich and UEA branches have transformed themselves in the past couple of months. Norwich already had good interventions in united fronts; comrades were central to organising the city's first ever Pride march this summer, and there are active local StWC and PSC groups, but until recently the SWP branch was not so strong.

The branch had regular Saturday sales, and a paper distribution network, however the sales weren't large and it was difficult for the comrades to cover much more than the routine. And last year there was practically no activity at UEA at all.

Since the summer, several more comrades have moved into the area, and the branch has been able to expand what it does. The main areas that have obviously improved are: public sales, recruitment, students and industrial work. These have all overlapped and have strengthened each other.

After a few paper sales with 8 or 9 comrades, we decided to try a two shift sale. Working out who could do which shift meant doing a proper ring-round for the sale, so it has helped us keep in touch with comrades better. When we first tried it, we roughly doubled our paper sales from around 25-30, to 62. It was encouraging to comrades that we could have a sale on the level of much larger districts. Last week, when the Saturday sale was rained off, we organised an evening sale before our branch meeting which students and town comrades did together.

The UEA group now has 10 comrades and activity in the town branch has benefited in general from a strong SWSS group. We recruited 7 people to the party since the start of term, mainly on direct debit subs and now have weekly SWSS meetings and stalls. Students have also taken part in town sales and industrial sales. We also took a coach of 16 students from UEA to the protest at the BBC against Nick Griffin.

Due to the increased confidence of the branch we were able to intervene well in the post strikes. We now have a regular post sale, and the new student members have done two collections at UEA, and raised over £60 for the posties.

Our united front work continues to be central to our activity, however now this is reinforced by a strong branch capable of intervening on many issues.

### Norwich SWP

## THE NATURE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

I want to say something about the nature of the kind of party required - it's breadth, programmatic level etc - defending what was good about the SSP model and criticising it from direct experience for parliamentarism, bureaucratisation and the failure of the ISM to break fully with the economist/opportunist/electoralist CWI tradition of party-building.

I'd also say something on the virtues of the Respect model, the mistakes made by the SWP within it while critically defending the project overall.

Also the challenge of balancing 'agitational' and 'propaganda' elements of a programme which inevitably lead to some confusion over the relevance of certain transitional demands compared to the (lack of) political level of the consciousness of the working class vanguard; and the stages of development required to reach from a small vanguard party to a mass workers party.

Unless we believe we are THE revolutionary party - many critics have always accused the SWP of this - the revolutionary party in Britain is in fact an instrument that is still to be built of which the SWP must form the decisive core. We must accumulate around us those new forces emerging from current and future anti-capitalist resistance.

Incidentally I see the SWP as a small vanguard party with the aim of accumulating cadres and trying to become a bigger more effective force in the class struggle. If the growth of the revolutionary party has any meaning it is as a class struggle combat party - and given the relatively low levels of generalised class struggle combat going on - it is hardly surprising that a revolutionary party is not growing rapidly but only in twos and threes.

The stage we are at now is actually one of building vanguard levels of organisation within the working class and to link their struggles. We are not yet at the stage of building a mass workers party in Scotland or Britain but of building a bigger vanguard militant core and fusing their consciousness with that of our revolutionary party. Crucial to this vanguard stage of development are our efforts to build shop stewards networks, rank and file groups and alternative left leaderships in the trade unions and in the community resistance struggles.

The left were not really successful in building autonomous R&F structures even if in Britain as a whole we were able to elect 'left' General Secretaries and for a whole period make it almost impossible for any candidate to openly support New Labour and be elected a union leader. These

victories were all achieved in unions with a strong rank and file level of organisation and autonomy from the union hierarchy.

If this lack of R&F base organisation and lack of cohesion of the left inside the unions more generally were some of the subjective reasons, the main objective reasons for these failures were the low levels of largely defensive industrial struggles in the 2000s and the still deep stranglehold of Labour reformists in the big manual workers and public sector unions representing 2/3rds of organised labour - UNISON, GMB and Unite.

Contrary to those comrades concerned that we are not growing as people think we should be during a crisis of capitalism such as we have now, I would say it is perfectly understandable why we haven't really grown given the level of development of the class struggle in Britain. The much-anticipated winter of discontent last year failed to materialise obviously because of the recession's grip of fear of job losses and mortgage default.

Revolutionary politics (our propaganda) need to become the guiding influence within the ranks of the vanguard of the class. This is necessary before any broader programme (our agitational demands) can become the acknowledged property of the masses of working people. For this early phase is needed a process of orientation by the revolutionaries, leading to implantation and location within the working class in their workplaces and in their communities to counter some of the obstacles we face.

The party's efforts to deny the undoubted swing of large sections of public opinion to the right (if not that many more to the far-right) - and of politics to the right is also denying the obvious that during a recession these are the inevitably backlashes against minorities that have nothing to do with the crisis they are being blamed by racists for.

We can't credibly say politics is not moving to the right when workers and trade union leaders have used slogans like British Jobs for British workers and struck to keep foreign workers out; and when racist football hooligans are once again scapegoating minorities by marching upon mosques. The growth of the BNP to 12,000 members - nearly equal in size to the entire revolutionary left.

These are all symptoms of some deep underlying prejudices amongst significant numbers of working class white people. This clearly has an impact on our growth - to say otherwise will mean we are in denial. This is unlikely to change in the short term until we have decisively driven the BNP/EDL/SDL off our streets and exposed Griffin and co as the Nazis they are.

Our comrades in the last two weeks have led the fight to mobilised against the BNP in Hamilton and Glasgow North East, in solidarity for the postal workers strike and in UAF's bid to stop the SDL/EDL march on Glasgow Central Mosque. However

it should be also pointed just how much smaller the support levels for the BNP in Scotland are – it was the only area where they failed to make a mark in June 2009's Euro election (gaining just 2%) though they gained respectable amounts of support in pockets of Glasgow. The divided far left between them (No2EU, SSP and SLP) easily outpulled the BNP in Scotland unlike in England. The Glasgow North East by-election will be an important test of the impact of Nick Griffin's appearance on Question Time

The stage of the struggle we have reached is still by-and-large one of defensive responses to the bosses and government attacks on workers. Even if they are often taking militant forms of direct action - they are not yet generalised into a mass movement. There are not yet basic alternative structures of class struggle that can replace the trade union bureaucracy's decisive stranglehold over these struggles. You only have to look at Diageo workers who only now are being balloted for strike action nearly 6 months after the closure announcements; well after the bosses rejected the Scottish government's rescue plan and ignored a massive 20,000 march through the Johnnie Walker-town of Kilmarnock against the plant closures there and in Port Dundas Glasgow.

## Explaining the Respect debacle and learning its lessons for left unity now

I always opposed notions of the SSP or Solidarity or Respect being described as 'mass workers parties' of a reformist Labourite type.

They were in practice actually vanguard parties - in the sense of being composed almost exclusively from revolutionary or centrist militants from the vanguard layers. These mostly kept schtum on their revolutionary politics in order to attract a mythical mass following of left-moving reformist workers that were about to flood the gates with membership applications requests to the left pole of attraction. .

That Respect never worked out was partly because of John Rees's mistaken understanding of the 'united front of a special type' - an unwieldy analogy which got blown up into a false theory to justify the SWP's failure to raise fully socialist politics within Respect - but also partly because of the stage of development we were at.

The SSP and Respect's growth were all the more remarkable for occurring in a period lacking a generalised fightback against New Labour. Efforts to do something about that imbalance between struggles and electoral support within both projects came too late.

The left within the SSP - the SW platform and others like the Fourth International supporters - fought the increasing parliamentarist reformism of the SSP leadership separately and failed to bloc together against

the centrist ISM leadership. The SWP split with Galloway and Respect was triggered among many other factors by the Organising for Fighting Trade Unions conference which the SWP organised with a view to shifting the project leftwards from below. It was an initiative that should have occurred at the beginning of Respect to raise the working class content of the new formation and to allow working class people to stamp their identity upon it.

Unfortunately SWP comrades within the Respect leadership led efforts to block essential socialist demands (such as a workers wage for a workers representative, lesbian and gay equality - apparently so-called 'shiboleths' ) from being Respect party policy. Even the farce of not allowing Respect to be called 'party' but a 'coalition' was perpetrated so that comrades didn't have to deal with questions about the wrong political programme being imposed by SWP members blocked votes at Respect conferences. Let me make it clear I 100% supported the setting up of Respect as a SSP member despite the at times Islamophobic and anti-religious opposition of many of my then ISM colleagues and the stinging rebuke of my then SW Platform colleagues who were the biggest supporters of building the profile of George Galloway as de-facto leader of the anti-war movement.

Even if I was critical of the not-very-democratic processes that led to its formation and the unnecessary political concessions made on programme and the class basis, it was not wrong to want to form a party with anti-war Muslims. They were moving to the left as anti-imperialists and making radical conclusions on what to do about the nature of Islamophobic British society.

Respect was right because it gave these leftward moving Muslims a vehicle to reach white working class people with solidarity instead of divisive political Islamic alternatives, which were marginalised by Respect's emergence. Muslims being in Respect were not the problem - it was the socialists dipping their red banner in green and posing as left-reformists, which was the main problem.

Respect did not begin with or by orienting to a working class base but by orienting to the leftward moving elements of the anti-war movement. The most successful united front-type body in British political history the Stop the War Coalition was built because of its breadth across the working and middle classes - as defended by the SWP without whose central role the Stop the War Coalition would never have become the force that it temporarily did in British politics.

However the SWP was too long immersed in the idea that the movement was the be-all and end-all of social movements and when that movement failed to actually stop the war - despite getting 2 million people protesting on the streets - the lack of workers action against the war began to tell. Only once the anti-war movement's decline - from a super mass movement into a regular

and important though much diminished campaign - was obvious did any change of tactic occur with the party announcing itself more as the revolutionary (party) component of the STWC in its interventions. However, the lack of sustained working class involvement in the much diminished anti-war movement meant it could no longer be a short cut to left party-building success.

Had the party been more vociferous about what made it different from its allies in the STWC (i.e. revolutionary Marxism) and concentrated more on what it had in common with its allies inside the left at the time in the Socialist Alliance and SSP (also revolutionary Marxism) - the left would have politically benefited more from that movement.

The SWP leaders inside Respect instead carried favour with existing Muslim community leaders without any serious political test of their loyalty to the new cause. Instead of mobilising more radical younger Muslims against these reformist misleaders Respect often helped re-enforce these leaders' control over Muslim youth. They wanted to attract the social base of these leaders through the short cut of co-opting the community mobilising methods often found in Black and Minority Ethnic 'communities of resistance' based around church, temple, gurdwara or mosque.

Today all the main bourgeois parties do this to gain support in what was once the preserve of Labour. However between 2005 and 2007 Respect did this too. We cannot therefore be surprised that BME councillors elected as candidates of an ostensibly socialist party could defect so easily back to New Labour or the Lib-Dems without any apparent loss of voter support.

At the time we tacked right in order to attract people moving to left. It is this method that was a mistake inside Respect that is being left barely challenged now in the party in the approaches to left parties in Europe and in the possibility of a new party here - despite the marginalisation of the leadership behind that turn. It is simply not credible for the CC to blame only these comrades directly involved in the respect debacle. The whole CC were all to blame and while the party's statement on leaving Respect was a little self-critical it did not draw the proper conclusions about new-party building.

## The lessons from the experience of the Scottish left

Comrades in Scotland however went through an entirely different experience. We were not the cause of the split in the SSP and we were on the right side in defence of Tommy Sheridan in an unfortunate but necessary parting of the ways with so-called socialists who backed Rupert Murdoch against him.

However, the left in Scotland does not seem to have suffered to quite the same

extent as in England. The SWP is in fact growing in Glasgow in size and influence, as comrades will have noticed by the coverage of struggle in the paper emanating from Scotland as a proportion of coverage in the Social Worker and by the massive contingent we sent to Marxism this year.

We are the only serious left wing party in Glasgow capable of making links in the class struggle at picket lines, on campuses and in the anti-war and anti-fascist movements. We are playing the role of the vanguard party and have eclipsed all those currents stemming from the Militant tradition to be the largest revolutionary left group in Scotland.

Why is that? I'd say it is because we came out of the SSP split into Solidarity intact. The Solidarity movement has its problems but it is the only left unity vehicle remaining in Britain. It is not yet accepted as THE vehicle for radical change and continuity of socialism in Scotland that we hoped it would be at its launch in 2006.

But Solidarity is still the only sizeable left unity vehicle capable of waging an election campaign in the Glasgow North east by-election where Tommy Sheridan is standing. Scotland is also the only place in Britain where SWP members work closely with CWI members (called, confusingly, the International Socialists in Scotland) in a left unity vehicle. So for us it is actually a question of broadening an already existing unity project or indeed folding it into any new initiative stemming from the left unions like the RMT, PCS, FBU and CWU.

Solidarity's efforts to reach a deal with the No2EU groups and with the SSP to stand a left unity candidate were genuine because it is still itself a genuine left unity vehicle. That said, SWP members have been very minimally active in it of late. I myself resigned from Solidarity in November 2007 because of the racist positions on immigration controls and Islamophobic view of terrorism held by CWI members. While they did not win a majority at Solidarity Party Conferences - a sizeable percentage of Solidarity activists shared their bad positions on racism, which pander to the weaknesses of some workers - the epitome of which was the approach by the CWI to the Lindsey Oil refinery first strike in January 2009.

This old CWI economism on race and the working class was in stark contrast to the very principled stand taken by the SWP and was one of the reasons I joined the party on January 10th 2009. However our relative absence within Solidarity has left the party in control of a CWI coalition with the Highlands based right-centrist grouping the Democratic Green Socialist platform. Solidarity is in danger of being a rebuilt Scottish Militant Labour unless the SWP swings decisively back into action.

The SSP was successful at implantation and location within working class struggles. Its militants well placed within grass-

roots struggles of a community or single issue nature - their recognition by workers was not based upon purely workplace struggles.

The SSP began with the CWI/SML's social base in schemes and workplaces led by Tommy Sheridan in the mid-1990s but quickly broadened out into much wider and deeper layers of the Glasgow and Scottish working class. From this base the SSP won the majority of active class-struggle-combat committed forces of left to be found other sections of the class in Scotland. To begin with the SSP was a regroupment of class struggle and combat-ready militants not simply an electoral pact - though of course by the end in 2006 it had degenerated backwards into a reformist parliamentarist pro-Independence movement.

Clearly the SWP's then assumption that a broad new 'workers party' could not be formed on a broadly anti-capitalist basis but instead on an anti-neo-liberal, left reformist basis, was proven to be entirely wrong. All the more so, given the fact that a workers party the SSP, had already been formed in Scotland on an explicitly anti-capitalist basis at least in words. Even if its practice was rather more reformist, the SSP was a real anti-capitalist step forward and of a qualitatively different order to Respect or the other electoral coalitions that dominate our discussions and are in the so-called European Anti-Capitalist Left (EACL).

Today's NPA is clearly very much influenced by the SSP model. When Comrades Alex and Chris are debating the merits of the NPA model they are really debating the SSP model while effectively rewriting the recent history of left regroupment in Britain almost to write the situation in Scotland out of the story of the European radical left. We have valid experiences and lessons to show others - especially our comrades in France and Germany.

It is a big mistake not to have an organised current or platform with a distinct set of politics and with a programme that defines its identity within any broader anti-capitalist formation. Without a proper democratic centralism - a loose collectivism inevitably will take hold and become anti-Leninist and hostile to any form of programmatic distinction from its host party.

## **The national question for the SWP in Scotland - a brief note**

For Scotland - a specific approach is needed reflecting our slightly different circumstances.

The facts speak for themselves that Scotland's situation is rapidly diverging from that in England and Wales. That means our tactics and orientations have to be decided by a committee closer to home than the CC in London whom with the best will in world cannot be expected to keep tabs on the Scottish situation the way

that the Scottish District Committee can. Indeed now that following our National Dayschool in Edinburgh in the summer on the national question, the SWP in Scotland have overwhelmingly endorsed voting Yes in an Independence referendum.

There will have to be some rapprochement between the ex-SSP family but also into this mix now comes the CPB/Labour left trade unionists via the No2EU Bob Crow project. This is an element that will steer any unity project firmly to the right. Following the Tories likely victory next year - our referendum will take on a renewed and broader significance.

Comrades in Scotland believe that revolutionaries should support a Yes vote for independence. Even if we opposed the SNP's bourgeois recipe for independence - we favour the extension of more direct and accountable democracy and the desire of the majority not to have nuclear power, nuclear weapons, nor neo-liberal economic remedies imposed by Westminster to pay for the crisis.

We can argue more easily for taxing the rich to pay for the crisis here and for nationalising industries under workers control precisely because of the national element to the politics of the RBS and HBOS debacles. The SNP government will be forced to make class war in order to impose Westminster's budget cuts - or seeking the full sovereign tax-raising powers needed to control the commanding heights of the economy - be forced into concessions to workers to defend the public sector by taxing the rich.

A No vote or abstention would leave us in one of two undesirable positions: Either as disarmed supporters of the constitutional status quo - and in the same trench as New Labourites who have just betrayed the workers and been removed from office - or, as irrelevant sectarian propagandists arguing from the sidelines for no real strategy and not really addressing the national question with a concrete answer. Saying that you support the 'right' to self-determination but opposing any attempt to actually exercise it, is in reality opposition to self-determination - and effectively support for the British imperialist Union.

We are now set on a road that not merely is 'comfortable or 'not worried' by the idea of independence but one which now effectively means that we advocate the break-up of Britain. We can be and are for independence without being nationalists and we always state clearly our opposition to the capitalist utopia the SNP will try to dupe Scottish workers with.

But it is a certainty that the SNP cannot get a majority vote for independence without making promises of major reforms and concessions to the working class. This gives much scope for the SWP to intervene in the referendum campaign - should there be one - by raising working class demands on the type of independent Scotland we should have, contrasting that with the one

we're going to be offered by the SNP.

To successful work our way through the tactical minefields we need a Scottish-based leadership with full authority to act on our national terrain. It is time for the SWP in Scotland to have become a fully-fledged party within the IST.

## The debate on the European Left in the Party

For the first time in weeks this week's Socialist Worker noted the dangers of the German Die Linke degenerating because of taking governmental office. Explicitly now that party - within which our German comrades in Marx 21 play an important role including as MPs - is seeking to follow the Berlin route where it is in regional government coalitions with the New-Labourite SPD.

Oskar Lafontaine seeks to repeat that in each regional government as preparation for the next a SPD/Die Linke/Green national government at the next general elections. The decision of our German comrades not to back the efforts of the Berlin WASG back in 2006-7 to stay independent of the right-reformist pro-cuts leaders of the PDS senators in Berlin are now chickens coming home to roost.

Having not waged a struggle for an anti-capitalist and non-government coalition basis for left unity - the far-left in Die Linke has less credibility to oppose the rightward drift into the kind of governmental coalition that messed up the Italian and French Communist parties recently. Die Linke now want to adopt broad left coalitions as the model for everywhere.

Our Linksruck comrades were wrong to support left unity at any costs back in 2007 - just as the Unir faction of the French LCR that argued for the NPA's unity with the left Stalinist formation Parti de Gauche directly inspired by Die Linke were also wrong. Yet co-thinkers of the SWP in Europe seem confused about the nature of left unity today. Even our Irish comrades flushed with success of the People Before Profit coalition were confused at Marxism's debate on the NPA.

Richard Boyd Barrett of the Irish SWP posed the issue of NPA's unity with the PdG - the rightist position within the French party. This was duly dismissed by the invited NPA speaker who said the PdG's formation was and is a deliberate attempt to undermine the more radical anti-capitalist unity in the NPA, which is based on opposition to participation in reformist governments. It seems the debates between Francis Sabado of the NPA, Alex Callinicos and others in pages of the ISJ - do not take account of the similarity of the NPA model to the SSP-model.

The LCR has liquidated itself into the apparatus of the NPA just as the ISM did when it formed the SSP in the teeth of opposition from its then international the CWI. In Britain we directly participated as SWP

members in two competing left unity projects - of which the one in Scotland was on a far more advanced level politically and was not dominated by the decisions of the SWP Central committee - and model based on the broad left reformist party approach to regroupment - which was indeed dominated by the SWP's size and direction (Respect).

There is a link here between our party's inconsistent assessments of the various European left projects (some like Chris Harman and Alex Callinicos seem to be saying different national conditions mean different bases for left unity). It is that the party has not learnt the lessons of its debacle within Respect. Namely that the whole Central Committee were responsible for the errors of perspective and tactics involved.

The very model basis of the party - which was not allowed to call itself a working class party or directly say it was socialist in its election materials even though in practice its membership was almost entirely both working class and socialist. Our SWP leaders forced party members to vote against the party's own political positions in the maintenance of what turned out to be an opportunist alliance.

Is that likely to happen again? Yes. It is simply not credible to ditch long-standing leading members from the CC such as comrades Rees, German and Nineham and blame them for all the mistakes in Respect. Such mistakes could be made again by our party inside any new vehicle being built by the left reformist trade union leaders or those around the Peoples Charter.

Unless we have agreed a medium term strategy of party building, we will be pulled to the right. If we admire the example of the LCR's creation of the NPA in France we should also admire what got them there which was a steadfast and principled refusal to unite with left reformists in the PCF and PdG unless they committed to the principle of not joining capitalist governments.

They have exposed the reformist left unity seekers within the united fronts of workers and student struggles over the last 5 years. That is how the NPA has 10,000 members and is the main left party in France eclipsing the PCF, which is shrinking and haemorrhaging members and votes.

## Conclusion: Why the SWP should support the call for an anti-capitalist party in Britain

We are today in Scotland and Britain several steps back from the point we reached pre-2006. A new anti-capitalist party here will have to go through the process of recovering lost credibility for revolutionaries; regaining roots in the class, and offering an attractive viable strategy for effective action (or programme of action) to the vanguard elements.

We revolutionaries are going to have to be much more honest and direct about

who we are and what we stand for that is different from our reformist allies. While we must still be cultivating ways to get them (in some cases reluctantly) to work with us in United Fronts - for example in initiatives like Unite Against Fascism - we must always remember that our united front work is not the same as our party-building work.

Even if they are related tasks of perspective, orientation and intervention both united fronts and the revolutionary party are built in opposition to and by exposing reformism - one from within the same united front organisations, and one from the example of combat party of workers struggle that specifically separates us as revolutionaries from the reformists and in practice and in content.

I think an NPA model-workers party on an anti-capitalist basis is clearly preferable to broad-left formations of the Die Linke-type in the next period of struggle in Britain.

For something like it to be adopted as the preferred model in Britain, the SWP's stance will be crucial. It will be inevitably face pressure from Left unity partners to its right - the CWI, CPB and the left General Secretaries led by Bob Crow - to form something not very radical for the sake of left unity and of workers political representation.

There is no doubt that the party's call for the left unity was a sincere attempt but one that did not carry enough weight with potential allies to our right. Our open letter did not spell out what should be the political programmatic nature of the next unity project we want to build.

Of the major forces of the left in Britain only the intervention of the SWP is likely to ensure the most anti-capitalist outcome to such a process of left unity. The radical content of whatever left unity vehicle emerges - is dependent on the SWP taking a firm principled stand in favour of building an explicitly anti-capitalist party in Britain - one that I hope will be loosely of the NPA type.

I am supporting this call initiated by Workers Power because I believe it is both possible and necessary to build a vehicle of an anti-capitalist left unity. That's because - despite the relatively low levels of defensive class struggle during 1999-2006 we actually had anti-capitalist left unity in Scotland in the form of the SSP. Now we have Solidarity - the only ongoing electoral left unity project remaining in Britain since the SSP and Respect splits. But Solidarity is not sufficiently anti-capitalist enough to inspire any serious radical break from Labour reformism by workers.

What the working class needs from revolutionary Marxists is an answer to crises of capitalist economy, and of working class organisation and political representation.

That must be an anti-capitalist party not a confused 'broad left unity' project or electoral non-aggression pact with centrists

and left reformists. I believe the SWP leadership have a point that the groundswell for an anti-capitalist party is not strong right now given the quite low levels of class struggle.

But that does not stop the party being obligated to start preparing the ground now for an anti-capitalist party for when the conditions are right in the near future. We do this by building rank and file autonomous structures in the trade unions and by anticipating a growth in struggles and by exposing the left reformists roadblocks to a real left party for what they are.

I would call on the SWP Party Conference to back Workers Power's call for anti-capitalist party in Britain and to take up a leading role with such a campaign.

**Graham (Glasgow)**

## DCH: THE CAMPAIGN GOES ON

The Defend Council Housing campaign, a broad united front with the SWP at its heart, has been pivotal in forcing a significant shift in government policy towards council housing. The gathering housing crisis, and council tenants' resistance to privatisation have driven the shift, but a persistent, broad united campaign with the right politics is what forces their hand.

Locally branches and districts, and unison and other trade union fractions, can reap the benefits of this work and our part in it, by connecting with local housing issues and linking these to the national campaign.

Recession and a crackdown on public spending doesn't need to stop us winning concessions. In the process we gain some victories to take pride in, a presence on estates and in the tenants' movement, and another front on which to engage with and differentiate those Labour supporters and others prepared to turn words into action to stop privatisation.

The latest Housing minister John Healey has declared himself a 'Keynesian', and boasts of his 'biggest [house] building programme for almost 20 years' (MJ magazine 29.10.09) combined with new investment in existing council housing.

This promises 3,200 new council homes – a drop in the ocean of need, with 1.8 million households (5 million people) now on council waiting lists. The vast bulk of government's £1.5 billion 'housing pledge' goes to private developers, lenders and landowners, including some housing associations.

Proposed reforms of Council housing finance include a 5% rise in management

and maintenance funding, plus an average 24% rise in major repairs funding. There is a restated commitment to improve all council homes and add external improvements including lifts, and a promise of capital grants to meet the backlog of improvement work. Proposals for councils to be 'self-financing' are controversial, and the proposed increase in allowances is inadequate even based on the government's own research (we need at least double the proposed rise in allowances).

But the moves to invest in existing and new council housing – and to stop subsidies to stock transfer – are concessions. We should say loud and clear that these have been won by campaigning, in face of Labour's weakness: resistance pays. There are dangers that this is a token sop to shore up a fast-disappearing electoral base. But the harder and sharper the campaign is, the more concessions we will gain, whoever wins the election.

The people we meet in these campaigns are trade unionists, tenants and activists desperate to unite and fight with others. Many are the very people we want to involve in UAF, Fight for the Right To Work, post worker support groups and other campaigns. In Salford, Manchester, tenants are sickened by the empty private housing developments that have cost millions but done nothing to ease the housing crisis. The campaign against the despised Hazel Blears should involve and help revitalise the campaign to take housing back into council control.

Privatisation hasn't yet gone away – and a number of areas face imminent or threatened stock transfer ballots. These include Wales (Neath Port Talbot, Vale of Glamorgan, Flintshire), Oldham, Stockton, Warrington, Bolton, Kensington & Chelsea, High Wycombe, Mid-Suffolk, Hemel Hempstead, Swindon. Others face PFI (including Newham, Southwark, Hull, Stoke on Trent, Portsmouth, Northampton, Birmingham, Nottingham, Cornwall, Shropshire) or sell-offs and private renting etc (Winchester, Brighton, Camden, Lambeth among many others). And there is a declared threat to privatise all Northern Ireland's public housing.

In these areas we have an open door to get involved or initiate a campaign (see IB1 for lessons, and start early). But in every town and city, and in most rural areas, housing is a crisis issue – and council housing is part of any answer. By finding the local angle, checking with council unions, councillors and tenants about what's happening locally, and taking the first steps to see what's possible, local areas can connect with and contribute to winning.

For resources see [www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk) and also [http://www.support4councilhousing.org.uk/report-resources/HOCCHG\\_report.pdf](http://www.support4councilhousing.org.uk/report-resources/HOCCHG_report.pdf)

**Eileen (East London)**

## “THE PAPER WE NEED NOW” – A RESPONSE

The article in the first pre-conference bulletin 'The Paper We Need Now', by Mike and John from Hackney, is very welcome indeed. It is important to take a fresh look at the paper now and it is true that it does need to change. The writers have proposed many excellent recommendations and have also invited comment. Ours would be to add one more reason to the list they have given as to why the party produces a paper at all.

That reason is that the newspaper should inform, arm and organise the party membership itself. This function is hugely important for us as it was for Lenin. The paper, he said, shouldn't be "limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education and to the enlistment of political allies ..... it is also a collective organiser." And for all the rest of "What is to be Done" he talks exclusively of the paper's role in organising the party and its members.

Mike and John have observed the paper to be at its weakest at times of change, due to lack of clear perspectives, and that was certainly true of the late 1970's. We would argue that the paper is also very weak when it forgets its role as organiser and therefore the politics of the members who are going to sell it.

This clearly happened in 2004 when the paper went much further than just to "relate" to the movement. It suddenly, deliberately but mistakenly, dropped the role of informing, arming and organising the membership and periphery.

Instead of striving to be the paper of the most radical, insightful, clear-thinking section of the movement, it became simply "the paper of the movement". As a result, it published uncritically a great deal of very poor stuff, some of which actually ran counter to our politics. That the editor was aware of the fact was acknowledged when the only action taken was to admonish members for not countering it in the letters page!

The newspaper became unreliable, unauthoritative and lightweight and comrades were actually ashamed of the paper we had to sell every week on the High Street and elsewhere. It had little of the crucial insight or foresight necessary in a revolutionary paper. Readers discovered that Galloway for example was somewhat less than perfect, only after his big fight with us.

There are many other such examples and these editions of the paper stand testament for all to see, an object lesson in how not to do it.

The cardinal sin for revolutionaries



entering into united fronts is for them to become opportunistic, to forget their politics, adapt to the movement and to a degree, dissolve themselves into it. But that is exactly what the paper did and worse than this, consciously. In such a movement there is a whole melee of competing ideas, confused and contradictory. The role of the paper in such circumstances is to fight for clarity, introduce a hard analysis, give unambiguous direction and thereby draw people towards the revolutionary organisation. But instead, in 2004 it did the reverse and introduced the whole melee of confusion into itself.

The reason we stress all this is that five years later the paper is only still recovering. Certainly, it has improved, perhaps under pressure of circumstance that it has to be the organiser of a revolutionary party and a pole of attraction in a larger movement. The influence and expertise of a truly excellent team of journalists surely must also have been instrumental. The formulation “the paper of the movement” was quietly dropped but there still remains an editorial tendency to downplay the role of informing the membership and periphery in favour of blind optimism.

Our early coverage of the Postal Strike is a good example of this. The paper has to be much more than just a cheerleader for the strike. We have to analyse it, look at its strengths and weaknesses, and at the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy, and spell out a strategy to win. We know that every one of the recent strikes has occurred because of massive attacks by employers. Every one of them is defensive and all the bigger strikes are controlled by the union bureaucracies.

The postal strike suffers from all these problems and also from the loss of the Royal Mail monopoly position. The ruling class, Labour government and employers are united in their determination to beat them. We know they are hell-bent on smashing the union to discourage all other workers from defending themselves in the job slaughter which has just begun. There is a lot riding on this strike and we all have to fight flat out to try to win.

That should have been the tone of the coverage of the strike by the paper right from the start, informative, serious and “looking reality in the face, however unpalatable”. The old triumphalist tone we too often adopt does neither them, nor us, any good. (As if right on cue this week’s issue carries the headline “Sheffield’s Glorious Autumn ....”).

Anyone reading the paper on this and the other strikes could be forgiven at times for thinking that the whole working class in Britain was on the move. This only feeds the mistaken belief of many members, mostly influential members, that there is only one legitimate field of activity for revolutionaries at the moment, and that is trade union work (see for example contributions to the Democracy Commis-

sion documents). Even the writers of “The Paper We Need Now” want the paper to put even more emphasis on focussing on workers at work.

To sum up, change to the paper is needed and the suggestions that have already been made are good. What should be included is perhaps not so much a further emphasis on workers at work (which at the moment is a pretty miserable place to be and the balance in the paper now is about right), but a greater consideration of the people who are going to sell the paper. The members themselves have to feel it helps them in their party work, that it informs them, arms them and organises them. They have to feel proud of it, involved in it and want to go out and sell it.

**Anne & Martin (West London)**

## Disputes Committee

*We do not normally publish contributions about ongoing cases the Disputes Committee is dealing with. There are two simple reasons for this.*

*Firstly we do not want to prejudice the case. Secondly neither the CC nor the Disputes Committee are able to comment on the cases or refute the charges.*

*A faction has been declared and therefore we have decided to publish the complaints. The CC refutes the allegations and will respond to the complaints in IB3 after the cases have been dealt with.*

## IS THIS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE?

The SWP has always had a tradition of dealing with political differences through debate rather than through disciplinary measures. That is why we view recent developments with alarm.

Three comrades have now been suspended, and a fourth threatened with discipline unless he closed down a website. None of them has been involved in activity which should warrant these measures. Worse, other comrades who have acted in a similar manner, or who have openly organised against a member of the Central Committee, have had no such action taken against them. Indeed one of them is being proposed for the new CC to be elected at conference.

These double standards appear to be politically motivated. All three suspensions took place just as the pre-conference discussion period opened. A faction has now been declared, in line with the constitution, and comrades will have the opportunity to judge the arguments. These measures have the effect of preventing those comrades from taking part in that faction. This is a serious curtailment of these comrades’ rights and is an unacceptable way of dealing with political differences.

What are the charges against the comrades? In the case of Alex Snowden in Newcastle, he was already being referred to the Disputes Committee (in a Kafkaesque twist after he expressed concerns to the CC about the behaviour of a leading member in Newcastle), allegedly for being unaccountable and for circulating a document outside of pre-conference period.

In fact lack of accountability should in the first instance be seen as a political, not

a disciplinary, problem, and should be dealt with politically. The document referred to was also circulated by the then district organiser, and related to branch perspectives, not to any wider critique of the party. If this was a politically motivated referral, as we feel that it was, worse was to follow, when Alex was suspended from party membership a month before his disputes committee hearing. This was on the grounds that Martin Smith had access to e mails which proved factional behaviour.

The content of these emails has not been divulged, apart from one which refers only to statistics for the website Counterfire and the Stop the War website. It is impossible to judge therefore the truth or otherwise of Martin's allegations. Even more seriously, it is unclear how these e mails were obtained. Everyone they were sent to denies categorically that they forwarded them to Martin. How then did he obtain them? This raises very important questions which Martin must answer.

They also pertain to the suspensions of the other two comrades, James Meadway and Claire Solomon. The charges against them are that they helped organise an event called Mutiny which was a political and cultural evening of discussion around money and the economic crisis. It was a successful event, which pushed LMHR, the Tower Hamlets strike, the Brighton demo, and other party supported events, but the CC criticised it as building a 'parallel organisation'.

Two CC members met the comrades before the event and raised their concerns, but did not argue that they should withdraw from it. After the event, even though the comrades said they would not take part in future such events, they were suspended. Again evidence of unspecified e mails was adduced, which again were supposedly forwarded to Martin Smith. The charge of Mutiny being a 'parallel organisation' is too ludicrous to take seriously. The real motivation is to remove two comrades with whom the CC does not agree.

Then there is the case of Ady Cousins, told to close down the Counterfire website or face disciplinary action, on the grounds that it was 'factional' and again using evidence of largely unspecified e mails. Counterfire has never carried material criticising the party or any section of it; indeed it carried links to SW, posted articles and debates by many party members including those on the CC.

If no party members were allowed to have websites, or organise events with non party members, then this might just about be acceptable. But this is very far from the case. A number of comrades have blogs or websites, notably Lenin's Tomb, which doesn't always carry the party line.

Comrades are involved in a range of issues which lead them to help organise events outside the party, sometimes successfully. One comrade launched the Historical Materialism journal expressly against the wishes of the CC, and now organises a conference associated with it.

It seems that there are different criteria for different comrades, depending on how they are viewed by the CC. This cannot be acceptable. The most glaring example is in the attacks on Chris Bambery, a CC member of long standing, around SW. A letter criticising the paper and calling for his removal as editor appears to have been orchestrated by two full timers, Joseph Choonara and Rob Owen.

Signatories included Pat Stack, chair of the disputes committee. Many comrades were critical of this letter and it failed in its purpose. However, the journalists have since continued this campaign, creating a factionalised atmosphere on the paper which came to a head just before the NC.

The CC claims they do not agree with the journalists or with the letter circulated by Joseph Choonara. But absolutely nothing has been done to stop them behaving in this way. So unelected full timers can seemingly campaign against an elected CC member with impunity. Joseph Choonara seems to have been rewarded for his behaviour by being proposed for the CC.

Pat Stack defended his signing the letter at a party meeting by saying that he no longer wanted to sit quietly when things were happening that he didn't agree with. Fair enough. But if that's good enough for him then it should be good enough for other comrades.

These arbitrary and unfair measures are the opposite of the open and honest political atmosphere there should be in the party. They should be rescinded now and comrades should all be able to debate the way forward as politically as possible.

**Lindsey (North East London), Mark (Home Counties) and Tom (South London)**

## **'MUTINY' AND THE PARTY: RELATING TO THE ANTI-CAPITALIST MOVEMENT TODAY**

A group of comrades have been involved in organising 'mutiny', an event intended to appeal to an audience drawn from the anti-capitalist movement. The intention was to create an evening of entertainment and culture which had a committedly political edge.

We wanted to use the skills of SWP members and those close to us in organising the event. We arranged an exhibition of paintings and photographs by radical artists, projected films across the back wall, and - most inno-

vatively - broke up the conventional meeting format by sitting the platform around a table in the centre of the room, where members of the audience were encouraged to sit and contribute. The evening was filmed, and can be watched on Youtube.

The initial intention was to hold a single event at the Resistance Gallery in Bethnal Green. However, because the venue needed booking in advance and the incredibly positive initial reaction from potential attendees we decided to run the event over three nights. The intention of the event was to create an environment where there would be genuine political discussion where revolutionary politics could be presented consistently and convincingly.

The first event, 'Money on Trial', was an unqualified success. More than a hundred people passed through the door to hear an impressive range of speakers, including SWP members and NGO executives, academic Marxists and radical hip-hop acts. The unusual format worked well in encouraging contributions from the floor, breaking down what can otherwise be an intimidating barrier between those speaking and those spoken to.

SWP members consistently made sharp contributions that helped raise the level of discussion. The average age of attendance was in the low twenties, the great majority of attendees were unknown to the organizers and for many it was their first political meeting.

A large audience of young, radicalised workers and students discussing Marxist economics well into the night is something a revolutionary organization should celebrate and attempt to emulate. SWP members were central to organizing Mutiny and our politics helped shape and inform the event, with SWP members on the platform and contributing from the floor. The biggest single cheer of the night met an announcement of the victory of the Tower Hamlets College strikers, won earlier that day.

The forthcoming 'Rage Against New Labour' demonstration was repeatedly plugged. Literature and leaflets for the various united front campaigns the Party is involved with were made available to all. Comrades had copies of Socialist Worker. Attendees were encouraged to come to organising meetings and at the first following the event five non-SWP members volunteered.

It is to be regretted that two CC members asked to speak at Mutiny, Chris Harman and Weyman Bennett, declined. It is also unfortunate that the local SWP branch took the decision to send only the local district organizer, and not branch members, along to the meeting.

The first event partially clashed with the Tower Hamlets branch meeting as the venue was not available on other nights. However, clashes are sometimes unavoidable when the party is dynamic and involved in united front work and local campaigns. In this case, given the timings, it would have been en-

tirely possible for local comrades to attend both the branch meeting and Mutiny.

Closer SWP branch involvement would be precisely in line with the political approach the Party has implemented since what Alex Callinicos called the 'political earthquake' of the Seattle anti-WTO demonstrations of 1999. This involves facing outward to the movements, providing where possible strategic leadership and direction and everywhere arguing the case for revolutionary socialist politics. We have sought, as Callinicos recommended, to "build the party in the age of mass movements".

Those movements have not gone away, as is clear from the G20 mobilisations, the 6 Billion Ways NGO conference, and (on a smaller scale) the success of Mutiny itself. There was disappointment expressed at the highest levels of the Party that we did not have a greater presence at the Bank of England and Climate Camp during the G20 protests in April this year. Anti-capitalist themes have clearly influenced the upturn in working class militancy this year.

This is true of the Vestas occupation or in the criticisms made by Tower Hamlets' strikers of their banker-led governing body. It is obvious that the Party needs to continue to relate to those influenced by the anti-capitalist movement.

It is a matter concern and genuine disappointment that Mutiny has been met with unrelenting hostility from sections of the SWP leadership. This has culminated in the suspension of two people involved in organising the event from the Party. We have become aware of a number of outright falsehoods about the event that have entered into circulation. We want simply to put the record straight.

Mutiny was no in sense an 'organisation'. It was planned as a series of events, in a venue in East London. It was put together by some SWP members and some non-SWP members who formed an ad hoc committee solely for the purpose of organizing those events. As is now utterly conventional when publicizing an event, a website was set up.

To cover Mutiny's costs, principally of publicity, we asked for donations and charged a small ticket price. That was the extent of the 'organisation' needed for Mutiny: that needed for any political event of any sort and no more. There is no membership structure. There are no 'Mutiny branches', there are no subscriptions, there are no full-time workers. There is, in short, no organization. We did suggest that other people around the country organize something similar themselves. That's because we've got a good idea and naturally want to share it with other political activists, both Party and fellow traveller.

Mutiny was not 'factional'. At no time did any participant, whether in the SWP or not in the SWP, criticize the Party or its leadership. Disputes inside the SWP were a matter of complete indifference to those attending. Young anti-capitalists, students, artists and union activists do not necessarily wish to spend their Thursday evenings pick-

ing through the whys and wherefores of the perspective of the Party. It is absurd to claim Mutiny was related to a factional dispute inside the SWP.

And it is churlish and ill informed to describe Mutiny as 'close to autonomism'. The politics informing the organization of Mutiny are those at the very heart of our tradition, dating back to the debates Trotsky and Lenin led in the early years of the Third International against both 'infantile' ultraleftists and opportunist right-wingers. The politics of the united front and the creative way those in the International Socialist tradition has attempted to apply them subsequently have been successful in the form of the Anti-Nazi League of the 1970s, Defend Council Housing in the 1990s and Stop the War today.

Our little event was a modest attempt to create something in that same spirit, working alongside people close to us but not yet revolutionaries. We simply wanted to present the case for revolutionary politics more effectively than if we stood alone and adopted the same phrases in the same speeches delivered with the same mannerisms and refrain. We think we successfully brought together a milieu that the SWP's politics could relate to and recruit from, should it choose to. Other comrades have organized events on similar lines to Mutiny. This has not always previously involved disciplinary action by three Central Committee members. I'm A Photographer Not a Terrorist was organized at a bar in east London, complete with its own website, request for donations, and - on the night - political speeches alongside art and music.

Some comrades produce 'Historical Materialism', an academic journal - in virtually direct competition to the ISJ. This now hosts well-attended annual conferences and CC members now regularly speak at HM events, so we may assume some degree of approval. The absolute lack of consistency in the treatment applied to Mutiny is striking and, once again, bitterly disappointing.

Two organizers of Mutiny - the two now suspended from the Party - met with Hannah Dee and Chris Harman before the event. At no point was cancellation of the event requested by these two CC members. The CC has ordered that future Mutiny events are cancelled and SWP members evidently face suspension if they continue to be involved. This has come at a cost to their political relationships. We have won an argument with those outside the Party to cancel the Mutiny event planned for the 24 November. Despite our best efforts and our honest and clear defense of democratic centralism, this resulted in five people eager to know more about the Party stating they will never now join.

The situation generally is deeply unsatisfactory. Two active and inspiring comrades have been suspended for organizing a successful, innovative event that provided a young activist audience for our politics. There is reason to believe this was a factional operation. However, bureaucratic and undemocratic methods have been used against

the two comrades.

If there are political concerns raised about Mutiny, or a desire within the CC to change the Party line on the united front, these should be raised in the proper manner during the pre-conference period. This would allow for meaningful debate in which the theoretical level of everyone involved can only be raised. Instead, two comrades are barred from any discussion inside the Party and discussion generally is hobbled. We insist the suspensions are lifted, that the two comrades are allowed to participate fully in the pre-conference period and that a fair, full and frank debate is held.

Such a debate is clearly necessary. We note that the CC continues to express its commitment to the united front method, in both Stop the War and Unite Against Fascism, and has itself noted the resurgence of anti-capitalism after the G20 demonstrations. If the CC now wishes to turn the Party away from the line and the analysis developed post-Seattle, about the need to relate to wider movements and social forces, it should be the subject of discussion and decision making across the SWP.

Democratic centralism only functions when the maximum possible debate is held, after which decisions taken can have both the authority of the Party leadership and the legitimacy of the members' support. We believe that branches across the country should be invited to hold events like Mutiny, with Party members central to building them. This will allow our members to engage with, influence and lead a wider anti-capitalist milieu.

**Brendan & Narzanin (South London)**

## A LETTER TO THE PARTY

I would like to place before the party a letter I sent to our National Secretary on October 28th in response to his proposal for facilities for discussing our perspectives for the SWP. I would also like comrades to be aware that the CC Code of Conduct for Faction discussion was published in Party notes on the day this response was submitted ie without any discussion with the Faction. The SWP constitution states:

'A faction will be given reasonable facilities to argue its point of view and distribute its documents. These must be circulated through the National Office, to ensure that all members have the chance to consider them.

It is very frustrating that although framed as 'a proposal' the CC has determined what is reasonable with out entering into any discussion with the comrades who would like to share their political views

through open, properly constituted Factional organisation.

My motivation is not to gain approval or other wise of the points below but simply to show that the officers of the Faction have gone to great lengths to abide by the rules of the constitution and the spirit of the democracy commission. Needless to say all our suggestions are currently rejected except for our last point to which we have (at the time of writing, Nov 5th) we have had no reply.

Martin,

Thank you for your clarification re pre conference rules of conduct. In response to your points:

1 & 2.

We have produced a draft document which is supported by the first 30 names we have already submitted to the CC. Following the rule and the spirit of pre conference discussion, we have agreed that the proper approach in submitting our thoughts is to take note of the CC perspective set out in IB1 together with the discussion on Sunday (first Faction meeting) and submit a final document for publication in IB2.

Having announced the formation of the Faction in Party Notes - comrades may well be interested in the political arguments. To ensure 'all members will have a chance to consider them' we would recommend the National Office circulate the draft document with Party Notes prior to publishing the final document in IB2. If you would like an electronic copy of the draft document for this purpose we will be happy to forward it to you.

3. To facilitate Left Platform meetings in Districts we would recommend that District organisers be authorised to communicate meetings in their District through District Notes in addition to Party Notes

5. It is unreasonable to ask the Faction to name aggregate speakers 5 days in advance if this is going to be a right of participation. Practical difficulties, illness etc may mean we have to reallocate resources. We can certainly give notice, when the list is provided, of which ones we will be attending.

In an effort to inform the debate we would suggest a proportion of the time allocated to the CC speaker and a right to reply. For example 30 minutes CC plus 15 minutes Left Platform. This would not prohibit faction supporters from being able to contribute from the floor in the usual way.

In addition to your points we would raise three more for consideration:

This is the first open Faction the party has had for many years and is an excellent opportunity to implement the spirit of the democracy commission debate. In the past the SWP has held more than one District Aggregate in order to give time to collective discussion and we feel there is a strong case this year.

On timing of aggregates – the deadline for submissions for IB 3 is December 4 so the facility to respond to documents in this

bulletin through collective discussion in aggregates will be severely curtailed by the Christmas break. To overcome this we would suggest that if only one meeting is to be held, aggregates are time tabled after publication of IB 3, and in addition (as last year) provision for an electronic IB 4 is timetabled into the pre conference agenda.

Has the CC given any thought to representation of Left Platform views at conference, for example encouraging a proportion of Left Platform delegates from Districts and the opportunity to speak and reply in conference sessions?

In comradeship

**Penny Hicks**  
**On behalf of Left Platform Officers**

## SERIOUS ISSUES ARISING FROM THE FORCED CLOSURE OF COUNTERFIRE

Below is a letter to the chair of the Disputes Commission, Pat Stack requesting an investigation into how a private email came to be acquired by the Central Committee and used as the justification for the closure of my website Counterfire.org.

I have requested that it be included in IB2 so that comrades can consider whether the use of emails in this manner is acceptable. I am quite happy for the content of my site to be evaluated by comrades and if it is judged to be critical of the party or deficient in some other way I am happy to make changes. But I do not agree with being forced to close a site because of who I talked to about it in a personal email.

### Email to Pat Stack 6/11/09

In March 2009 I set up a website called Counterfire.org.

On October 9th 2009 I attended a meeting with two CC members - Martin Smith and Alex Callinicos in order to discuss their "concerns" about the site.

During the course of the meeting I was shown a printed copy of an email I had sent on August 17th to a number of comrades. This email was used as the basis of an accusation of factionalism.

I was instructed to close down my site within one week or face further action via the disputes commission. I was also instructed to close down all related YouTube and Twitter accounts.

In addition I was required to give a written undertaking that I would not set

up any more web sites without first consulting the CC.

I am, and have been for 26 years a loyal and disciplined party member. I therefore complied with all these requests fully and well within the time limit - despite strongly disagreeing with the accusations levelled against me.

However, I feel that the use of my private email in this manner raises some very serious issues. Martin stated that the email had been sent on to him by one of the recipients who had decided that I was involved in a factional operation.

All of the recipients of my 17 August email have denied in a written statement (attached below) that they sent the email on to Martin.

All of the recipients have signed the Left Platform faction statement (apart from 3 who are unable to do so due to suspension).

This therefore raises the question of how the email was acquired and the possibility that one or more of our email accounts was accessed illegally by a third party.

I therefore request that this matter be investigated by the Disputes Committee.

Fraternally

Adrian Cousins

### Email to Martin Smith 13/10/09

Dear Martin

We understand that at your meeting with Ady Cousins you showed him a private email containing the site statistics for the STWC and Counterfire.org. You told him that it had been forwarded to you by one of the people on the circulation list.

This letter is signed by all the people on that list. We assure you that this is not the case. No-one on that list forwarded the email to you or anyone else.

This then raises the very serious issue of how the person that sent you the email obtained it in the first place. It raises the possibility that one or more of our email accounts have been entered illegally. For this reason, we request that you tell us immediately who sent you the email.

Even if there were no possibility of an illegal action having taken place it is unacceptable that anonymous accusations become the basis for disciplinary action in the SWP.

Signed

Samuel Fairbairn, Lindsey German  
Elaine Graham-Leigh, Feyzi Ismail  
James Meadway, Brendan Montague  
Chris Nineham, John Rees  
Alex Snowdon, Clare Solomon

**Ady (South London)**

# National Committee elections

EVERY YEAR at SWP annual conference delegates elect a national executive committee of fifty members. This body meets between four and six times a year to discuss key questions the organisation faces and to assess our work.

Those elected to the NC also attend Party Councils and the Party Conference by right.

In the past nominations have been taken at the conference itself. This means the elections can be hurried and give delegates little time to decide who they would like to elect to the NC, and give the districts and branches no time to discuss the overall balance of the NC.

This year we are calling for nominations for the NC in

internal conference bulletins (IBs) 1 and 2. All nominations must be received by 12 noon on Friday 27 November.

A full list of the nominations will be published in IB 3. This will give branches and districts time to decide who they wish to elect.

Below is the nomination form. Each nomination has to be supported by five com-

rades, and the nominee has to agree to be nominated.

To be on the National Committee you have to be a registered member of the SWP and up to date with your subs (this also applies to the comrades nominating the candidate). We are asking each candidate to submit 50 words explaining why they should be on the NC.

Nominee.....

Branch .....

Nominated by

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Please give a brief outline of why you should be on the NC (no more than 50 words)

.....  
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.....  
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Please return this form to:  
Martin Smith, PO Box 42184, London SW8 2WD.  
Or email the required information to: [martins@swp.org.uk](mailto:martins@swp.org.uk)