

**THE UNITY
ISSUE**

THE EXCHANGE #3

a joint publication of debate and unity



Anticapitalist Initiative, International Socialist Network and Socialist Resistance

www.facebook.com/exchangemag Twitter: @_exchangemag



4 Left Unity can build an alternative to Labour

9 The battle in education

12 Grangemouth: twenty-twenty hindsight

16 The Big Six, Labour and socialism

18 An organisation with integrity

22 Making unity work

24 Radical organisation

28 Overcoming the obstacles

30 Coordination beyond unity

33 The Fourth International and Socialist Resistance

36 Revolutionary unity needs to be built on firm foundations

39 Is there a new crisis of work?

41 Austerity and the politics of work

44 Queens of the coal age

46 A transgressive troubadour



Editorial

A WORK IN PROGRESS

When we started *The Exchange* a few months ago it was a part of a growing trend among sections of the revolutionary left. The three organisations involved in the editorial team for the publication (the Anticapitalist Initiative, the International Socialist Network and Socialist Resistance) were talking about the prospect of a united organisation at a national level and locally we were developing closer links and ways of working together. In producing a magazine together we hoped to provide a space to discuss the big questions facing the left, to work together on a joint project and to have a voice with which we could spell out our common vision for the left: the building of a democratic culture and organisation in which people from different tendencies could work together to develop a more relevant and effective revolutionary politics.

What this might look like we don't know. By its nature such a process has to be experimental and open ended. The point isn't to develop and put forward a fully worked out revolutionary politics but to have a revolutionary politics which is in constant development. One where we are willing to learn from one another and – something the left misses out too much – try things out.

The experience of working on *The Exchange* does give us some clues as to what the future might have in store and we hope we've gone some way towards a model of a left wing publication which does something different. We've tried to move away from what we think are bad habits and models practiced in the production of a lot of left wing papers and magazines: the maze of acronyms and jargon; the shrill sloganising tabloid; the bland recruitment tool; the gossip rag; the giver of lines; and the converter of activists into peddlers. Models that are all too common but don't really work.

What we hope we've come up with is a format which gives space to different voices and traditions and

lets us look critically both at the world we're trying to change and our practices in trying to change it. We've tried to make something that gives people something to think about whether or not they're already on the left and hopefully we've made something that shows to people that the left is a place where interesting debates and activities are happening and where they can contribute. This hasn't been true of a lot of the left for a long time but things are beginning to change.

It's the prospects and process of this change that issue three is aimed at. Here we look at what direction Left Unity might take, how and in what way revolutionaries might work better together, and the opportunities for resisting austerity and pose an alternative to capitalism as well as the obstacles to that. We've got contributors from across the revolutionary left who have different approaches but who are interested in building more links and a better kind of left.

This will mean focusing on grassroots organising, committing to democracy and transparency and putting the struggles of the oppressed at the centre of our project. We are still a long way from the kinds of cultural and organisational shifts we need to create a healthy and viable revolutionary left but we are moving in the right direction. This magazine is a work in progress in the wider work in progress that is the recomposition and regroupment of the left. The outcome is undecided but we hope we can play a small part in helping it to be positive.

Working group

Josh Davies, Richard Seymour, Rachel Twaites, Simon Hardy, Luke Cooper, Terry Conway, Rich Trigg, Steve Edwards, Duncan Chapel, Dave Kellaway, Cat Rylance, Tom Walker and Chris Strafford



Andrew Murray, a leading advisor to Len McCluskey (Unite general secretary) and a *Morning Star* supporter, has published a twenty page article in this year's *Socialist Register* criticising the choice we have made in developing the Left Unity (LU) project, as a political alternative to the Labour Party (LP).

Murray spoke at the recent Historical Materialism conference on the same theme, and with the same vehemence against groups like Socialist Resistance who are involved. In May the Left Unity website published a similar article written by Michael Ford which was pseudonym used by Murray – the reason being, he said, “to avoid the union, Unite, which I serve as Chief of Staff, being dragged into any public controversy on the issue at the time”.

If we are to build a broad left party then we must debate with currents who still believe we may be able to reclaim (or split) Labour for the left through working with his union, Unite, the GMB and others alongside campaigns like the People's Assembly. For him projecting political and organisational alternatives today is a waste of effort and doomed to failure. Although I think he exaggerates

their strength – particularly in organised terms – many activists in the unions and Labour party still support his position. We need to work alongside them in common action while patiently discussing with them how to build a political alternative to Miliband.

There is no blueprint today for how socialist political parties can emerge

What we can agree on

Let's start by listing where there is some agreement between Murray and LU supporters:

Murray is honest enough to recognise that historically his line has not been very successful. Older comrades may remember the way in which the Communist Party line of the British Road to Socialism...has led in 2013 to this party been smaller than the revolutionary left forces. Nevertheless we can

agree with Murray that the record of the radical left outside Labour has not been glorious either. This is precisely why we are trying to do something with LU which is different to Respect, the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Alliance or the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. But Murray just lumps us all into the same bag. Indeed his polemic also targets groups like the



LEFT UNITY CAN BUILD AN AN ALTERNATIVE TO LABOUR

Dave Kellaway, Socialist Resistance

Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party despite the fact that neither of them support LU. Some of Murray's critique of these groups' political approach is shared by supporters of LU.

We do not agree with his underestimation of the space that has opened up to the left of the LP but I think most of us accept his point that this space does not automatically produce a left current just by existing. Exploiting that space means astute political intervention and the existence of struggles and campaigns that in practice challenge Miliband's social liberalism. I think Left Unity supporters agree with him about the importance of rebuilding trade unionism and recognising the social weight and protagonist role of the working class in any anti-capitalist transformation. Unfortunately his article repeatedly and dishonestly reduces LU to an electoral force and disregards the engagement of LU members in their trade unions and mass campaigns.

We also agree that major splits in the mass organisations will be likely if we are to build an effective anti-capitalist party in this country. LU will not be turning away from these bodies in some sort of splendid isolation. Building a political alternative now and not solely waiting on unions, campaigns or events to produce these splits will potentially improve the basis for bringing them about. Syriza's record in Greece has certainly shown this, but Andrew ridicules electoral scores of 5% – which was the vote Syriza was

getting a few years ago.

I think there is no disagreement with the importance of the People's Assembly and its contribution to developing an alternative to Miliband's social liberalism. The latest version of Murray's article gives more space to this development, but again he seems to think that you cannot build LU as a political alternative and at the same time be the best builders of a broader united front campaign. Andrew knows that LU supporters are in the collective leadership at both the national and local level of this campaign.

I also think we share much of his analysis of the defensive nature of the period, the effect of accumulated defeats and the need to rebuild basic working class organisation and resistance. Unite has worked positively in many areas and is growing but Grangemouth also shows the limits of this progress.

Now let us deal with the six key arguments that form his case against Left Unity:

1) "it [Left Unity] is based on a flawed assessment of how worthwhile socialist parties can be created"

His model is rather mechanical. The mass organisations will eventually split under the pressure of struggles or political events. If there is a left current, one that is not projecting a direct political alternative either within unions or openly against the Labour Party but is well embedded in the mass organisations and campaigns,

“The disastrous social consequences and increasing unpopularity of ‘austerity’, an economic programme that is challenged only in terms of its extent and methods of implementation by the Labour Party, render the creation of a new working class party both a credible possibility and an urgent necessity. Left Unity is an opportunity to reassert socialist politics in Britain. A party that clearly articulates an alternative vision of society, and refuses to limit its demands to reform within a capitalist framework, whilst maintaining a democratic structure that accommodates political difference and encourages debate, could have a wide appeal amongst activists all over the country, both those who are and are not currently organised into parties. It will be necessary for such a party to combine electoral participation with social protest and militant economic struggle. I believe that Left Unity, if it stays true to these principles, has a potential to grow that no other organisation of the socialist left in Britain possesses.”

Liam Cooper

Murray seems to reduce class unity to broad united campaigns, building the unions and voting for Ed Miliband

then you can create a mass socialist party when conditions are right.

There is no blueprint today for how socialist political parties can emerge. Stalinist ‘socialism’ repels working people, nor are we in the 1890s where the trade unions and basic organisations of the class were rising. Any new socialist party will emerge from people coming out of social democratic, Stalinist, Eurocommunist and Trotskyist traditions or with entirely new experiences which may be feminist or ecological more than socialist. Indeed the limited experiences of the LU local groups confirm that sort of mix.

Murray appears to dream of another starting point that will result from successful united front struggles over a long period which will finally pull the new party rabbit out of the hat at the last minute. He also tends to ignore the new ways people have become radicalised – the experience of Occupy, UK Uncut, feminism, the role of social media.

At one point he dismisses us as a party that started with an internet-based appeal. Presumably the early socialists, or dare I say Leninists, did not use the most modern forms of communication of their time (newspapers) to launch parties or appeals, preferring just to have factory meetings. Che and Fidel used the

radio very effectively from the Sierra Maestra. What is so terrible about a film and the internet helping the formation of 80-odd local groups? Given the weakening of trade unions and the numbers of precarious, often young, workers who are not unionised,

any means of reaching them should be seized, not sneered at.

2) “it prioritises a chimerical ‘left unity’ over class unity”

Murray seems to reduce class unity to broad united campaigns, building the unions and voting for Ed Miliband. LU, or forces like it, do not think a movement headed by ‘one nation’ Miliband equals class unity – unless you redefine class unity to mean a majority Labour government.

Although Murray is very strong on purely negative balance sheets of projects such as Respect or Rifondazione he is very reticent to analyse the historic ‘success’ of pushing Labour to the left, which has nearly a century of failure behind it. You have to analyse the political content and context to see what class unity or left unity actually represents, otherwise it is just meaningless jargon.

"I joined Left Unity because I felt that there was no hope that any of the mainstream political parties (and most particularly those currently in power) would ever consider alternatives to capitalism and to the current system, which is causing more and more harm to more and more people every day – with unlivable wages for some and unthinkable riches for others, climate change worsening, disasters unheeded, safety nets ripped away, and only ever profit as an aim. I hope another way can be found!"

Ellie Litten

"For all their good words on tackling energy companies, Labour are pledging only to fiddle at the edges of the problem. What Left Unity must do above all else is fight the root cause of poverty and demand a living wage. We are subsidising low salaries, while the benefits bill continues to rise. This seems of benefit to no-one. But the very 'top' 1% prosper, having rigged the system to make this period of austerity their most profitable on record. To change this, we must change the language of the debate. We must re-cast the 1% as the true villains."

Adam West

3) "[it] misreads European experience and its applicability to Britain"

The progress of the broad left parties outside the traditional reformist parties is deliberately minimised in Murray's article. He concedes that there may have been some limited success in the southern European countries where the Communist tradition is stronger, but ignores experiences like the Red-Green Alliance in Denmark or the Socialist Party in Holland. There are even developments in Belgium at the moment around the militant trade union area of Charleroi. Die Linke in Germany has managed to consolidate its support in the recent national elections and Luxembourg has a left party that picked up another MP in the recent elections. Izquierda Unida in the Spanish state is at 10% or more in recent polls and the Bloco in Portugal, which did not follow the Murray schema, is very much alive and well. So these new parties are not temporary or marginal and most have not resulted from major splits in the mass organisations fomented by long term embedded work. In some



cases the role of open political currents outside the traditional organisations has been important. In fact where you did have a significant mass split from a traditional mass working class party, as in Italy, the experience ended badly, mainly because ex-CP members did not re-evaluate historical participation in local or national governments with reformist forces.

No doubt if Murray had been writing a few years ago he would have condemned the rather thin ranks of Syriza for confusing left unity with class unity.

4) "it fails to seriously address the Labour Party and working-class support for it"

The article argues that the space to the left of Labour is occupied by Labour because these people... still vote Labour. Here I think there is an underestimation of both the ideological and organisational weakening of Labour's hold over working people. The SNP in Scotland operates in many ways within an 'old Labour' framework and has sucked up LP votes. Plaid and

the Greens do the same. Even the partial success of Respect or some TUSC candidates shows that the space to the left of Labour does exist. If it was not for the undemocratic voting system the fragility of Labour's hold would be much more quickly exposed. The Labour vote is different from the past – before, there were many more organic connections to Labour, whether through Labour clubs, meetings or other institutions. People vote Labour to keep the Tories out. It is lesser evil politics. Opinion polls, like a recent YouGov one, show people are to the left of Labour on many issues.

Miliband's tacking to the left over energy prices and the living wage will regain some support for Labour but there is no sign that these fundamental trends are changing. In the latest version Murray is more cautious about whether Miliband will win or "will be willing or able to lead a sustained shift away from austerity politics". Later he suggests the government could generate "an arena of struggle over its direction". He even envisages the possible conditions for a new party after that experience. Although he still writes off LU as being able to contribute to that future project, these points tend to undermine his original thesis. He denounces LU supporters for not noticing any moves by Miliband, despite recent articles by Alan Thornett and others highlighting such shifts!

If LU was sectarian to LP activists then this point may have some weight. We work alongside Owen Jones and others to defend workers' interests. The big question, though, is: how do you break Labourism's hold over the working class? Do you do it purely through united front campaigns around the cuts, the bedroom tax or against imperialist war, or do you challenge it politically and electorally too? Do you postpone it or do you start to prepare the terrain now?

In the new version of the article Murray takes a dig at Ken Loach's speech at the national People's Assembly, because Loach questioned Labour's commitment to reverse the cuts or austerity policies. My observations at the Assembly suggested that quite a few interventions from LP or trade union activists criticised the Labour leadership in a similar vein. Agreed, it would be a mistake to narrow down the People's Assembly by focusing equally on the Tories' actual austerity and the LP's potential future austerity – but it is legitimate to allow campaigners to voice concerns where the LP today is not challenging austerity policies.

5) "[it] ignores the failures of previous new left parties and, indeed, the real state of the contemporary left"

Many people involved in LU have drawn some of the lessons of previous initiatives. We think that it is no use having an electoral intervention based on a cartel of political organisations, even if supported by a trade union. We believe you need a membership organisation and consistent local bases from which you can construct some electoral success. The actual problems of the left in any case apply as much to the forces supporting his political project. Is the CP growing? Are *Morning Star* sales soaring?

Murray praises Socialist Action (SA), who he says share his political approach. Since his first version however a front page article on the Socialist Action website has come out in support of the LU project. So these fine SA united front builders do think they can also put forward an open political alternative now.

Is there evidence of a growing left wing in the Labour Party? Has the Owen Jones phenomenon, which is positive, reached anything near the impact of the Bennite movement in the late 70s or 80s? Is there any evidence that the LP/TU Murray left is actually organising people or is it a pressure group? Surely you need an organised left force if it is going to be able to win significant forces in any future split.

6) "indeed, it risks being an impediment to socialists actually making the most of present opportunities for working class reconstruction and advance."

This really takes the biscuit. LU supporters, by raising a discussion among thousands around the need for a socialist alternative and organising local groups, are somehow an obstacle for the movement. It is almost like the old CP mantra that anyone to their left are splitting the movement. It reflects Stalinist ideology that the class can only be united around one party.

He fails to give concrete examples of how we hold the movement back. Perhaps he is referring to Ken Loach's speech which is apparently holding all the LU activists back from getting involved in the People's Assembly or trade union activity.

Andrew Murray's article does show one thing. Left Unity is making an impact. People would not spend their time penning such essays if the LU project did not present a challenge to their political perspectives.

People are to the left of Labour on many issues. The big question, though, is: how do you break Labourism's hold over the working class?

THE BATTLE IN EDUCATION

Alison Lord, International Socialist Network

As I write we face a variety of possible permutations of strike action in education over the next few months. We know that higher education and further education lecturers in UCU will be on strike on 3 December, the former alongside their colleagues in Unite and Unison. The certainty, however, ends there.


The teachers' unions, the NUT and NASUWT, have decided, rather cravenly it would seem, to ditch further action in the wake of their highly successful two regional days in October, and instead to sit with Michael Gove at some point soon and see if they can find a way to settle things. However, having since been being roundly humiliated by Gove's ungenerous responses to their olive branches thus far, it seems they may have to take further action before or on 13 February 2014. We will see what happens in January, but that is their commitment as I write.

Meanwhile, in further education (FE), my sector (and aptly known as the 'Cinderella sector' for our worsening conditions and dwindling funding over the years), our ballot over pay has turned out 71% in favour of strike action. The pattern for actual ballots has been pretty consistent in education for the past few years: when the leadership of our unions agree to ballot: we tend to say, 'Yes, fine, let's do it.' The good news that the FE sector will indeed be joining HE on strike on 3 December has allayed fears the general secretary would delay action for FE until the new year until our NUT/NASUWT comrades take action (or not...)

A grim reality

The reasons for these strikes are quite varied: pay is a major factor with an at least 15% cut in FE lecturers' pay packets since 2009 and 13% cut in HE since 2008. Teachers in schools are threatened with the inevitable pay cuts and performance-related pay that will be imposed if Gove gets his way over ending national pay bargaining. As well as pay being an issue for teachers, they are also in dispute over pensions changes (yes, still!) and excessive workload and bureaucracy.

But behind these disputes lies the grim reality in education at all levels: an erosion of standards, privatisation, and an attack on public sector provision.



Foregrounding politics within struggles can be a key factor in winning hearts and minds to action

Indeed, Gove seem to be winning his battle to make more and more schools academies. We face worsening terms and conditions and all the bullying that accompanies such attacks.

Ask any teacher how they view a management observation and they will look at you with disgust, anger and terror: we are observed at least once a year as part of our 'career development' and the grade we get can literally ruin our lives. A grade 1 (Outstanding) is a guarantee that we will survive at least another year without anyone on our backs. Pretty much same with a 2 (Good). But a 3 (Needs to Improve) can trigger performance monitoring, depending where you are, meaning you really do have to step it up or... then, and most seriously, there is grade 4 (Unsatisfactory). A grade 4 can and sometimes does lead to dismissal within a few months unless you can pull yourself out of this well of despair and self-loathing to jump through the life-saving but always nebulous hoops they impose. That's if the teacher can bear to go through that process. Many choose to leave, with or without a 'package', in order to salvage their careers while they can. You will not be surprised to learn that union reps and officers are frequently dispensed of in this way.

And when they are disposed of, for being, well, just not good enough, or too sick, there is the zero-hour contract for the newbies. The UCU's recent Freedom of Information request found "more than half of the 145 UK universities that responded, and two-thirds of the further education colleges, said they used these contracts, which do not guarantee work and can deny holiday and sick pay." (Guardian 16/09/13). In some institutions, their use is getting out of hand: at London Metropolitan University, for example, around 40% of staff are employed in this most precarious way, with some mood to resist emerging. People can earn as little as £6,000 per annum with 10 teaching hours. Hardly the 'profession' people expected when they embarked on a PhD.

No charm offensive

And then there's Ofsted. That most feared and loathed of institutions run by Michael Wilshaw, a man surely modeled on Charles Dickens' most vile pedagogic construction, Mr Gradgrind (from *Hard Times*), but without the spell in charm school. In 2012, just around the time the NUT executive knocked coordinated national strikes over pensions on the head, he took up his post and started to mouth off. In January 2012 he came up with the most vile green light to all the worst senior management teams: "If anyone says to you that 'staff morale is at an all-time low' you know you are doing something right." (Guardian 23/1/12). Any liberal nonsense about social context or poverty was, from the start, brushed aside: "There's a 'no excuses culture' here," he said. "We tell the youngsters and we tell the parents we don't care really what background you're from; it's where you're going that's the most important issue."

Just recently he stepped up this campaign against staff and students. While speaking at an

education forum early in November 2013, Wilshaw made it clear what he thought about teachers who presume to have their say as professionals:

"Even today, too many teachers still think that school leaders do not have the right to tell them how to teach or what to do," he said. "The staff room, in their minds, is just as capable of deciding the direction a school should take as the senior leadership team."

Sir Michael also warned heads not to try and "curry favour" with their staff, adding: "What's worse (is) far too many school leaders seem to believe that they don't have a right to manage, either."

"They worry constantly about staff reaction... They seem to think they cannot act without their employees' approval." (Independent, 7/11/13)

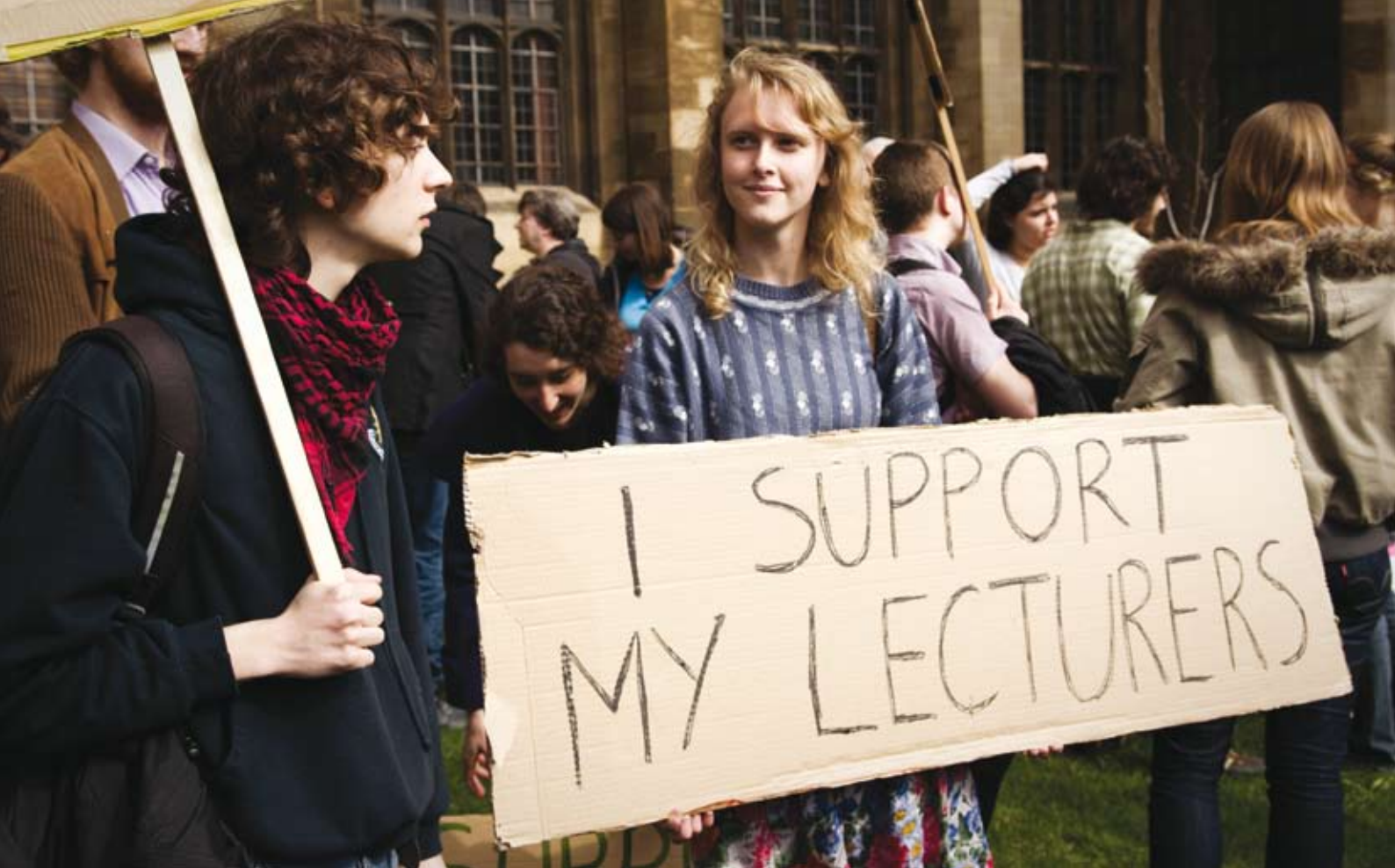
Of course, and this is where the litany of misery halts for a while, the fact that Wilshaw felt the need to make that point speaks volumes about quite how fed up he was about the strikes in October, and the level of resistance that exists within some schools. Successive, bureaucracy-led strikes may not get us very far when they are so quickly curtailed by our union leaders and their executive committees: but they do organise teachers in schools before and during the strikes themselves. Teachers hold meetings, debate, and gain strength from the sense of solidarity on the day. Many young teachers have been on strike for the first time and now understand what it entails.

In further education there have been many local disputes over a plethora of concerns: privatisation, compulsory redundancies, performance management impositions, to name a few. Many have been at least partially successful. The relative strength of the rank and file in FE is down to the incorporation process that essentially imposed a quasi 'business' model on the sector in 1992 and thus localised many of our terms and conditions. While this has been a grim and destructive process overall, in terms of education provision and our pay and conditions, it has meant that to resist often entails a local fight, often supported by the UCU declaring a local struggle to be of 'national significance'. This is why the UCU backed Tower Hamlets College in the fight against compulsory redundancies four years ago. Also, of course, local action means less to lose for them, both financially and in terms of the wrath of the state that sustained national action would bring.

The rank and file and a political approach

So what to do when, as seems most likely, the bureaucracy-led strikes start to judder to a halt, again squandering the very real anger and demoralisation out there? When the bureaucracy will not support us, we are told that, as revolutionaries, we act alone as a rank and file; but rank and file organisation is thin on the ground, as we know. Is there any hope that education workers will act alone at some point?

There are many ideas circulating, attempting to address how we proceed that may, or may not, be of use in the process of building a combative rank and file.



So what I say next is very much *not* a prescription, just ideas that form part of a much wider discussion and debate that is on-going in unions, workplaces and the internet. Neither will I chant, "Onwards and upwards, comrades, to a 'hot spring'!"

There are a few green shoots appearing in terms of encouraging workers education about how we build effective organisation in workplaces. London Region UCU, for example, is running a day school; a positive step. The revolutionary left is trying to address this question too, by running similar 'schools' where members can unite and share ideas and practice. Of course, to be effective these should be led by the rank and file themselves, rather than 'experts' brought in to 'teach' trade unionists what to do.

The trade unions are under increasing pressure to support local rank and file struggles that are bubbling up under sheer force of the attacks from the Tories. A recent example of where this has paid off is the successful campaign at a sixth form college in Walthamstow, north east London, (culminating in a day's strike) to reinstate a sacked health and safety rep. I suspect we'll see more scattered, but local (rank and file led) action in education as these attacks continue. Workers' education can help to generalise the lessons learned from struggles such as these.

Foregrounding politics within struggles can be a key factor in winning hearts and minds to action, both in terms of staff, students and the community. The transformation of the economic struggle at Tower Hamlets College over redundancies into a campaign over the axing of much of the ESOL (English

for speakers of other languages) provision was key to attracting community and trade union support on a local and national scale. The Lambeth College campaign is similarly couching the defence of its Brixton campus on the grounds of provision and access to the community.

The economic clout of education workers may be minimal compared to industries such as power and manufacturing, we can all agree on that. However, public support for our services is high, evidenced by countless surveys and the reception of Ken Loach's *Spirit of '45*. Defending the content, quality and relevance of education to the communities we serve is central to how we galvanise people to fight and getting support for future struggles. Left Unity is promising, both as a forum and network for debates around this.

At some point there will be an upturn in struggle, but of course that could be next year or in many years' time. It *could* be that economic recovery, however small, could generate serious economic demands and a confidence amongst workers to fight for them. Meanwhile, all we can do is organise where we can, attempt to generalise from what rank and file action and organisation we do have, and develop a more political approach to economic struggles within our institutions. There must be many more ideas than these out there. Let's start to share them.

The IS Network is holding a caucus for trade unionists in London on 14 December. For more details see internationalsocialistnetwork.org

GRANGEMOUTH: TWENTY-TWENTY HINDSIGHT

Richard Seymour, International Socialist Network

No one could have foreseen this defeat. The employers played their hand too well, and moved too quickly once the elements were in place. The most that we can do is get it right in hindsight.

There is little disagreement on the left about the fact that the deal negotiated by Unite with Ineos, the multinational chemicals company that owns the oil refinery in Grangemouth, was a catastrophic defeat. Everything that the employer demanded was conceded: pay freezes, an end to final salary pensions, the end of full-time union convenors on site, and no strikes for three years. The reaction of Grangemouth workers to the deal was, for that very reason, discomfiting. Smiles. Overwhelming relief. That this was also the reaction of local people interviewed is perhaps less surprising. But the workers, when interviewed, were actually effusive: "Good news." "Fantastic, absolutely fantastic!" "Absolutely ecstatic! It's fantastic news." Not a whiff of anguished betrayal.

How could this be? The first starting point for the analysis has to be that this was an employers' strike far more than it was a workers' strike. The workforce at Ineos had voted to take industrial action in response to the victimisation of Unite rep at the plant and Falkirk Labour Party chair Stephen Deans, not to fight a battle for the future of their pensions. The second starting point for the analysis is that this employers' offensive was facilitated and given its raw materials by a political offensive within the Labour Party against its organised working class base.

Labour's campaign

The background to this was a vicious McCarthyite campaign against Unite in the Labour Party by the

leadership. Ballot-rigging in the selection process for the Falkirk Labour candidate was alleged, and the leadership called in the police. Both Deans and the prospective Unite-backed candidate Karie Murphy were implicated. Miliband used the panic to make an ultra-Blairite union-baiting speech, demanding the 'reform' of the union link. His proposals didn't just moisten the Blairite crevices, but actually obtained the eventual consent of Unite leader Len McCluskey. A significant part of the reason for this may have been that the overall effect of the reforms proposed would be to strengthen the leverage of the union bureaucracy in Labour, albeit re-pivoting that relationship on a more clientelist basis.

Deans was later cleared of any wrongdoing. The police declined to investigate any further. However, this provided the context for the company's attack on Deans. The allegations against Deans had focused on his allegedly signing up large numbers of members in an illegitimate way, many of them from the Ineos workforce. Even with the allegations dropped, the company sensed weakness. They had launched an investigation against Deans in an attempt to prove that he had used company time to engage in suspicious or culpable behaviour. Having drummed up a case, they suspended Deans.

Unite's reaction was to ballot for a strike, gaining an overwhelming 81.4% mandate to take action. The vote took place within the usual ponderous procedures and time-frame of British industrial action ballots. And when the result was known, Unite did not hurry. They began with action short of a strike, including work to rule and an overtime ban, and entered into Acas negotiations with Ineos. The pace of their action suggests that the



union still thought they were fighting a witch hunt case.

The terrain shifts

However, Jim Ratcliffe, the major shareholder and founder of Ineos, had already started to leak a different narrative to the press. It was no longer about one union member. The company was 'at a crossroads'. It was losing money, in dire financial straits. Something had to give. Ratcliffe had already been making it clear some months before that his corporate strategy was to start shifting investment to the US and away from Europe. He told the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers in Spring 2013 that Europe's recovery was so weak and the best that could be done in European plants was to cut back and rationalise.

Ineos on the offensive

Such rationalisation was always going to be difficult. In Grangemouth, it meant going after the workers' final salary pensions schemes. Ratcliffe had complained that only in Britain were these anachronisms still burdening employers with their unreasonable costs. But the workers at Grangemouth had previously defeated Ratcliffe when he attempted to roll back the final salary pensions scheme. Even as he was speaking in San Antonio, his company had lost a significant battle with tank drivers.

But the company leadership displayed considerable cunning in preparing for the strike. They

The reaction of Grangemouth workers to the deal was discomfiting – smiles, relief

began stockpiling and readying for an industrial battle in the Spring, and when they initially struck they lured workers into a battle over what they thought was a victimisation case. As it increasingly became clear that Ratcliffe was after more from the union, Unite became more cautious. When the employers walked out of Acas negotiations, Unite claims that they were on the

verge of a deal. But, perhaps sensing a trap, instead of marching into an all-out confrontation the union withdrew from its planned strike action. It didn't matter. The company, noting the hesitation, responded with its own offensive.

The negotiations broke down on 15 October. On 16 October, Ineos shut down the plant and locked out the striking workers. Citing its alleged financial crisis, the company said it could not run a profitable operation unless workers accepted the cuts to their pensions, and a whole series of other attacks contained in its new 'survival plan'. Unite argues that the claims of a financial crisis are bogus, but this is only significant if it can be shown that Ratcliffe would not have closed the plant and reinvested his capital in a more profitable venture. We have every reason to think he was serious about closure. This withdrawal of capital constituted a strike on the part of the employers.

The workers interviewed about this on the news were manifestly knocked for six. They were not belligerent, or militant; they were gloomy, and

desperate. In the period before Christmas, when having money to spend is essential, they were looking at unemployment. The tentative economic recovery was going to be lost. A large, well-unionised chunk of Scottish industry – not just the refinery but all the support industries and contractors – was going to be destroyed. Scottish workers had seen this before.

Clearly sensing weakness on the part of the workforce, on 21 October the Ineos bosses sidelined the union in order to offer the workers their new contracts individually, with all the cuts included. But in addition to the cuts, they offered a one-off financial inducement of £15,000. This was like the offer of a rescue from a loan shark: one might take the money, knowing perfectly well that it would come at a much bigger cost in the long run, simply because the immediate alternatives seemed so bleak. At least a third of the workers signed the new contracts immediately, even though the union urged them not to do so.

Those socialists who visited the plant found little appetite for a fight. And there were elements of 'common sense' about the current situation that would have made it harder even if a militant minority had been disposed to leading a radical occupation-based struggle. For example, the attitude of one Grangemouth subcontractor, interviewed by the BBC about potential job losses, was: everyone else is having to make cut-backs in recent years, but many people are going to lose our jobs because Ineos workers won't take a pensions cut.

If Unite dared to look to nationalisation of the plant as a solution, John Swinney of the SNP quietly let it be known that this was off the agenda. While the Scottish government might help find a buyer, it wouldn't be the buyer. For all the SNP's success in taking over the language of reform from Labour, it is fundamentally committed to a neoliberal growth project. In the context, therefore, finding a private sector buyer would probably mean finding a buyer who would pay the lowest possible price and expect job cuts and salary cuts. The Scottish Labour leadership under Johann Lamont declined to back the Unite workers, although several frontbench MSPs did, and there was no question of calling for nationalisation.

By Wednesday 23 October, the union had agreed to all of Ineos's key demands and was pleading for Ratcliffe to put the previously rejected deal back on the table and re-open the plant. A powerful, well-organised workforce ultimately went down on their knees, grinning in relief not to be on their backs.

Betrayed by the bureaucracy?

The easiest thing in the world for socialists to do is to denounce the union bureaucracy in situations like this. One can cite the 'massive anger' which existed among workers, the 'mood' for a fight, squandered by a conservative union leadership. This makes good

This is the intellectual leap that we have to make: not every puzzle has an answer; not every immediate struggle can be won





identikit propaganda. Unfortunately, no such solution avails itself here.

There is no evidence that the workers were spoiling for a fight, much less a generation-defining titanic struggle in defiance of anti-union laws to bring about the nationalisation of the plant and inflict a historic defeat on the British bourgeoisie. And given the situation they had been put in, this is entirely unsurprising. And those of us who brandish the slogan 'socialism from below' should be attentive to this, because it is the combativity, organisation and politics of the 'rank and file' that matters most to us.

In hindsight, it's easy to say that certain things could have been done, or done better. In terms of left-wing campaigning, a 'Save Grangemouth – Nationalise Now' campaign might have been a promising intervention, that would have simultaneously given confidence to the workforce, put pressure on the Scottish government, and made it harder for the union leadership to acquiesce. But even here it's important to recognise that, quite possibly, there was nothing that the left could have done that would have changed the outcome of this particular struggle.

This is the intellectual leap that we have to make: not every puzzle has an answer; not every immediate struggle can be won. There isn't a short term solution to every problem.

The fact that things could have been done differently, and better, is no guarantee that with the balance of class forces as they presently are the workers at Grangemouth could have achieved victory. We have to break from the habit of thinking that struggle itself is sufficient, that an outburst of class or social warfare can by itself shift the overall balance of forces in our favour.

The reason why it is necessary to make such a break, ironically, is precisely to overcome the internalised defeat of the British left and the labour movement. Because the forced, neon 'optimism' at every juncture, the belief that a simple outburst of struggle can suddenly reverse the long-term shift in the balance of class forces, can only disappoint. We need to recognise that many of the factors in the defeat of the Grangemouth workers are 'structural', not merely 'conjunctural'. They are part of a material and ideological terrain prepared over decades by the ruling class – whether it's the wider legacy of defeats within organised labour, the capitulation all the dominant parties to neoliberalism, or the penetration of certain neoliberal logics into the daily calculations and interactions of workers.

This entails a serious strategic reconsideration of our plight. We need to begin a process of reconstructing class capacities, articulated with an equivalent process of rebuilding the left's political capacities. That requires a break with the dogma and backwardness of sections of the left, and a regroupment of those forces willing to carry through such a – to use a perilous phrase – cultural revolution.

THE BIG SIX, LABOUR AND SOCIALISM

Graham Balmer, International Socialist Network


Ed Miliband's proposal to freeze the energy bills of the Big Six energy suppliers has struck a chord with millions of workers, suffering from both government-led austerity and employers on a cost-cutting frenzy that has seen real pay decline dramatically over the last four years. As profits soar, CEOs have joined greedy bankers in the popular consciousness. It should be a vote winner for New Labour, with opinion polls showing a large majority of people supporting price controls in the energy market and, more importantly, for nationalisation of the 'natural monopolies' – national infrastructure such as energy and public transport.

It may be tempting to see a leftwards shift in Labour policy, with the price freeze announcement coming on the back of a commitment (finally) to scrap the Bedroom Tax – after all the public campaigning – and voting against UK military intervention in Syria (not that the Labour frontbench expected the vote to go this way!). Labour, earlier in the year, switched from "too far, too fast" to fully committing themselves to the coalition's spending plans, damaging Labour's only serious claim as the lesser evil. Hence the need to recalibrate policy to regain lost polling numbers. But, lest Labour should divert from its long-ago capitulation to neoliberalism, we have a shadow

cabinet reshuffle that promotes Tristram Hunt and the free schools philosophy. Similarly, Rachel Reeves goes further than Iain Duncan Smith in attacking benefit claimants. No change here.

The price freeze on electricity and gas bills would only be for 20 months – from an election victory next year to the end of 2016 – and may have a smaller impact on the profits of the energy companies than Tony Blair's windfall tax in 1997. Not so Red Ed, as John Major has pointed out. We can dispense with the howls of protest from the energy companies and the ridiculous Tory claim that consumers can switch supplier, when a majority of the Big Six have just put up their prices by 10%.

What about more competition as the solution, the Tory mantra that reflects the dominance of the market in private capitalism? Energy supply in the UK is akin to an unofficial cartel as they share infrastructure and buy energy on the same wholesale markets. Smaller new companies can only enter the market due to tax breaks. Also, the number of competitors in a given market sector is not really the point. Until recently, one of the most cut-throat global markets was a duopoly – Boeing and Airbus. Any new sector of production of goods or services will encourage capital to flood-in, searching for



It may be tempting to see a leftwards shift in Labour policy... but there is no change here

higher profitability, initially fostering a multitude of companies. As the sector matures, mergers, acquisitions and failures will reduce the number of units of capital. For example, compare the dotcom boom of the late 1990s with the global IT market today and the dominance of Apple and Samsung in mobile phones.

Re-nationalisation and beyond

An energy price freeze and effective regulation of their activities is of course to be welcomed. Popular support probably extends across the political spectrum and people can castigate excessive capitalist profiteering and at the same time blame 'benefit scroungers' or migrant workers. Neoliberal ideology, particularly in a time of austerity, is a powerful and divisive weapon.

Nationalisation is more interesting, and support for taking rail back into public ownership is longstanding. Now we can add the utilities and the privatised Royal Mail, sold-off far below its market value. Real re-nationalisation – not the "arms length", partial and temporary state ownership of the banks in 2008 – would be a stunning victory for the working class, reversing a three-decade long trend. But the re-nationalisation of profitable private companies, even

with compensation, is impossible to envisage without a massive upsurge in protests and strike waves over a host of issues, a radical and profound shift in politics, engaging millions of people throughout the country. And under these circumstances, much more may be up for grabs than nationalisation.

Socialism, ultimately, means destroying the profit motive and concentrating on fulfilling social need. The market and rule by a tiny elite must be replaced with cooperation for the benefit of all. Nationalisation may remove the market imperative, though without national self-sufficiency throughout the supply chain there are obvious limitations. Workers' control means self-management and democratic control to determine energy needs. A combination of participatory and representative democracy, ranging from workplace and community voting to the immediate recall of elected representatives on wider bodies.

No society can escape the 'economics' of the allocation of resources and planning is a necessity. This includes the transformation of energy generation and distribution from fossil fuels to renewable sources. Cooperation and planning are not new ideas – we do it every day. The capitalist class and their system is the impediment.

AN ORGANISATION WITH INTEGRITY

David Renton

The main motion for discussion at the Socialist Workers Party's conference in December will say, "Conference recognises ... That all the comrades involved in the DC [disputes committee] hearings sought to apply our politics in a principled way at all times and tried honestly to

do the best they could in the circumstances. All DC hearings have been conducted with integrity".

That last word, *integrity*, is the important one.

I don't want to make familiar points going back over what happened at that

DC hearing; or whether it is possible to transform an investigation from scandalous to principled merely through a conference vote.

Here, I want to ask: what does the left need to do, if we are ever going to have again a reputation for integrity?

Principles

The word "integrity" means at least two different things. In a first sense, it just means being principled and living by what you believe.

For a very long time, in so far as the SWP has thought about "principles", we have assumed that they could be subordinated to the interests of the party, which stood in our understanding as a proxy for the class, which stood for all of humanity. "Anarchists", we have explained, may see a revolutionary group as the harbinger of a new society, but "Marxists" don't agree with them: it is not possible to wash off what Marx once called "the muck of ages" (i.e. oppression and its effects on both oppressor and oppressed) merely by wanting to be better, without a social revolution. But in the last year we have found that we are being judged, not for the formal content of our ideas, but the mismatch between our ideas and what we have done.

A socialist party cannot pretend to be the growing embryo of a potential future society. But behaving repeatedly in an unprincipled manner is enough to kill any organisation and especially one which aspires to carry the dreams of millions.

A socialist party cannot pretend to be the embryo of a future society – but behaving in an unprincipled manner will kill it

Codes

One way to reorient the left is through adopting detailed codes which formulate basic rules as to what behaviour so obviously “crosses the line” that it is incompatible with membership of a socialist group. This winter, for example, the International Socialist Organisation (which was for many years until 2003 the SWP’s American affiliate) is preparing for its own annual conference. One of the documents being circulated by its leadership is a Code of Conduct for the ISO’s members.

The Code commits them to conducting debate rigorously, but with civility and respect. Members are made accountable for actions that bring serious harm to other members or to the organization. Discrimination and harassment are prohibited. All sexual encounters must be consensual, whether with another ISO member or not.

Elsewhere, in the main body of the ISO’s rules, the group prohibits members from making false statements to obtain membership or engaging in financial improprieties, or acting as a strike-breaker, a provocateur, or an informer.

I like the document and I support the ideas behind it but I won’t pretend that it, alone, could cure the problem. For one thing, the behaviours prohibited by it seem to have been selected quite arbitrarily. I accept I wouldn’t want to be in a party with a police informer or an agent provocateur, or indeed a former informer. How about a police officer? (I assume not.) Or a prison officer? Or a serving soldier? Someone who owns their own business? What if the business has a left-wing content? In the SWP, we tried to prohibit for a time our members

having jobs in the union bureaucracy or even being on 100% facility time. Unfortunately our former national secretary had a number of friends in these positions, so we maintained the rule, but applied it arbitrarily. In some cases, through the party’s ignorance of what its members were up to; we didn’t apply it at all. Should we have kept the comrade who serves in the bureaucracy, as a very senior manager (i.e. with a power to hire and fire), and who has an OBE for his services to trade unionism? Does it make a difference that he is one of the kindest and most genuine people you will ever meet, as well as a committed revolutionary?

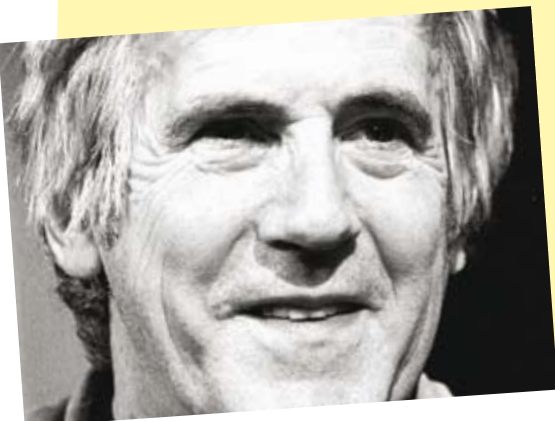
It is quite obvious, after the Smith rape scandal, that any left-wing organisation with any survival instinct will respond better than the SWP has done to complaints of rape. But any Code isn’t made useful by its ability to recognise last year’s errors, you want it to guide you through next year’s crises, whatever they may be.

The definitions of discrimination in ISO’s document mirror American law, but US law is relatively underdeveloped compared to various international counterparts. European law (and therefore even UK law) prohibits a much wider set of behaviours directed against wider sets of disadvantaged groups. This isn’t to praise UK law, by the way, which is itself the product of certain kind of social compromises and has all sorts of limitations, but only to say that any list will always be incomplete. The trick is to work out what the principles are behind our prohibition of certain behaviours, and to hope that those principles will guide you right even in unfamiliar situations.

Consistency

Integrity has a second meaning; consistency. We in the SWP often say that women’s liberation is “integral” to our politics, if this is going to be more than hot air, it would have to mean that every aspect of our socialism was shaped by our commitment to ending women’s oppression: that we could not think about trade unions, universities, anti-fascism or anything else without thinking about women’s oppression.

One story about the old SWP illustrates nicely what integrity can mean. The revolutionary journalist Paul Foot had been educated at Shrewsbury public school, and his friends there, including Richard Ingrams, Willie Rushton and Christopher Booker later worked with him on the magazine *Private Eye*. Unlike them, Foot was a socialist, joining the SWP’s predecessor, the International Socialists, in 1961 after leaving Oxford and remaining with IS/SWP until his death in 2004. A few years before he died he suffered a heart attack and was recovering in hospital, mute and seriously unwell. Friends from *Private Eye* visited him, and, as he lay in bed, said that they had raised enough money for him to swap his NHS bed for one in a private hospital. Unable to speak, Foot lifted his fingers at them in a V-sign – ill as he was, he was the same Paul Foot he had always been.



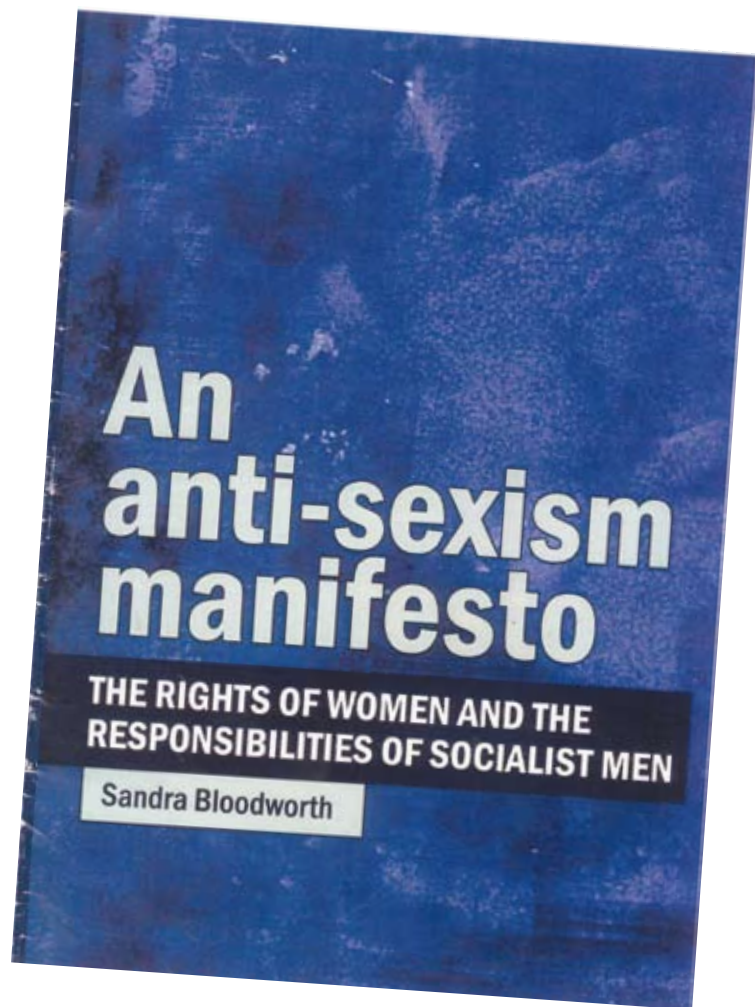
**You can't say
one thing and
do another**

Anti-sexism

How do parties show integrity? Socialist Alternative, the largest IS group in Australia, published five years ago *An Anti-Sexism Manifesto* (you can download it at bit.ly/antisexism), setting out how to enable women to take part in a group as equals with men.

The pamphlet describes, in ways which any socialist should recognise, how men can dominate in social relationships, how women still tend to do the majority of housework and certainly childcare (even in socialist relationships). It notes the persistence of old, stereotypical ideas about how men will be the ones who work and women the ones who do most of the caring. It accepts that there is a limit to how far sexism can be overcome under capitalism, but makes a comparison with workers' subordination: "Socialists do not passively accept that workers will always submit to their bosses' authority, or that they will automatically adopt racist or other divisive ideas ... We fight these ideas vigorously when we can. And so it is with sexism."

Much of the pamphlet is about consent, and why socialist men should never chivvy a woman for sex, get her drunk in order to sleep with her, pretend that a "No" was playful rather than serious, etc. "No means no at any time", its author writes. It talks in practical ways about what is wrong with men controlling women. Socialist Alternative encourage their members to practice safe sex, and to see this as something which is the man's primary responsibility. Last of all, the authors of the pamphlet insist that no-one should use



the group as a pick-up joint.

Some of the ideas in their pamphlet are things which people on the left have done intuitively for years. Even in the SWP, we don't normally ask men to speak at Marxism on women's oppression. Generally, we do try to have a number of women either speaking, or at least chairing, our national events. And any comrade who has been in the SWP more than a few years will remember a time when we tried much harder to challenge sexism than we do now.

In the past, for example, we did try to provide childcare to enable parents to attend our meetings. The problem is that all these things we do, or did, feel partial. We never explain properly why we do them. They are not followed through in our campaigns or our publications.

A theme of the SWP opposition has been that if we want people to believe that we actually have a theory which makes women's liberation "essential" to our project, then we need to demonstrate that our internal practice matches up to the way we like to present ourselves to the world. You can't say one thing and do another.

Campaign behaviour

The mismatch between theory and practice is not only about how SWP members interact with one another – how we have sex or who with, and what happens when sexual relationships go wrong (although these matter) – our “integrity deficit” is also about the ways in which we have behaved in campaigns, and the message which our audience has drawn from our behaviour.

All of the major campaigns in which the SWP has been involved recently have had their problems. When the SWP was led by the people who now lead Counterfire, we took decisions which caused people to think worse of us. This began with the Stop the War campaign, which for all its strengths also had a top-down internal culture; was wrongly hostile towards direct action; and its SWP-led decision-makers took the movement away from any explanation of why the movement might diminish once troops went in, in favour of a repetitive strategy of A-to-B marches. It was the largest campaign any of us have lived through, but it could have been so much bolder.

In the Socialist Alliance, we fought with the Socialist Party for leadership when we would have done better to let the reins loosen. We forced out independents of the stature of Liz Davies and Mike Marqusee and were too fast to close down the SA in search of a phantom alliance with trade unionists, Greens and Muslim Britain. Maybe that would not have been such a mistake if such an alliance had come off – but it didn't.

Instead of that mass movement, we formed something narrower, Respect. It was a mistake, within Respect, to argue against MPs salaries' being limited to the workers' wage (imagine the good name we'd have gained, if we had won that policy, and Galloway had stuck to it, all the way to the MPs' expenses scandal), and to protect a phantom Respect “right” by voting for policies in favour of immigration controls, etc.

More recently with Unite Against Fascism – if a party is going to sell itself to the world as the holder of the legacy of Lewisham and the Anti-Nazi League, it needs to do better than send its national organiser to negotiate bans with the police; it needs to do more than shelter, time and again, behind police lines. Maybe we could explain why, tactically, our approach has changed. But if we simply go on pretending that we're doing the same things, when we're not, why should anyone believe us?



The immediate prospect is that the SWP opposition are unlikely to win the positions we seek from SWP conference. And then we will have to decide what we do next.

Whatever position we take – if we are going to persuade anyone new that there is something valuable to IS politics, we will also have to show that the new custodians of that tradition are capable of organising in a more democratic and livelier way than the SWP has done recently, and with more integrity.

David Renton blogs at lives;running

MAKING UNITY WORK

**Kat Burdon-Manley, Kris Stewart & Magpie
International Socialist Network**



The issue of regroupment on the revolutionary left has been important to members of the International Socialist Network since we formed in March 2013. At our first national meeting we agreed to involve ourselves in discussions with other groups, because “An organisation that unites revolutionaries from different traditions would be a real step forward”. In the months since then, IS Network members around the country have held meetings jointly with comrades from the Anticapitalist Initiative, Socialist Resistance and Workers Power, we’ve contributed to three issues of this joint publication *The Exchange*, we’ve held discussions at a national level and we’ve worked with comrades from those organisations and others in a number of campaigns.

At our recent conference, we decided to seek an early fusion with the Anticapitalist Initiative, to continue all the joint work that we have been doing locally and nationally, and to engage with other organisations – such as Plan C, the IWW, Workers International Network, Anarchist Federation, Solidarity Federation – and other revolutionaries who are interested in building a united multi-tendency revolutionary organisation. We’re currently trying to put together a group – initially made up of IS Network, ACI, SR and WP comrades, with the intention of widening that group as soon as possible – to organise an open national meeting early in the new year to begin the process of building this new organisation.

Some IS Network members are concerned that this process is proving too slow and that we risk missing an opportunity to begin the rebuilding of the revolutionary left. In fact the authors of this article voted at conference for a different approach, which would have seen an immediate commitment to fusion with the ACI and SR and a founding conference for such a fused organisation in March 2014. However we failed to convince a majority of members and instead we are now committed to being part of making our agreed process work.

(We recognise that Scotland is another country, at least when it comes to how the left operates. There are members of the IS Network in Scotland and they have held discussions and worked alongside others on the left and will continue to do so. When we refer to “nationally” and “across the country” in this piece, we mean England and Wales. The project of rebuilding the left in Scotland is a different one – no less important and no less a priority for members of the IS Network. But we have to recognise that the political landscape is different.)

What, why and how

So what’s it for? Well, it’s pretty obvious to anyone paying attention (sadly, but understandably, few) that the revolutionary left in this country is in a pretty rotten state. After its upcoming conference, with the opposition smashed once again, we can expect the Socialist Workers Party to continue to decline in

numbers, in capacity and in the eyes of everyone who has even half-decent politics on women's oppression. While we do not mourn the impending death of this now rotten institution, we must face the reality that it will take a lot of time and effort to build something which builds on the best of the IS tradition while avoiding the degeneration we have seen.

We want to organise alongside people with whom we share some fundamental principles – that socialism can only be brought about from below, that no matter what reforms we might win (and win them we must), a socialist transformation of society can only be won through revolution, and that to do so will require an independent revolutionary organisation. Further, that any such organisation needs to have at its heart a serious commitment to the politics of liberation of the oppressed, and must be open, democratic and ready to learn as well wanting to teach.

It seems unlikely that the others we have been talking to would reject any of those positions – although some might want to argue for more than just those fundamental principles as a basis for organisational unity. That's a discussion we can and should be having now. But if we're agreed on the basics, we can work out together what we should be doing in support of those principles. There are huge tasks ahead – the working class has suffered from a long series of defeats since the 1970s and there's no easy fix for that. The revolutionary left has so far failed to face up to those defeats and what they mean for our theory and for our practice. We in the IS Network have started to work on some of this, re-examining our tradition and bringing our understanding of and practice around issues of oppression up to date. It would be even better to do that alongside comrades from other traditions, at the same time as working with them in today's struggles.

Liberation and self-organisation

What does taking liberation politics seriously mean today? It means encouraging self-organisation of those who identify as part of an oppressed group. Liberation caucuses must be encouraged to organise their own meetings, determine their own activity, develop their own politics and publish their own material. But the wider organisation cannot simply abdicate responsibility and members as a whole must work hard to bring those politics to the wider organisation.

As part of doing that, caucuses should have representation on all co-ordinating or leading bodies, as of right. That won't be sufficient, but it is necessary. When it comes to our political theory, we must never allow our approach to questions of liberation (among many other issues) to become set in stone, settled and decided, never to be revisited. Instead we must continually question, discuss, debate, write, read, listen and talk, and seek to develop our politics, alongside all those on the left thinking about and working in these areas. This cannot be restricted to those inside our organisation or those who share our political tradition.

We must also work to make our organisation a safe space for all. We have seen in the SWP over Martin Smith and the Socialist Party over Steven Hedley, what can happen when formal adherence to women's liberation is not fought for all the way through an organisation's

structures, publications, meetings and theoretical development. While we cannot promise a complete absence of oppressive behaviour, we can and must fight against each and every manifestation of it, within our organisations as well as in wider society. In questions of sexual assault and rape, we must start from a position of believing a woman who complains of having been abused.

So with the caucuses, having representation on the leading bodies, how else

might a new organisation work? We like the idea of a federation of branches, fractions and caucuses, with a co-ordinating group made up of representatives of those federal bodies, and a more clearly and actively political editorial board – again representing all parts of the organisation – overseeing our publishing, both electronic and physical. We think that all positions should be elected, and all subject to instant recall. Our discussions must be open and our votes free.

When we have come together and chosen a course of action, we should expect – but not compel – members to join in. We shouldn't consider any question closed and must ensure that minority voices are heard and represented and that there is space for those who disagree on a course of action can follow a different approach if they feel strongly that they must. We should never expect a member to pretend to believe something she doesn't. We must insist that elected representatives put forward the organisation's agreed positions.

Fancy it? We do.



RADICAL ORGANISATION

Simon Hardy & Luke Cooper, Anticapitalist Initiative

Simon Hardy and Luke Cooper introduce a set of principles that could help shape the building of a new revolutionary organisation.

1 IMAGINE A CLASSLESS SOCIETY. Capitalism is a system based on the exploitation and oppression of the vast majority so that a small minority can live a life of vast wealth and privilege. Our aim is communism – not the hideous dictatorships that denigrated the radical project in the last century, but a truly democratic, classless, stateless society where ‘the free development of each is conditional on the free development of all’. This vision must shape how we organise in the struggles today. The empowerment that comes from self-organisation and building from below is fundamental to our political project. Short-term goals need to be connected to the longer-term strategy of getting rid of capitalism. As technological development proceeds apace the question of democratically organising the labour process so that scientific breakthroughs result in cuts in hours, not job losses, becomes posed ever more sharply. Romanticism about mythical ‘golden ages’ of capitalism in the past need to be rejected. There is no going back and our future can be better if we develop a vision and strategy for anticapitalist change. A new left party will need to provide a space for different strategies and alternatives to be debated. It should be careful to retain its breadth but also provide effective, practical answers to the deepening social crises of modern capitalism.

2 WORKING CLASS – OLD AND NEW. The exploitation of labour by capital on the world stage is a complicated business. Due to the process of global integration over the last three decades and the growth in the size of the labour market in the West, there has never before been more people directly exploited by capitalist production. This means that never before

have more people had a direct interest in getting rid of capitalism once and for all. Capitalism however reproduces this exploitative labour process anarchically. It creates hierarchies of economic and social privileges within the working class; between full time employees and the precarious, between the super-exploited and unskilled and the skilled, the employed and the jobless. Capital also readily exploits those outside of the ‘wage-labour’ relation. Peasants are driven into extreme servitude and poverty through the combination of financialization and capitalist modernisation. In the world’s biggest cities a vast army of formally self-employed labourers live at the mercy of the big banks. When we speak of a ‘working class’ that has an interest in getting rid of the system, we refer to all these social groups that are exploited by capital and can be drawn into the revolutionary movement. In short, we refer to the working class in all its cultural and social diversity. The radical left also tends to organise a layer of the working class that undertake relatively socially empowering forms of work (e.g. skilled jobs white collar jobs) and require a university education. Overcoming this isolation from poorer layers of the working class remains a central task of a new left, and recognising the problem is only the first step to solving it.

3 A NEW LEFT. Today the radical left are a small minority in most societies in the world. The marginalisation of groups that offer a radical alternative feeds into an absence of vision that blights the cultural life of modern capitalism. Elites take advantage of the widespread belief that there is no alternative to the system to present even the most limited of social reforms as utopianism and ‘socialism’. To rebuild a democratic, anticapitalist project we need to convince millions of people that they have the power and interests to overthrow the system and begin a transition to a new type of society, one where human need, not

private profit, holds sway. Building mass movements of the exploited and oppressed is crucial to this project and we support every struggle against injustice or for progressive reform. Radicalise, democratise, and empower – these are the principles that guide how we relate to the emerging mass movements.

4 POLITICAL ORGANISATION. Mass struggles need to be connected to the aim of realising a transition to a new mode of production. For the great majority of working people in liberal democracies involvement in politics remains limited to the confines of representative electoral democracy. The way in which neoliberal hegemony has eroded political differences between major parties has however bred apathy with increasing numbers passively abstaining from electoral politics. We recognise that we need to bring the mass of the working class into an active engagement with politics in their localities and workplaces, creating empowering forms of self-organisation that can deliver victories in struggles and show in practice an alternative way of running society is possible and necessary. We reject the social democratic model of political party organisation – of a parliamentary elite in control of an apparatus that holds an unaccountable power over an atomised and passive membership. But we recognise that to convince millions they have the power to change the world, mass political organisation – a radically different type of political party – is necessary. A new type of party is needed that is democratic, built from below, pluralist, transparent, one that focuses on encouraging working class self-organisation, campaigning and direct action, and connects the daily struggles with the over-arching goal of a classless society. It should be open to people from different radical traditions – feminism, ecology, anarchism, socialism, etc – and engage creatively with new ideas in today's struggles.

5 DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE. The revolutionary organisation that we want to build should aspire to unity in action in the working class movement. A culture of collective political discussion and clarification should try to work towards a political convergence of ideas that can be translated into practical outcomes. But we recognise that unity in action is not always possible. The organisation that we build will have to allow different strategies to co-exist and be tested inside the working class movement. We expect there to be differences on the practical questions posed by the working class struggle: for example, how to relate to the Labour Party, how to work within the unions, what position

to take towards the labour movement bureaucracy, whether to prioritise grassroots campaigning, and how to analyse and respond to international questions. Wherever differences arise they should be openly and critically discussed inside the organisation and in its publications and website. The traditional conception on the left is that members should be compelled to abide by collective positions on pain of expulsion. In contrast to this, we believe that this should be entirely voluntary. The only exception should be individuals elected to a national leadership position inside the organisation, parliament, or inside the labour movement. They should be expected to abide by the collective instructions of the grassroots membership and to resign their position of authority if they are not prepared to implement the collective policies.

6 ANTICAPITALIST TRANSITION. Our vision of 'socialism from below' provides a link between how we work in the movements today and the kind of society we seek to achieve. Democracy must be at the heart of the socialist project. We reject the politics of top-down control in favour of participatory forms of organisation that are built from the bottom-up. Tragically in the last century with the rise of Stalinism, the illusion spread that undemocratic hierarchies of control and subordination provided protection from reformism. The opposite is in fact the case. Only truly

democratic organisation can provide any guarantee that the left will not abandon a revolutionary perspective. Only an empowered membership can stop elites coalescing that push movement or parties towards managing the system for capitalism ('reformism'). Direct, working class democracy is also central to a revolutionary, anticapitalist transition. This requires a new type of state – one that is neither rooted in the architecture of capitalist production nor based on the nation-state –, but is internationalist and democratic. This 'commune state' must be the property of all the oppressed social classes. We advocate a new economy based on participation, collective ownership, coordination and democratic planning. An effective democratic structure (free elections, a free press, re-callable officials, rotation of office holders, constitutional rights and freedoms, etc) will be needed to obstruct the development of a privileged caste of bureaucratic officials.

7 INTERNATIONALISM. Britain's has failed to come terms with its colonial past and present. It is one of a handful of global powers capable of projecting

Short-term goals need to be connected to the longer term strategy of getting rid of capitalism

military power in far-flung corners of the globe. Its interventions into the world's 'trouble spots' are exercises in maintaining its global prestige, influence and commercial interests. Britain is strategically aligned to US imperialism that has only been tempered, rather than decisively setback, by the failures of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to produce stable pro-American regimes. This has led to a retrenchment to imperial war as 'humanitarian intervention' that has to be clearly opposed. Our anti-imperialist perspective also has to take into account a changing international system. The new world order of the second decade of the 21st century has seen the rise of Chinese, Russian, and European powers that have a similarly self-serving agenda. If the last decade was defined by anti-imperialism, this one has been increasingly defined by the struggles for democracy in the Middle East. The alignment of some of the leaderships of these movements with Western imperialism should not lead us to deny the essentially progressive character of their struggle for democratic rights and freedoms.

8 FIGHTING THE NEW RACISM. The last decade has seen the electoral rise of the far right, both the fascist BNP, and the xenophobic and nationalist, UKIP. Feeding this growth of the far right is the new popular racism that has targeted Muslims, asylum seekers and economic migrants. This new liberal 'common sense' that there 'is really a problem with Islam' that there are 'too many immigrants' coming to Britain, has been allowed to achieve a hegemony in political culture that then legitimises the rising tide of individuals acts of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim violence and abuse which blights the lives of ethnic minorities in this country. No platform for fascism – including physical confrontation and direct action – remains a central part of the response to the rise of the far right. But just as important is pushing for mass anti-racist campaigning that starts to turn the tide against mainstream 'racist common sense'. Self-organisation and encouraging the development of Black-led social movement campaigning will be crucial for the radical left. This is not merely a question of the right to caucus – important as that is, but actively encouraging the political forms of self-organisation.

9 SEXISM, OPPRESSION AND POWER. Recent experiences on the left have highlighted once again all too clearly how anti-sexism must mean much more than a merely formal opposition to sexism within wider society. Having anti-sexist politics is a necessary but not sufficient condition for actively working in a way that is anti-sexist. The unequal power relations between men and women – expressed in sexual violence, rape, the double burden, unequal pay, domestic violence, etc. – that characterise modern societies requires special forms of struggle and organisation. Feminism should be a term of identification on the left – not a dogmatic way of narrowing the terrain of legitimate ideological debate. The creation of bureaucratic and unaccountable

power structures in revolutionary organisations has a special impact on all oppressed groups, as they lack the proper, democratic channels to confront sexist and violent behaviour by members of the party elite, ultimately making the organisation an unsafe place.

10 ECOSOCIALISM. Capitalism is drifting into a deepening environmental crisis. Repeated failures to tackle global warming through fossil fuel emissions will result in catastrophic levels of climate change in the coming decades. The challenge for the left is that solving the environmental crisis requires political power and the development of a democratic plan for sustainable production. Outside of power we need to find ways of incorporating a "green thread" into the day-to-day social struggles, as well as working within environmental campaigns and protest movements.

11 THE 'OLD LEFT'. Traditional parties (or 'sects') of the radical left in Britain have failed to connect to the new spirit of democracy and self-organisation in the mass movements. Their 'intervention' into these movements lacks organicity. It appears not as a natural evolution of the movements but all too often as attempts to subordinate them to a preconceived dogma. The 'control or destroy' method of the left in the anti-austerity movement has persistently obstructed the building of a genuinely united movement, leaving it divided between several front organisations. These problems overlap closely with the issue of bureaucratism in the modern labour movement, where lay members feel alienated from complex and socially privileged bureaucratic structures that they have little control over. The weakness of the left and the decline of grassroots participation in the working class movement can foster dependency on the official bureaucracies. It would be wrong to abstain from the official structure of the unions for this reason. But we support wherever possible the development of grassroots and independent organisation that can act with the official structures where possible and without them where necessary. The creative formation of a 'Pop-Up Union' at Sussex University stands in a long tradition of grassroots unionism but it is also an innovative response to the legal and political challenges facing the modern-day labour movement. This kind of ingenuity will be central to building fighting unions.

12 HOW TO BUILD A MOVEMENT. The People's Assembly is an example of the opportunities and problems of the left and social movements in Britain. Its size and popularity indicates the potential for a mass movement, but the way it has been organised risks undermining this opportunity. Local people's assemblies had no right to bring proposals or amend the statement that is being put to the conference. The leadership organising the event were never elected and will not be re-elected at the conference. A recall



conference was promised but has yet to materialise, and without a delegate-affiliate structure for local and national organisations to join (and have rights to bring proposals and elect a leadership) then it will lack an organised link to the anti-cuts movements at the local level. This means its aim of ‘uniting the movement’ cannot be properly turned from words into deeds. The Assembly remains, effectively, a rally or ‘spectacle’ rather than the concluding point of a movement, a process, of building from below. Criticism of the union leaders that have failed to deliver industrial action against austerity or the austerity-lite politics of the Labour Party have been actively discouraged. The danger is that it doesn’t provide a space for critical discussion on strategy or real organising. It underscores the need for an alternative type of politics on the left based on democratic organising, free and critical debate on strategy, and hostility to bureaucratic control.

13 PUTTING DOWN REAL ROOTS. There is a basic problem with how the British left campaigns that can be summarised as ‘the cult of the next big thing’. The focus tends to be on the next big conference, the next big demonstration, etc, and this results in frenetic bursts of activity usually followed by slump, then sometime later by another burst in anticipation of the next major event, and so on. Missing within this is a more permanent, locally rooted politics with a degree of permanence, able to draw in working people into a lasting political relationship with the radical left. A tendency to bandwagon jump needs to be replaced by a longer-term perspective. There are three major avenues for this that a new left needs to explore. Firstly, with the decline of the welfare state, the left will have to rediscover the tradition of ‘Mutual Aid’. Charities and religious organisations, rather than the unions or the left, tend to dominate the growing network of ‘Food Banks’ in Britain. But in the Bedroom Tax campaigns the left has been able to play a role in providing practical support and assistance, alongside political campaigning and activism. Secondly, Left Unity is an opportunity to build a lasting project to the left of the Labour Party. It is being built ‘from below’ through the formation of local organisations that then coordinate on a regional and national level. It is not dominated by a single left group and has attracted a diverse range of activists. It will only succeed if it retains this patient and democratic approach. A campaigning focus – with energetic activism and events – will, however, be needed give the project political momentum. A careful balance has to be struck between effectiveness and participation – with transparent and accountable structures the key to doing this. Thirdly, workplace organisation needs to be rebuilt at the grassroots. Patient work and activism in the localities needs to be coordinated through national campaigns and initiatives. The 80,000 votes for Jerry Hicks and the formation of a new grassroots project based on rank and file activism, Unite Fightback, indicates the potential.

OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES

Joana Ramiro, Anticapitalist Initiative

The task we have set ourselves, the task of building a “united, plural and heterodox revolutionary tendency on the left in Britain” (see bit.ly/exctask), is by no means an easy one. When the Anticapitalist Initiative was launched, before we had even encountered the pitiless voice of general public opinion, we were already showered with criticism from all corners of the left. These have ranged from inconsequential comments on Facebook to more cynical pieces in publications such as the *Weekly Worker*.

Any new project that makes bold claims of unity will have to consider what are, indeed, the obstacles and their weaknesses. What might come to harm the project of revolutionary regroupment, or thwart what we think has the potential to become a truly democratic, grassroots, socialist organisation? This document is but a small contribution to the issues I believe we need to address in order to become the organisation we all want to be part of.

Old habits die hard

It is safe to say that many of those involved in Socialist Resistance, the International Socialist Network and the Anticapitalist Initiative are no novices in the ins and outs of the British left. Having such experience is most often an advantage, for these comrades have accumulated priceless knowledge, developed their organisational and public speaking skills, and acquired the patience necessary to deal with such great goals as trying to make the world a better place.

However, in their 10, 20, 30 or even 40 years in and around revolutionary organisations, some comrades have also accrued certain bad habits, which are hard to lose. These customs are epitomic of a far left which has been plagued by sectarianism, demagoguery

and a lack of democratic versatility for longer than we would like to think.

From aggressive “interventionism” in meetings and conferences, through delivering relentless “party line” dictates, or pointing the finger at those in the room who in previous joint enterprises (might) have acted in x, y or z way – the list of misdemeanours goes on and on. And whereas many comrades are ready to accept that such a way of speaking is disruptive and obtuse, one cannot deny that in most meetings someone will invariably stand up and do their best impression of a hack.

Yes, we should celebrate the fact that today we find ourselves talking to each other, willing to accept our differences for the sake of a larger, more effective, more genuine revolutionary organisation. However, to truly break with the old, to truly become revolutionaries of today, we need to start acting, as well as talking, differently. Political distinctions should be drawn out in meetings, debates over policies and politics should be held, but only if conducted in a true spirit of camaraderie and solidarity amongst people who, for all intents and purposes, lie on the same side of the political struggle, against austerity, discrimination and, at their root, capitalism.

So bad habits must be ditched, quit, die. To make room for a more cooperating, entrepreneurial left. To allow the revolutionary organisation we imagine to truly come to life, and leave behind a positive legacy.

Coordination, coordination, coordination

For many involved in the regroupment talks, who left democratic-centralist organisations with their strictly imposed rules on what to say and what to do, it is refreshing, liberating and in many ways healthy to find ourselves in much looser networks.



Yet, this poses a problem: how do we develop the debate, move forward in our decisions (and take the most representative ones) if and when our meetings are not well-attended or the people attending often rotate indiscriminately? How do we bring over to the discussion all those who are sympathetic but argue that we don't have enough visible people, that we don't have enough gravitas, that we can't build momentum? Importantly, how can we look like the vibrant organisations we are and attract not only activists but also general members of the public (for lack of a better word), who are becoming more aware of the injustices inherent in our economic system?

It is our duty to engage in discussions not just about democratic structures and our common political values, but also about how we want to interact within such parameters. We need to instil a certain level of self-discipline, which does not ignore personal time outside of political organising. We need to create networks of people who want to come to meetings knowing they are investing rather than being deprived of their leisure time. We need to organise to accommodate for parents, long or irregular shift-workers, and those with less mobility.

In a sense, the possibly less systematic local and national organising can be seen as an opportunity to create new and more comprehensive forms of organising, devoid of the stiffness and strict directing

some of us might have endured and/or "passively resisted" in the past.

Homogeneity vs cohesion

The point of our discussions is to bring together our panoply of views on how a revolutionary organisation should look, and make them work in unison and in the same direction.

Yet, heterogeneity is a tricky attribute. The diversity of our opinions is, indeed, our strength when it comes to building a robust political front against sectarianism, conservatism, and reactionary politics. However, internally, it can often lead to interminable discussions, creating strife and the illusion that unity and agreement are impossible to uphold.

So how do we transform heterogeneity into cohesion? How do we transcend the seeming incongruences in our politics? How do we work together as socialists, libertarians, Trotskyists, anarcho-syndicalists, Marxists, ecologists, feminists?

Can we find consensus? Must we agree to disagree? Perhaps the two are not diametrically opposed. We must recall what we came here to do and where we lie in the bigger picture. If we want a plural and democratic organisation we need to work for it. We need to be ready to accept that others will have different conceptions of what it means to be revolutionary than our own.

To truly break with the old, to truly become revolutionaries of today, we need to start acting differently



The constant clamour of denunciations of 'sectarianism' and calls for 'unity' can seem bewildering and obsessive on first encountering a left organisation. They're almost entirely absent from other walks of life. Further, they can usually be pinpointed to particular lefts rather than being a concern of the left in general. In this article we examine the specific political terrain to which the binary 'Unity' and 'Sectarianism' may have once been appropriate and argue that it is now neither useful nor in any way meaningful. Instead of unity, we propose developing means of co-ordination and argue that this should operate specifically in the context of regroupment. Instead of shared solutions, we propose working together on the basis of shared problematics. We suggest this both as a pragmatic response to the reality of 'sectarianism' and as a desirable means of developing an anti-capitalist movement capable of matching and bettering the dynamism of capitalism itself. Lastly, we explore the 'network of reference' as one of a number of different ways these ideas might be put into practice.

For much of its history the radical left, and in particular the Marxist-Leninist left, has focused on building parties large and strong enough to overthrow capitalism. This has usually taken the form of singular national organisations, linked transnationally to similar revolutionary organisations. In periods of weakness some revolutionary organisations have sought to build alliances and fronts with other radical or more social democratic elements (e.g. the anti-fascist popular front pursued by members of the Comintern in the 1930s). While the success of these strategies is debated,

COORDINATION BEYOND UNITY

Ben Lear and Gareth Brown, Plan C

the radical left was taken seriously because of its relative strength within the working class. The breakdown of the Fordist compromise in the 1970s was a significant blow to the left and socialist parties. Current calls for unity in the left being pushed by socialist elements in both the UK (via Left Unity and the People's Assembly) and United States (via *Jacobin* magazine) come at a time of crisis and disorientation, rather than strength and solidity, and function to pull together the fragments of a once much larger and more effective political community.

The decade prior to these most recent initiatives saw various attempts at building popular fronts that were ridden with accusations of sectarianism. It feels vital to us that we spend a moment looking at the uses to which the terms can be, and are, put. In other words, we wish to look at what the real-world function of the idea of Unity/Sectarianism might be. The briefest of trawls through the public tracts, declarations, and meeting minutes of left organisations gives an impression of sectarianism as a dangerous pandemic. Whether it's groups being accused of being sectarian for having removed themselves from unity projects, or groups being accused of being sectarian prior to being kicked out of unity projects, or unity projects themselves being accused of being sectarian for failing to listen to the sense being spoken by said groups, one thing is clear: Those who disagree with me are sectarian, those who agree are pro-unity. Near everyone, it seems, believes themselves to be working towards unity. The arguments bear little relation to numbers, or to membership, or to participation. After all, the tiniest, most marginalised organisation can still, if it dares (which often it does), claim to be the authentic voice of the working class (a far larger body of people than even the most quantitatively successful unity project). The idea of sectarianism is here mobilised almost solely in the silencing of dissent. Furthermore it is clear that anything other than an implausible state of total unity necessarily generates sectarianism as its mirror other.

There is a secondary function too. The small groups (the dreaded 'sects') may yet have to accept some complicity in the accusations being leveled against them. We still operate within a political dynamic wherein groups derive worth from a proprietarian approach to 'issues' which are 'theirs'. This is perhaps a (by-)product of a vanguardist approach to political militancy. How does one differentiate oneself when one is already working amongst the foremost specialists in revolt? By sharpening that specialisation to the point that in order to understand the contemporary organisation of the capitalist workplace, one must first understand Hungarian anti-fascism in the 1930s or Gramsci's musings on weevil entomology. This process is somewhat obscured by the notion that it is about 'sectarianism'. We see this as being far more related to problematic notions of authenticity and a worrying race-to-the-front (or to the top), rather than being a deliberately constructed situation of separateness. Specialisation of this sort isn't incompatible with the idea of unity, only with the idea that unity may not be on my terms. We can see a certain

complicity here in the self-image many revolutionary left organisations have of being implementors of rather than active participants in a future revolution.

Without attempts at reconfiguring our politics it seems likely that any new initiative runs the risk of falling into old traps. It's clear we need a new politics which is in tune with the changing composition of the world. Whilst we are critical of the "networks of individuals" which have emerged in response to the crisis of the party form we need to recognise that here in the UK, the past decades have not seen a move towards political consolidation in singular organisations. Whether we feel comfortable with this or not, the current conditions suggest that the majority of people are not persuaded by the idea of a big working class party and are unwilling to join one. This clearly leads us to some difficult political questions which organisations are either dealing with or not. The prolonged implosion of the SWP has been the catalyst for a much needed period of reflection for many of us. As austerity and nationalist politics continue to be implemented in the Global North, the left, for the most part, struggles to formulate viable alternatives and gain any traction on the world. This current political disorientation means that calls for unity aren't simply a numbers game. If we don't understand the current composition of capitalism, our problematic histories, or have any new ideas then what's the point of spending countless hours of our time trying to unite?

Rather than seeking unity and agreement on programmes, we could be thinking about co-ordination as a practical response to the times in which we find ourselves. Of course we want to strengthen our organisations and that has to be a part of our political work but, when it comes to working with other groups we think co-ordination rather than unity makes sense. We don't think this is just a case of semantics. If we don't believe in the possibility of change being implemented through one large organisation then we need to change our approach. We need to work out how to identify key terrains, find allies (some of whom may be in the most unusual of places) and make sure we work in synergy with each other rather than competing for members and attention. We might even want to think about how we can bring this co-ordination into our internal structures – to turn our organisations into spaces for creative encounters not just formal structure. We need to develop the structures and skills to manage this co-ordination in a sustainable and democratic way. Whilst many look to the assemblyism of Occupy or the square occupations in Southern Europe as models, with only a few exceptions these processes failed to provide enough coherence or strategy once the tents were packed down. It seems a politics of one big meeting is as limited a strategy as that of one big party. This co-ordination has to address the weaknesses of both the "networks of individuals" or assemblyism of the horizontal movements and the programmatism and quests for unity of the traditional left.

The fallout from the SWP scandal has both produced and fed into an extraordinary intensification of

endings and new beginnings on the left and a ferocious process of rethinking. In the last couple of years the parameters of the socio-political environment have been hammered and molded to the shape of not only the so-called economic crisis but also the riots of 2011, the Occupy movement, the informationalisation of labour, the diffusion of managerialism, and a renewed attack on women. These new parameters provide something of a context for the emergence of groups and affiliations such as Anticapitalist Initiative, International Socialist Network, Plan C, and Collective Action (to pick a handful of relevant examples). The root-points of these bodies are diverse. Some emerge from democratic centralist traditions and others from horizontalist, network-based, or federalised approaches. However, there is, it seems to us, a strong point of convergence between them. That convergence doesn't primarily take place at the point of solutions (which, when articulated, remain diverse). Rather, it's at the point of the problematic that the commonality is to be found. This problematic seems to relate to the incommensurability between capitalist dynamism, a system that can change rapidly and at short notice in order to incorporate and adapt to working class attempts to produce value for ourselves, and the slow-moving, monolithic 'hold-the-line' structures that we erect in response, structures that keep us tethered to means of organising that capital has left in the distant past. Crucially though, it's only possible to read this problematic because we can compare and contrast the different bodies with one another.

We find it useful to think about this in terms of waves. Political organisations (or traditions, or ideologies) can act like sturdy wave machines in seas of class struggle, reliably producing the same motions, causing the water to act in the same way over and over again. Often, political organising seems to be geared towards continual fortification of the wave-machine so that when external changes happen (the water levels change or the current shifts) we can continue steadfastly to produce the same wave motion. There's sense in this. It produces coherence and security. The left, though, is awash with such machines, all springing up in different contexts and in different times and places. No matter how permeable and open to change they are, they're all anchored to those contexts. This is necessarily the case and is something to be worked with rather than resisted. So, we can work with it by employing the language of authenticity, by saying this one wave-formation represents the one true nature of class struggle and everyone needs to reproduce it, or we can enact an imaginary overlaying of the wave-formations. Overlain, there are areas where the peaks of one machine's waves coincide with the

troughs of another, cancelling each other out, flat-lining (suggesting a silence, a point that the left needs to rethink and rearticulate). Conversely there are areas where two peaks coincide creating a mega-peak (a point that lends itself to inter-organisational collective action), and areas where the mid-points match up and recreate almost exactly the same wave formations that would have been found at one machine alone (these are the situations in which merger makes perfect sense). We see this as being consistent with a properly grass-roots approach to struggle. Allowing it to begin in and develop from the diverse everyday experiences of the working class rather than beginning in the intellectual laboratories of our think-tanks and central committees and handed down. So it's preferable to us to be one amongst many resilient and effective organisations rather than the sole one. As such we are disinterested in recruitment drives but keenly interested in working with others.

But what could this look like in practice? Plan C are currently testing out our ideas around co-ordination within two initiatives. In the UK we're experimenting with building a "network of reference" with a handful of groups external to ours. This entails negotiating a mutual, formal commitment to critically engage with one another's projects and ideas by sharing them for comment. The hope is that by exposure to different political frameworks and different experiences of struggle they will tend towards a greater robustness, flexibility,

and coherence. Occasionally the relationship may entail practical support and solidarity. This is not, however, required by the formal commitment.

Internationally we're plugging into a developing network containing groups from Germany and Greece. At the time of writing, we're nearing the completion of an online platform to start sharing experiences, spreading analysis and hopefully moving towards practical co-ordination. This project (Beyond Europe: Antiauthoritarian Platform Against Capitalism) is another experiment in working around shared problematics, in this case nationalist and neoliberal responses to the crisis, rather than an attempt to build *a priori* unity. Compared to the levels of transnational co-ordination we witnessed during previous cycles of struggle, the current one is distinctly nationally bounded. We hope to bring more groups into this initiative, from both the UK and beyond, as it starts to take shape. Obviously these two initiatives are being undertaken on unfamiliar ground by relatively small amounts of people. We don't know if they will work or where their limits lie, but they are practical experiments in working from an emphasis on co-ordination rather than unity.

We need to develop the structures and skills to manage this co-ordination in a sustainable and democratic way



THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL AND SOCIALIST RESISTANCE

Liam MacUaid, Socialist Resistance

Socialist Resistance (SR) is the section of the Fourth International (FI) in the British state, and we are currently seeking to build a new socialist organisation together with the Anticapitalist Initiative (ACI) and the International Socialist Network (ISN). This process may expand to include other groups.

At our 2013 conference SR voted to dissolve itself if we were able to successfully merge with the ACI and ISN. However we will propose that members of the new organisation will have the right to be part of a Fourth International caucus which would not be restricted only to former members of Socialist Resistance. That means we need to let people know about the FI.

The quickest and easiest way to find out for yourself what the Fourth International and the organisations that belong do it are doing and saying is to visit its website International Viewpoint (www.internationalviewpoint.org). There you will find reports, interviews, longer analytical articles and significant documents.

Why an international organisation?

“Why do you want to be part of an international organisation?” is an obvious question. The simplest answer is that the capitalists think and organise on a global level. Firms like Barclays and Shell hold more real power than many states. Our class is international too. We are never patriots. We always take the side of the workers and oppressed in any part of the world when they are in conflict with our or their ruling class.

Capitalism obliges us to think and organise on an international level and it's not just a question of simple solidarity. We inherited a tremendous legacy from Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, but our world is no longer their world. The Fourth International

allows us to draw on the ideas and experiences of our co-thinkers in more than sixty countries. It helps prevent us from developing an insular or Euro-centric version of Marxism. It allows us to constantly refresh and update our politics.

Much of what Socialist Resistance has to contribute to debates around feminism and Marxism owes a significant debt to the women in other sections of the International. Our thinking on ecosocialism has been pushed along by theoretical and practical work done by comrades in Belgium and the Philippines, for example. The distinctive positions we've developed on broad left parties are the product of our own recent activity and that of our comrades in many parts of Europe.

The main thing that links all the sections of the Fourth International is an enduring commitment to having a Marxism which integrates feminism and ecology and uncompromisingly defends socialist democracy inside and outside its organisations. Our collective experience over decades is that our affiliation to an international current with these firm principles has helped us preserve and develop these ideological fundamentals.

No decisions imposed

The FI decided some years ago that it would no longer present itself as the 'world party of revolution'. It is true that when the small group of anti-Stalinist revolutionary Marxists, led by Trotsky, declared the formation of the Fourth International they asserted that it was the World Party of Socialist Revolution. They had a perspective that the coming war would open up a new wave of revolutions which would destroy Stalinism and fascism. That history is part of where we come from but it is precisely that – history.

There is a fear that that SR will retain a secret

organisation taking orders from an international leadership. But the FI doesn't describe itself as democratic centralist and doesn't impose decisions on supporters and sections. Such an approach would be contrary to the FI's concept of internationalism, as you can see by reading our account of our most recent World Congress:

"The international committee is a 'federal' body, which means that each national reality has its own representatives... history taught this international current that a political line cannot be imposed from above, still less by a 'guide' party."

There is no point misleading people with exaggerated depictions of your strength. The FI is mostly composed of small organisations and groups which can discuss and advocate a general approach to politics. It debates and adopts political positions and statements on the big issues in world politics.

Sections and supporters are free to decide whether to support such positions and statements and often they don't.

This can be seen currently in Greece where the official section supports Antarsya (contrary to views of most other groups in the FI) whilst a supporting organisation backs Syriza. SR had no hesitation in making our criticisms of our Greek comrades in public on our website, something that caused some consternation but for us is perfectly normal.

Socialist democracy

Perhaps more than any other Marxist current the FI has tried to theorise and implement an understanding of socialist democracy both inside its own organisations and in a socialist society. The title and much of the language belong to an earlier era but *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Socialist Democracy* (<http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article921>) contains some of the major ideas that inform the way we do politics. These include:

"Fullest internal democracy of the party itself, with full rights for organising tendencies and a refusal to ban factions and possibilities of public debates between them before party congresses.

"Real integration of the party in a revolutionary international and acceptance of international comradeship criticism by revolutionary organisations of other countries."

Both of these concepts came out of an examination and a rejection of the way Stalinist

parties and regimes operated. They suppressed all dissent outside very narrow limits with unity and obedience being prized above all other qualities, an attitude that was also pervasive in many groups which rejected Stalinism but retained some of its organisational conceptions.

By contrast the Fourth International argued that: "...there are no infallible parties. There are no infallible party leaderships, or individual party leaders, party majorities, 'Leninist central committees,' etc."

The FI's leadership bodies and those of its sections explicitly guarantee the rights of minorities. So, for example, if a position were to win thirty percent of the votes at a Socialist Resistance conference, its supporters would be entitled to thirty percent of the positions on the national committee. It may be that the minority was right and the majority was wrong and people change their minds.

Dissent protected

The right to disagree is guaranteed for all sections of the International. Unlike other currents which have an international organisation and insist that all their supporters are in a single national group, it's not unknown for the FI to have members in two or three groups or

parties in the same country. That's currently the case in France, Italy and the United States, for example. Sometimes people come to very different judgements on what has to happen in their own country and split. If they wish to retain their connection to the FI they are allowed to do so since political situations and assessments change.

International meetings of the FI give full rights to those with different views to present these. Minority positions expressed at World Congresses are fully represented on the International Committee.

This is a model that has proved attractive to organisations coming from very different roots. The FI has made advances in Asia and more recently again in Latin America. In 2012 the Communist Party of Bangladesh-Marxist Leninist (CPB-ML) became a permanent observer organisation, a preliminary step to becoming a section. In 2003, at the FI 15th World Congress, the Revolutionary Workers Party -Mindanao (RWP-M) became an FI section. The NSSP in Sri Lanka joined the FI after leaving the CWI and the International has also developed a relationship with the People's Liberation Party (PLP) in Indonesia, which is now a permanent observer.

The Fourth International allows us to draw on the ideas and experiences of our co-thinkers in more than sixty countries

Ecosocialist

The FI is the only international revolutionary Marxist current which defines itself as ecosocialist.

Ecosocialism is a declaration that the designation 'socialist' is no longer adequate; that ecological issues are a fundamental component of our programmatic identity. It is a signal that we reject the capitalist logic of insatiable growth, which is built into the nature of the system and fuels the requirements of capitalist production. It means striving for a society based on ecological rationality, democratic control, social equality, and the predominance of use-value over exchange-value.

This means that our aim should be for growth in quality of life rather than in quantity of output, for abundance of free time rather than abundance of unnecessary commodities. It means progressively taking the decisions on production and distribution out of the hands of the 'free market' and submit them to rational democratic planning.

Feminist

Both SR and the FI define themselves as feminist organisations. Agreement on the significance of feminism for Marxists is one of the major points that has made our convergence with the ACI and ISN possible.

There is a social basis for the specific oppression of women in this society which makes it essential that women have their own political expression. A feminist movement makes this possible and political organisations need to learn from its experiences and insights.

We draw some organisational conclusions from this. Women's caucuses are a permanent feature of both SR and the FI's practice. We seek to have a majority of women on the committees which deal with internal complaints and we set a target of 50% women on leadership structures.

Broad parties

A major part of Socialist Resistance's work for the past number of years has been in support of developing a party with mass roots to the left of Labour. We were involved in the Socialist Alliance and Respect. We tried to engage with TUSC and are now strongly supportive of Left Unity.

Our connection with the FI has informed much of our activity in this area. Our comrades in Portugal, Denmark, Italy, France and Germany, among others, have had a range of positive and negative experiences in building parties to the left of social democracy and we have followed them closely. Our book *New Parties of the Left* is an attempt to pull together and make accessible to an English-reading audience the significance of these developments in Europe.

Our starting point is that social democracy, in particular the British Labour Party, has shifted significantly to the right in the last two decades under the pressure of neoliberalism. The political space exists for an organisation of 20-30,000 which can contain revolutionaries, people radicalised by the new anti-capitalist movements, militant trade unionists and former members of the Labour Party. Respect offered a glimpse of this possibility and Left Unity is also showing that the potential remains.

We have developed a firm view that there are some general rules which can make such a project successful. It has to be democratic and able to contain a range of views. It has to be free from the domination of a figurehead leader. It has to function as a party rather than as a non-aggression pact or an electoral alliance. Far left organisations which participate in it must not

seek to hegemonise it by using organisational means to win political arguments.

Conclusion

We think that the Fourth International has done more than any other Marxist current to both retain the essential principles of the revolutionary tradition and to take into account the fact that the early 21st century is not the same as the early 20th century.

We have absorbed the significance of climate change and feminism for revolutionary Marxism. We examined in great detail the absolute centrality of democracy and pluralism in socialist organisations and post-capitalist societies. There is no hidden agenda in our wishing to retain a link with our comrades in other parts of the world. We feel that this connection will do nothing but contribute to the strengthening and political development of a new organisation.



REVOLUTIONARY UNITY NEEDS TO BE BUILT ON FIRM FOUNDATIONS

Workers Power

The present time might seem a difficult one for the revolutionary left in Britain to seek to unite its fragmented forces. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), by far the largest far left group, is in disarray, if not in meltdown. The Socialist Party (SP) continues to think of itself alone as being the centre of the labour movement, and everyone else as being “on the fringes” of it.

The five-year crisis of world capitalism has led to a crisis of the far left. This is an international and not just a British crisis. In France it is expressed in the splits and dramatic decline in numbers of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA). In Italy it is reflected in the splintering and demoralisation of the Italian left – a painful contrast to the flourishing situation of Rifondazione Comunista, and the social forums and centres in towns and cities the length of the peninsula, witnessed ten years ago.

Even the libertarian left, which many in 2011 thought had found the answer with the US Occupy movement, has seen this movement dissipate, leaving little in the way of permanent organisation.

These splits in the left extend into the movement of resistance against austerity that cries out for maximum unity in action if the jobs, rights and social gains of the working class, young people, women and migrant communities are to be defended.

It might seem that the People’s Assembly movement has overcome this – to some extent successfully sidelining the rival “fronts” of the SWP and SP. But it has done so at a price. Counterfire – its core organisers – have struck a Faustian pact with the Communist Party of Britain (*Morning Star*) and the Unite union bureaucracy to keep it firmly within the orbit of Labour and the official policies of the “left” unions presently in full retreat from any “coordinated action” against the cuts. Indeed this last month of so has seen neither coordination nor action – unless their headlong

flight was coordinated.

Comrades like Luke Cooper and Simon Hardy in the ACI, former members of Workers Power, say that it is the very nature of socialist groups (the sect form), each preserving their own programmes and internal discipline, that is to blame. They are not fit for purpose. This of course depends on what you conceive their purpose as being. If you mean that the SWP and SP are not fit for the purpose of being parties of the working class, challenging the sell-out bureaucrats and exposing the Blue Labour traitors, we agree.

But if you accept that propaganda groups are the necessary embryos of a future party, where programme, policies, tactics and cadres are developed and trained, then such propaganda groups, big and small, have always existed, and will continue to do so until and unless a real sizable party of the working class vanguard unites all those who are not wilful sectarians, actually uninterested in the class struggle. That there are far more embryos than develop into parties is – as in nature – just a law of political life.

Workers Power has always rejected the idea that as soon as a group reaches a few hundred or a few thousand members, it can simply proclaim itself “the party” and thereafter just invite the working class to join its ranks. The founding proclamations of the Socialist Workers Party in January 1977, the Socialist Party in 1997, and the Scottish Socialist Party in 1998 did not mean they had in fact “built the party”.

This expresses a false understanding of the relationship of socialist groups to the working class, and the struggles and mass organisations of the working class. This is why they mutated the revolutionary tactic of a united front with the mass organisations of the working class (that is, trade unions and mass parties that are still under reformist and bureaucratic leadership) into “campaigns” on issues like war, anti-fascism, and anti-cuts organisation in the unions, which

from day one are firmly under the pseudo-party's organisational control. Meanwhile the illusion of a genuine united front of mass workers organisations is maintained by rallies – misnamed 'conferences' – at which prominent left union leaders and MPs speak, but at which nothing of significance for the movement at large is decided.

The rivalry of the pseudo-parties is extended into rival campaigns within the resistance against austerity despite the obvious need for maximum unity in action to defend jobs, pay, pensions and benefits.

So can the forces on the revolutionary left unite? And in doing so can we overcome the weak strategy the pseudo-parties have been pushing for so long?

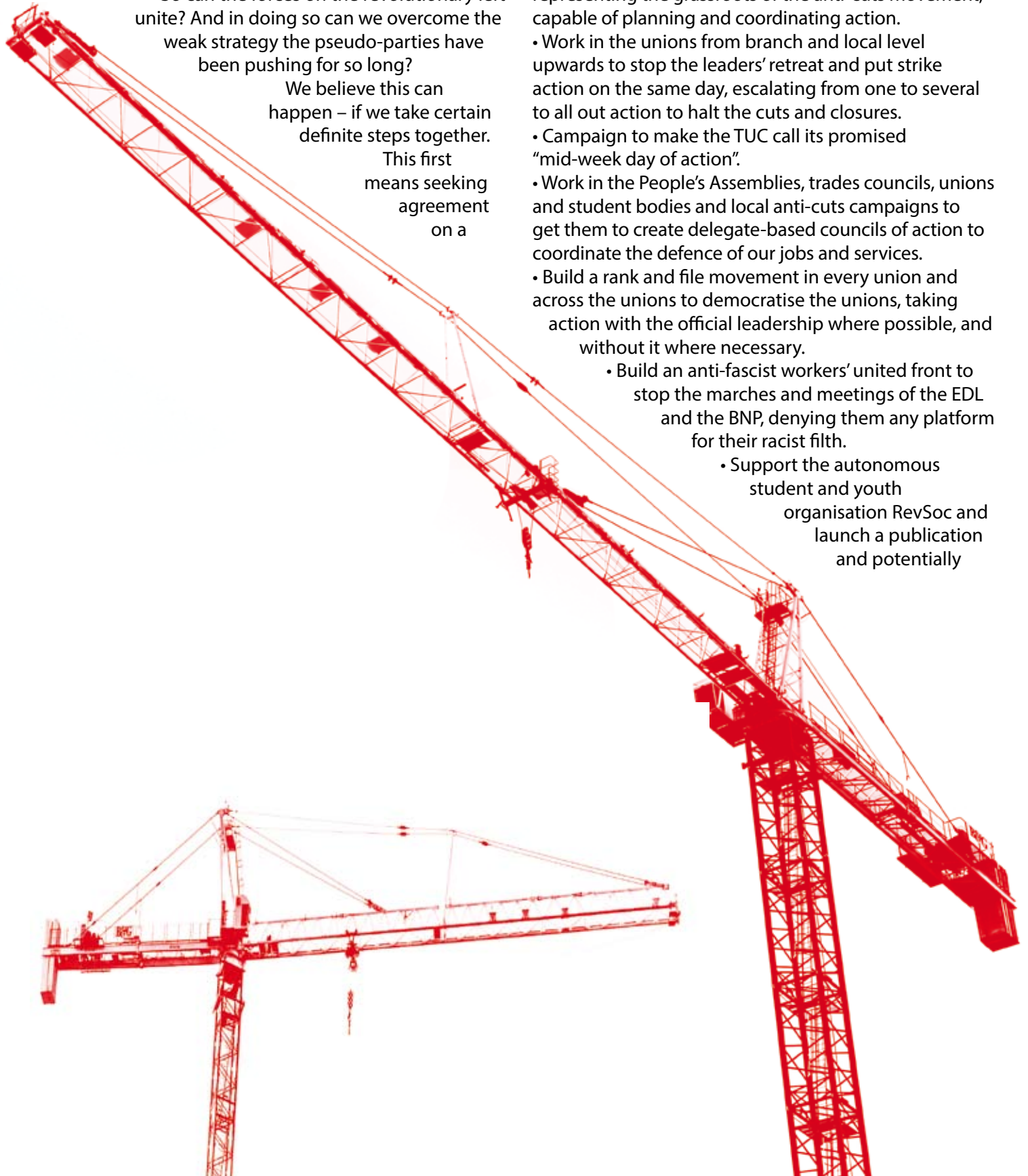
We believe this can happen – if we take certain definite steps together.

This first means seeking agreement on a

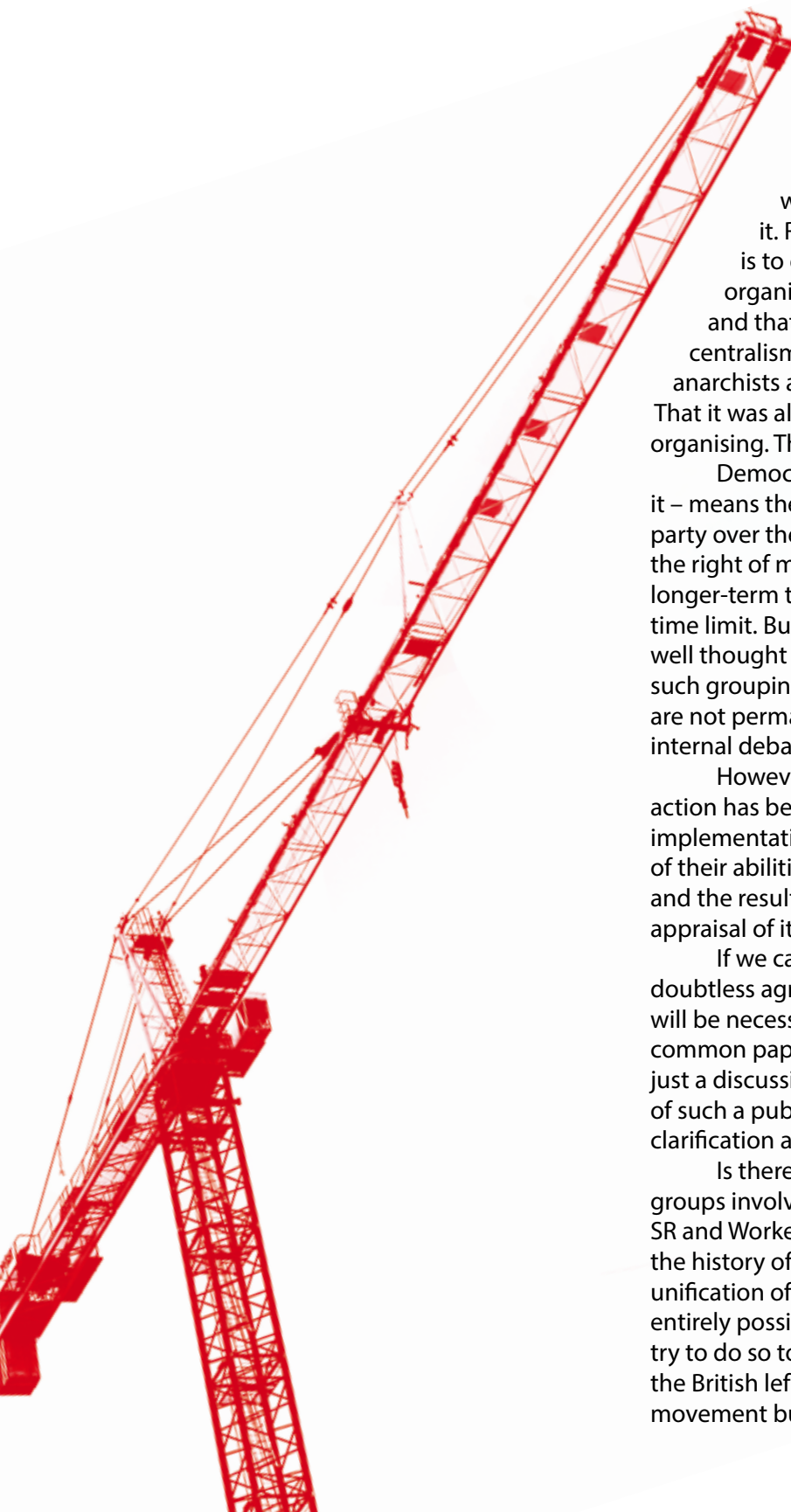
common immediate policy to defeat the coalition's attack on the post-war gains of the working class. The second – a far more difficult one it must be admitted – is to work towards creating a revolutionary party with a programme for working class power, drawing into its creation as many as yet unaffiliated working class and youth militants as possible.

What are the key policies we believe are needed today?

- Fight within the People's Assemblies to transform them from passive audiences for platform speakers to bodies representing the grassroots of the anti-cuts movement, capable of planning and coordinating action.
- Work in the unions from branch and local level upwards to stop the leaders' retreat and put strike action on the same day, escalating from one to several to all out action to halt the cuts and closures.
- Campaign to make the TUC call its promised "mid-week day of action".
- Work in the People's Assemblies, trades councils, unions and student bodies and local anti-cuts campaigns to get them to create delegate-based councils of action to coordinate the defence of our jobs and services.
- Build a rank and file movement in every union and across the unions to democratise the unions, taking action with the official leadership where possible, and without it where necessary.
 - Build an anti-fascist workers' united front to stop the marches and meetings of the EDL and the BNP, denying them any platform for their racist filth.
 - Support the autonomous student and youth organisation RevSoc and launch a publication and potentially



As well as a programme we need to debate what kind of organisation we need to fight for it



groups aimed at young and working class women – a sort of re-launched *Women's Voice*.

- Build international solidarity and pan-European action, especially with Greece, and with the resistance in the Arab world, especially Syria.

On such a basis we can prove ourselves capable of united and effective action in the class struggle. But this unity in action would not last beyond the present conjuncture unless it is accompanied by a serious and loyal debate, both internal and public, to establish the strategic questions that unite us and those still dividing us.

We should start by discussing the text of a short, focused revolutionary action programme – addressing the main challenges facing us today and showing how a revolutionary anticapitalist solution is the only one which can answer them.

As well a programme we need to debate what sort of organisation we need to fight for it. Recent events show all too clearly how vital it is to ensure that a pre-party just as much as a party organisation does not succumb to bureaucracy, and that means establishing genuinely democratic centralism. Apologists for capitalism, reformists and anarchists alike say that this is a contradiction in terms. That it was always a bureaucratic and undemocratic way of organising. This is not true.

Democratic centralism – as the Bolsheviks practised it – means the maximum of debate and discussion within the party over the correct strategy and tactics to adopt. It means the right of members to form temporary groupings, as well as longer-term tendencies and factions with no constitutional time limit. But an open and flourishing democracy and well thought out policies and tactics should also mean that such groupings spontaneously and voluntarily dissolve and are not permanent features, or even the “normal” way that internal debate is conducted.

However, when a decision on a policy or specific action has been reached, it requires disciplined unity in its implementation by all members in a loyal manner, to the best of their abilities. Then, once the campaign or battle is over and the results can be seen, it allows for full and democratic appraisal of it once again.

If we can reach an agreement on this matter – and doubtless agreements to differ and principled compromises will be necessary on all sides – we should try to create a common paper for intervention in the class struggle (not just a discussion forum, though this too). The editorial team of such a publication could greatly speed up the process of clarification and effective common work.

Is there a guarantee we will succeed in unifying the groups involved in the current discussion – the ISN, ACI, SR and Workers Power? No, there are no guarantees. But the history of the revolutionary movement proves that the unification of revolutionaries from different traditions is entirely possible, if it takes place on firm foundations. Not to try to do so today during an unprecedented time of flux on the British left – a crisis of leadership not only of the official movement but of the far left too – would be criminal.

IS THERE A NEW CRISIS OF WORK?

Stuart King, Anticapitalist Initiative



“Political economy considers the proletarian, ie the individual who, without capital or ground rent, lives entirely by his labour, only as a worker. It is able therefore to assert that the proletarian, just like a horse, need only so much as enables him to work. It does not consider him in his leisure time, as a human being...”

Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, Marx, 1844

In *Exchange No 1*, Manchester Plan C suggested there was “a crisis of work”. The argument is that “work despite being increasingly unavailable and unremunerative is held up as the only option”, yet “less and less labour is needed to produce more and more goods”. Therefore “work is increasingly unnecessary for the production of the things we need and want” and in any case the experience of work involves “misery” and “pointlessness”. So, the argument goes, we should abandon the mainstream left’s “anachronistic demands for job creation” and make a key demand “for a universal basic income that is unconditional on work and enough to live on”.

Now there is a large element of exaggeration here. Tens of millions of people do have jobs in the UK and certainly not all of them view them as “pointless” – most NHS workers, teachers, social workers and many public sector workers do not view their jobs in this way. It is dangerous to generalise workfare jobs or “McJobs” to the entire working population. And even many of the routine manual jobs – supermarkets, call centres, warehousing, assembly lines – which in themselves can be tedious and routine, involve a social interaction with other workers that provides some compensation in terms

of friendship and solidarity even apart from “the cash nexus” that links people to their jobs, the pay packet at the end of the month.

None of this is to say that as socialists we should ignore the often stultifying and restrictive nature of work under capitalism – and in raising this issue, an issue largely ignored by the modern left, Plan C does us a service. The question is, what can we change now and what will only really be changed after capitalism is overthrown and a totally new relationship between work and social production introduced?

Work and more work

We certainly should, as Plan C suggests, attack the ideology of the “work ethic” in the way it is used to drive people into any job and make them work longer and longer hours and at greater intensity. When I was at school in the 1960s (yes, that long ago!) there was much discussion about “training people for leisure”. Given the growing productivity of industry, in our generation and succeeding ones, we were told would have to work very little and have enormous amounts of time on our hands. It didn’t quite work out that way!

Not only do people have to work longer hours, but millions of women have been drawn into the workforce. A single wage is now not sufficient to bring in a decent living for a family, both partners have to work, reducing family time for children and leisure. The increase in retirement age to 68 plus is a further turn of the screw for a “work till you drop” culture.

Of course the modern family, at least those with reasonable jobs, has a “standard of living” miles above

those existing in the 1950s in terms of consumer goods – cars, central heating, fridge-freezers, washing machines, TVs, Xboxes, computers, dishwashers, mobile phones. Yet despite the falling real price of these goods due to increased productivity, people still have to work longer hours to acquire them. In other words, their wages have not reflected their productivity, they have worked harder and more intensively and the capitalists have carried off the resulting profits.

But is the answer to this intensification of work and exploitation the demand that Plan C puts forward, “for a universal basic income that is unconditional on work and enough to live on”? Does Plan C really want to make us all dependent on the state? Worse is the idea in the article that Universal Credit should be this stipend. Universal Credit will become the most hated state system for driving down benefits and swindling people out of them. Our only demand on Universal Credit should be to prevent its introduction and for its abolition.

The right to be lazy

If we want to tackle the questions of unemployment, intensification of labour, longer hours and alienation at work there are much better demands and policies we can put forward. For example in the 1880s a pamphlet called *The Right to Be Lazy* was a runaway success; it was written by a French Marxist, Paul Lafargue, Marx’s son-in-law.

It argued very similar things about the obsession with work amongst the French left and amongst the workers themselves. Lafargue said that instead of hammering on the bosses doors demanding the “right to work”, workers should be demanding the “right to leisure”, the sharing out of work and the ability to work no more than three hours a day. This, he argued, given the growth of machinery and productivity, should be quite possible

without declining living standards or loss of pay. And of course reducing the hours would solve the unemployment question – it would be a massive job creation scheme.

Of course this wouldn’t solve Plan C’s other objection to work, that it generally involves misery and stress for the worker. But surely here trade union organisation and workers action is a vital weapon. The intensity of work and control in Amazon-type warehouses and call centres is partly a result of workers not being organised, of being atomised in the face of management threats and demands. Even in schools, offices and hospitals, trade union organisation can protect and defeat attempts to increase the pressure and intensity of work.

But this is only a partial solution. The alienating nature of work is bound up with the nature of the system of production we live within – capitalism. As Marx pointed out in 1844, this system is not interested in the worker as human being but in the profit that can be extracted from the workforce. This means high intensity, repetitive and highly controlled long hours of work.

Under socialism we will still have to produce consumer and productive goods, fewer of them perhaps and of better and long lasting quality, but profit will not be the guiding principle of production. Someone will still have to dig the turnips in mid winter, weed the potatoes, clean the loos and work on the production lines. The hours will be shorter, which will help, machines will automate many tedious jobs and we won’t have a boss looking over our shoulder, all things which would make work more pleasant, and no doubt we will rotate many jobs.

More importantly we will have masses of leisure time to pursue the things we really want to do – which might well be “work” relieved of its capitalist label, or it might be the right just to be lazy.

The question is, what can we change now and what will only really be changed after capitalism is overthrown?





AUSTERITY AND THE POLITICS OF WORK

Darcy L

'What does the fight against cuts entail? Fundamentally, it is a struggle for subsistence and against the reduction of life-time to labour-time. The fight against cuts is in fact a fight for life, and for a life to be lived.' – Werner Bonefeld

British capitalism is in crisis – but it has been struggling on for a long time. According to various accounts, the rate of profit for British capital has either been falling since the 1970s or has been hugely reliant on the unproductive financial sector. In the context of the financial crisis, we saw a massive socialisation of debt in order to stave off the worst-case scenario. Now, we see the same socialised debt being used as a justification for the politics of austerity, which has meant massive attacks on welfare and public services; the social wage of the British worker is being eroded to a historically unprecedented degree, and it is all because of capital's unquenchable thirst for profit.

Capitalism is a system of generating wealth for a few through the relative immiseration of those who

work to produce those commodities (products and services) which are sold on the market. Workers are the sole creators of value, their hands being the ones that animate the entire circuit of capitalist accumulation. The labour of the worker becomes yet another commodity, albeit an absolutely central one, to this process of

accumulation. Through working more than they are paid, the labourer produces an entire range of useful products (and services) which can be exchanged for profit. The worker, quite simply, is not paid for what they produce, but for their power to produce. Hence, capitalism is a system entirely predicated upon the ability of labour to create commodities which can then be sold. Given this, it is evident that the extent to which these

The fight against austerity is a fight against the imposition of work as the only option open to us

workers are exploited will have a bearing upon the amount of wealth generated for the capitalist. The less the worker is paid in a wage (say for eight hours work), the more the capitalist keeps for themselves in terms of the value of the products created. This is the key to the entire capitalist process of accumulation.

Life-time and labour-time

Profit is the congealment of workers' time, their life-time, which is transformed into labour-time. Therefore, capitalism would prefer it if more of our life-time became transformed their labour-time, so that their wealth may increase. However, in order to achieve this end, the capitalist needs help and the state is in on-call to provide this help. Historically, the state has been utilised as a means of separating people from the means of subsistence, whether through bloody land appropriations or, as we see today, through the politics of austerity. The state, with its power over a particular bounded territory, can often do little to control capital which moves internationally. It can, however, attack those who have no option but to stay put – the public. The politics of austerity must be seen, therefore, as a strategy employed by the state against the working classes in order to resolve this recent economic crisis in favour of the forces of capital which demand the sacrifice of our time for the sake of their gain.

With this in mind, it is possible to suggest that austerity is proving, contrary to its moderate critics, successful. If one rejects, with good grounds, the notion that austerity is being implemented for the sake of debt/deficit reduction then we can claim that it is succeeding in immiserating the worker – which is a necessary prerequisite to renewed capitalist accumulation, especially in the context of a general

fall in the rate of profit for British capital. Austerity is achieving its aim of undermining the ability of the worker to resist and reject the exploitation inherent to work under capitalism. We have seen, since 2010 a 70% real reduction in workers' wages, with a further one third of the workforce facing nominal wage cuts and freezes.

Bourgeois economists of every hue put this down to the lack of skill on behalf of the working population, or to the general 'flexibility' of the workforce. The latter is correct, although the word 'flexible' does not quite do justice to what is actually going on. Throughout the 1980s union membership collapsed. From a highpoint of 13 million members (37% of the working population) in the early 1980s union membership fell to around 7.5 million (19%) in 2008. This shocking collapse in union membership has resulted in a greater vulnerability in work for

many people. However, the politics of austerity is the opening of another front. The state was once pressed into providing alternative means of subsistence outside of the wage-relation – the social wage – which includes services and benefits that the capitalist can do little to attack on their own.

Critical points

Crises are systemic features of the capitalist mode of production. They are necessary moments of

Benefits have been redesigned as a means of enforcing work regardless of its quality



value-destruction which enable the rehabilitated accumulation of capital which may be blocked in a variety of ways. As mentioned above, British capitalism has been in decline for many decades, of which crises are simply critical points. The falling rate of profit must be fought tooth and nail by the capitalists and their state manager allies. As such, we see in the current economic climate an assault on the social wage as a means of closing down alternatives to work outside of work. If no alternative means of subsistence exist outside of work, then work is the only option for labour to take – the Thatcherite slogan of ‘No Alternative’ takes on a perverse reality. Our most basic needs, which we must satisfy due to our being human, are used as a means of forcing exploitation upon us. The capitalists, who have long monopolised the means of subsistence, make us sell ourselves in order to subsist.

Without a social wage, the imperative to sell ourselves to capital becomes ever greater. Austerity, therefore, must be seen as a means of mobilising the reserve pool of labour, pushing them into the job market, creating considerable competition for jobs which are too few in number to satisfy us all. The infamous Jobseeker’s Allowance and workfare programmes are perfect exemplifications of this process. The fight against austerity is therefore a fight against the imposition of work as the only option open to us in order to continue subsisting.

Austerity, therefore, is a wholesale reduction of the state-provided means of subsistence which were won by the working class when we were organised and capable of resisting the inhuman demand of capital – accumulation at any cost. However, austerity is simply the politics of something much deeper. As argued above, with the

rate of profit falling year on year, capital is forced to squeeze its costs – one essential component of which is labour. Wages are reduced as a means of staving off liquidation. Benefits have been redesigned as a means of enforcing work regardless of its quality. Therefore, we have more and more people working several poor jobs in order to support themselves and their family. Growth, therefore, seems to promise liberation from this state of affairs. With the end of the recession, many hope for the days of boom, with job-creation and consequent wealth. However, exploitation is inherent to the very nature of work under capitalism.

What jobs promise is the continuing exploitation of the working class. This will happen even when (if?) austerity ends. With British capital in such a difficult position, it seems unlikely that work will return to us as a saviour. General immiseration both inside and outside of work is what capital demands for the continuing of accumulation in these strained times. Therefore, the only alternative to exploitation is the abolition of accumulation. Only through the abolition of capital, of private property, can promise freedom for the many who are, and will continue to be, exploited for the sake of profit. We must remember our goal in these times of generalised reaction – the overthrow of capitalism both in Britain and abroad.

The fight against austerity will only be won when the workers realise the importance of the social wage for their in-work wage. When the employed and unemployed, the working class as a class, unite against austerity, they unite against capitalist work. The Labour Party and other reformists are simply seeking an alternative means of increasing the rate of exploitation. Only organisations of the working class bring the promise of the end of exploitation which, under current conditions, means the end of capitalist work.



Queens of the Coal Age

Terry Conway

Next year, 2014, marks the 30th anniversary of the beginning of the Miners' Strike. The defeat of that dispute, which lasted almost twelve long months, profoundly shaped British politics over the following decades, especially in terms of the ability of trade unions to defend their members' interests. Maxine Peake's radio drama *Queens of the Coal Age*, broadcast by Radio 4 on 4 November, beat the rush 2014 may well bring in terms of commemorative culture.

In fact the events that Peake chronicles are not set in the strike itself but later in 1993 when 31 further pits were threatened with closure and four women, including Anne Scargill (former wife of then general secretary of the NUM and strike leader Arthur Scargill), occupied Parkside colliery in Lancashire for four long cold nights and days to try to prevent the closures.

In a fascinating interview on Radio 4's *Women's Hour*, Peake put it like this: "I've always wanted to write about aspects of the Miners' Strike that I felt had been under-explored. How the women mobilised, became the backbone of the strike and why they kept fighting. The 80s was the era women from mining communities became emancipated and found their voice. I was overwhelmed by their strength and courage." She explained that she chose to dramatise this episode, rather than something from the strike itself, because it focused on a single event and one which few knew about (www.maxine-peake.com has this interview and a number of other pieces about this drama).

Women Against Pit Closures brought women from the coalfield areas into political activity who had, in their majority, left school at sixteen, many of whom had not remained in paid work after having their first child and who had often not traveled beyond the nearest large town. But in order to defend their communities, which revolved round the pits, some of these women ended up speaking all over the world and most become an integral part of daily picketing and demonstrating.

The strike led to profound changes in people's lives because in order for women to become politically active, where previously there had been a rigid sexual division of labour with almost the entire responsibility for childcare and housework falling on women's shoulders, there now needed to be collective provision. Miners' welfare halls and the like became collective kitchens not only because it was cheaper to provide

meals for the entire community like that, but also because it was much easier to take turns on the picket line when others could keep an eye on young children.

It's true that much of this domestic labour was socialised between women during the strike rather than across the genders – if there were examples of the latter as seems likely they have not, as far as I am aware, been recorded. But collective provision made the point that that social reproduction was the responsibility of the whole community – and that women's political involvement shouldn't be held back by the willingness to co-operate of their male relatives or partners.

Such collective provision mirrored the sort of demands, such as free 24 hour nurseries, that socialist feminists had argued for as the key slogans around which the women's liberation movement should agitate. We understood that in order to win the fight for women's liberation it was necessary to overcome the sexual division of labour (and its apparent naturalness) in the home as well as that within the workplace.

We'd also hoped to see the ideas of the women's movement reach beyond the white collar jobs in which some of us worked, and the university campuses which for others had been the sites of our first radicalisation, to other places where working class women were found. We knew that although all women were oppressed through the sexual division of labour at home and at work, and all women suffered as of violence against women or the lack of ability to control our fertility, these burdens fell heaviest on working class women.

We'd tried to reach out to women organised at work around equal pay disputes at places like Fords or SEI, or around the right to organise at all (for example at Imperial Typewriters in Leicester in 1971), and formed some important connections, especially through the Working Women's Charter campaign. But it was the Miners' Strike which not only affected the relationship of forces in the labour movement as a whole in the decades that followed, but was also to have a profound effect on the battle for women's liberation.

Peake's drama itself brings alive the feisty spirit of the mining communities, in a close up portrait which shifts seamlessly from humour to more conscious philosophy and back. Peake's interview points out that women's humour expressed between ourselves is something the media usually ignores.



Peake's own portrayal of Anne Scargill was supported by working with Anne herself. On *Women's Hour*, Anne Scargill talks about her first experience of being strip searched – an experience which finds its way into the play to show in a graphic manner how the relationship between communities and the state shifted through the experience of fighting to defend jobs.

Previous to the strike these characters – and probably the overwhelming majority of people in mining communities – had assumed that the police were on their side, and that if people got “into trouble” with the law it was because they had done something wrong. The experience of the strike changed that profoundly. The drama, while set after the strike, gives us a close up of some of the “thousands of women who stepped out of their kitchens and out of their husbands shadows” to pursue what each of the characters in the play refers to as “the cause”.

If I have one reservation with the radio play it is that it is rather dismissive of any solidarity between women in the coalfields and the feminists that supported them, referring to us as middle class women eating bœuf bourguignon returning to our comfortable lives. That wasn't my experience of the lives of the majority of women who were active in miners' support groups across the country, or of the relationships built up when the twinning of pits with cities without coalfields led to close personal relationships of trust.

It is true that once the strike was over, inevitably some ways ways of being, relating and organising retreated back to the patterns familiar before. Anyone familiar with situations where people take enormous strides forward in their consciousness knows that not all those involved retain the lessons they gained in the struggle when they return to the humdrum of everyday

life. Some of us remain activists, revolutionaries, troublemakers – call us what you will – while others are absorbed back into the machine. And in some ways a defeat seems to make this more likely than a victory – the sense of “why should we bother sticking our heads above the parapet when we are going to lose anyway?” may be familiar for example to some of those whose first political involvement was the anti-war movement.

But the Miners' Strike was different in a number of ways. The fact that it lasted for such a long time meant that the changes went deeper than in some other cases. But also, paradoxically, the defeat of the strike itself meant that in fact traditional gender roles were less likely to be resumed than would have been the case after its victory. After the strike, many men who had been the sole breadwinners in so many families but whose only employment experience was down the now-closed pit found it impossible to find other jobs. It was more likely that women could find often part time employment, which was better than having no money coming in at all – but difficult to swallow for many who felt they were being thrown on the scrapheap.

It's frustrating that we don't know more about what happened to the people, including the women, whose lives were so altered by the strike. We know that some women remained politically active – and even during the strike itself some important links were made between Women Against Pit Closures and the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common (started in 1981). We know that some women went on to further their education through the Workers' Educational Association or in other places and that some relationships broke up. But it is all piecemeal – and it's impossible to know which of these things might have happened without the strike.

MUSIC

Lou Reed: Transgressive troubadour

Andy Richards

"One chord is fine. Two chords is pushing it. Three chords and you're into jazz."

Lou Reed, who died on 27 October, attracted tributes from a wider assortment of lefties than anyone I can remember for a long time. There's a message in there somewhere which Reed would no doubt have delighted in deconstructing.

I discovered Lou Reed almost by accident in my mid-teens, when I bought a copy of *Transformer*, his first hit album as a solo artist, mainly because it was produced by my real idol at the time, David Bowie. Though he admired and worked with Bowie, his work was very different. Where Bowie tended towards creating fantasy, Reed sang about the here and now; life as he experienced and observed it.

I was fascinated by the songs of the dark underbelly of New York on that album, and the realisation that this was music not destined for hours of airplay on the BBC – and music you didn't want your parents to know you were listening to! The songs were challenging and at times surreal – images of prostitution and drug use were interspersed with poems of real beauty about love and friendship, with even some humour thrown in. The album contained arguably his best-known songs, *Perfect Day* and *Walk on the Wild Side*.

My fascination inevitably led me back to the Velvet Underground, the band that Reed formed in the 60s with a Welsh viola player called John Cale, and which came under the tutelage of Andy Warhol. A band years ahead of its time.

The Velvet Underground were never commercially successful. The first album, produced by Andy Warhol, and featuring on vocals an Austrian model called Nico, sold just 30,000 copies. But, as Brian Eno remarked, "all of those 30,000 people formed a band".

In reality, the Velvet Underground's music did not fit with the music of the Summer of Love which was coming out of the west coast of the US in the mid to late 60s. Reed wrote and sang about "difficult" subjects – drugs, violence, pain, rejection, and a host of sexual themes, including transsexuality, well before Bowie ever got around to it. Today's stars are sexualised by big business to make money; Reed wrote and sang about sex honestly and on his own terms.

The music was mainly harsh guitar, leavened with Cale's screechy strings and Maureen Tucker's drums. There was always a sense that Reed was drawing on some of his own background. When he was in his teens his parents sent him for electro-convulsive therapy to "cure" him of his rebelliousness and "homosexual tendencies".

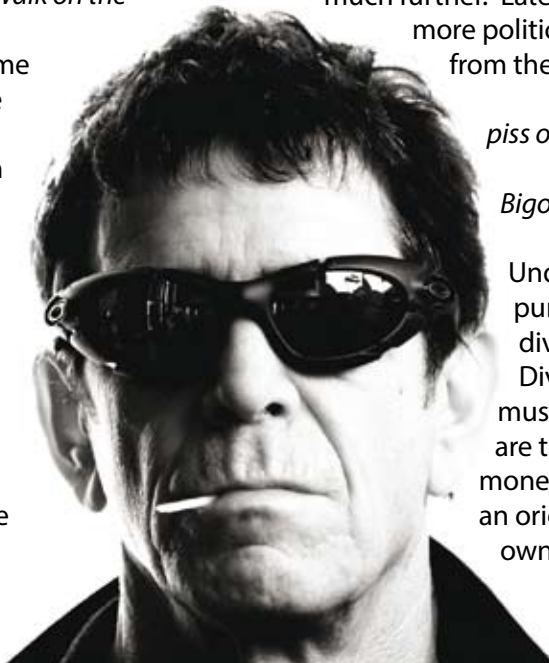
The Velvet Underground went on to make a number of albums and produced brilliant songs like *Sweet Jane*, *Heroin*, *I'm Waiting for the Man*, *Venus in Furs* and *Pale Blue Eyes*. They were also prolific live performers and concert albums (official and bootleg) are available. None of the albums sold but their influence is incalculable.

When Reed went solo he was happy to embrace glam rock for a time, but in reality his influence went much further. Later on, his work became noticeably more political in character with lines like this from the song *Dirty Blvd* -

*"Give me your tired your poor I'll
piss on 'em*

*That's what the Statue of
Bigotry says..."*

Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground can be heard in punk and in the work of artists as diverse as Bowie, Morrissey and Joy Division. In a time when popular music is "autotuned" and performers are treated as commodities to make money for corporations, Reed was an original, a one-off, who made his own rules.





anticapitalists.org
internationalsocialistnetwork.org
socialistresistance.org

THE EXCHANGE #3

a joint publication of debate and unity

The third issue of The Exchange focuses on ongoing struggles to build effective resistance to austerity, and the attempts to build unity across the left. The exchanges here try to look to the problems of the left and wider social movements – to ask how we might go forward, how we might contribute to the enrichment and revival of communist ideas, and how our work, in the here and now, can help to develop the left as a strong and serious force.



FREE
(donations welcome)