

**September 2013** ● Socialist Workers Party pre-conference

# BULLETIN 1

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# **SWP NATIONAL CONFERENCE, CENTRAL LONDON, 13-15 DECEMBER 2013**

**THIS BULLETIN IS FOR MEMBERS OF  
THE SWP ONLY AND IT SHOULD NOT BE  
DISTRIBUTED OR FORWARDED TO OTHERS.**

Dear Comrade,

Welcome to the SWP's Internal Bulletin 1 for our forthcoming conference. I hope you will read and consider the submissions and, if you wish, send in your own contribution.

**The deadlines for future submissions are:**

- IB2 9am Monday 14 October
- IB3 9am Monday 11 November

Please keep contributions as short as possible and send them to [charlie@swp.org.uk](mailto:charlie@swp.org.uk) (please do not send contributions to other email addresses). Comrades who send a contribution will receive an acknowledgement from the National Office within three working days. If the National Office has not acknowledged your contribution please contact us as soon as possible.

**Take part!**

We want conference to be a democratic event in which comrades can fully participate. Branches should make arrangements now to enable all members to be part of the conference discussion, and to make it possible for any member to put themselves forward as a delegate.

Every registered member with an email address on our system receives this and subsequent bulletins by email. But branches should also think about those comrades who do not have email, or require a printed copy. Printed versions of this bulletin can be ordered from the National Office at £1.50 each (the price rise is due to the size of recent IBs). Email your order to [charlie@swp.org.uk](mailto:charlie@swp.org.uk) or ring 020 7819 1170. Payment needs to be made in advance by card or cheque.

**Aggregates:**

These meetings, open to every member in a district, are where delegates to SWP Conference are elected. They are also a chance for every member to discuss our perspectives.

The only members who can be elected as delegates and take part in voting in aggregates are those who join before 16 September, the closing date for IB1. Anyone who joins after that is welcome to attend the aggregates, speak etc, but they can't vote or be a delegate.

Aggregate dates will be circulated in Party Notes. In addition each registered member will receive notification of their aggregate.

**Conference procedures:**

We want the greatest possible democracy and participation in the conference. The main method of discussion is through what we call commissions. These are documents drawn up at the end of conference sessions which summarise the main strands of discussion and action to be taken. These can be amended. And if there is more than one view in the discussion then there can be alternative commissions which are then voted on.

This method is democratic, transparent, flexible and open to the input of delegates.

It means that the very latest developments and the insights and arguments that appear in the debate can be reflected in the party's decisions.

Commissions allow delegates to listen to the experiences from the rest of the country, consider the arguments put forwards and then make decisions about what they think.

However it is not a method that people are used to for trade union or student union conferences. We will make sure it is fully and repeatedly explained at the conference.

*We also want districts to hold meetings after delegates are elected to introduce them to the way conference works and to deal with any questions in an unhurried atmosphere.*

Sometimes there's a need for more specific debates. These can usually take the form of commissions or amendments to commissions. But recently both the CC and other party bodies have submitted motions. These can be useful but should not be the main method of discussion. That should stay as the commissions.

The procedure for motions is:

- All motions must be passed in time for them to appear in one of the Internal Bulletins so that everyone is aware of them in advance. That means the final date for the submission of motions is the closing date for IB3 - 9am, Monday 11 November 2013. They must be passed by at least one properly-organised meeting of an SWP branch, or fraction, or district, or aggregate or the NC or the CC. Motions must be circulated well in advance (at least seven days) to allow comrades time to consider them.

- All amendments to motions must be in two weeks before conference - 9am on Friday 29 November 2013. They must go through the same process as for motions - passed by a properly organised meeting and with sufficient notice given.

- The fact that a branch or district or fraction passes a motion for debate at conference does not in any way mandate delegates who are part of that branch or district or fraction. Delegates are not mandated and have a free hand as to how they vote. It is perfectly possible to change your mind after hearing the debate: this is the strength of the commissions system.

- All motions and amendments should be sent to

charlie@swp.org.uk (please do not send contributions to other email addresses). Comrades who send a motion or amendment will receive an acknowledgement from the National Office within three working days. If the National Office has not acknowledged your contribution please contact us as soon as possible.

The Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) will receive the motions as they come in, and suggest in which section of the agenda they should be taken. Similar motions may be taken together (“composited”). The CAC proposals will be discussed at the start of conference. They can be challenged in the normal manner.

The CAC will also deal with objections such as “Fort William branch did not properly discuss this motion that has been submitted in our name” or “Maesteg branch submitted a motion but the national secretary has repressed it because it was critical of him” and report their decisions to conference – which can be challenged in the normal manner.

**Childcare:**

The question of childcare is an important one for all comrades, but particularly for women. Given we live in a society where the ruling ideas say that women are expected to bear the main burden of looking after children, it is women who are hit hardest when there is no consideration of this issue.

It is very difficult to provide a full crèche on the Marxism model for conference. At Marxism we use a combination of the (legally required) trained childcare workers and volunteers. It’s hugely expensive but we do it because we recognise that it’s necessary.

The cost is simply too high for us to provide that level of crèche for every party event.

But depending on the age/situation of the child involved, the delegate’s district could make provision to help, or a comrade could bring a friend to look after the child and be provided with a room at the event and some assistance, or the child could stay with someone else in London.

None of this is ideal, but it’s possible to sort out such issues. They have worked at recent conferences.

**Access:**

The conference venue is fully accessible. If there are any other needs that delegates require, please contact the National Office and we will seek to help.

If you have any questions about conference please contact charlie@swp.org.uk or phone 020 7819 1170 or write to PO Box 42184, London SW8 2WD.

**Charlie Kimber, SWP national secretary**

## GENERAL PERSPECTIVE

The SWP has faced the biggest internal crisis in the party since at least 1979-81. But we have also seen a series of very successful interventions in the class struggle.

We played a key role in Jerry Hicks' election campaign in Unite, the party moved quickly and had a high profile around Thatcher's death, we have been central to the fight against the bedroom tax. We had one of the most successful interventions into the union conferences for a number of years, both in shaping the conference debate and selling record numbers of Socialist Worker, holding well attended fringe meetings and enjoying good recruitment to the party.

We played a central role in UAF in resisting the attempt by the Nazis to go on the offensive after Woolwich and we moved quickly in response to the threat of an attack on Syria. Recruitment to the party has also been at a healthy level. Marxism, despite the boycott by some speakers, was nonetheless a real success, with an impressive range of outside speakers and non members and a high level of debate.

The focus for the party's internal crisis has been the Disputes Committee case. We don't intend to rehearse the arguments we had in the run up to the March Special Conference and the decisions supported by an overwhelmingly majority at that conference. However, one decision agreed at that conference was the establishment of a body of comrades to look at our disputes procedures and recommend any changes.

Their report is published in this IB and will be voted on, along with any amendments put forward, at the December conference. The CC supports the review report as a basis for discussion and we hope this process will go a long way to addressing any remaining concerns comrades have about the disputes process.

However, we have also strongly argued that the tensions in the party have been driven by much more than the DC case. They also reflect wider political questions even if these are not always candidly acknowledged.

Underlying these political debates has been an assessment of the character of the current period as one, especially in Britain, marked by retreat by the organised working class which in turn reflects a working class whose power and consciousness has been much more badly damaged by neoliberalism than we have been prepared to recognise to date.

This sense of frustration about the lack of a decisive breakthrough by the working class and left has been reinforced by international events. The onset of the Great

Recession in 2008 did not lead immediately to widespread mass revolts.

The year 2011 marked a major turning point in this respect - with an upsurge of revolt on a scale and with a global reach that seemed to carry echoes of previous waves of international revolt and revolution such as 1848, 1917-23, and 1968. Greece's repeated general strikes, the indignados movement occupying Spain's square, Occupy Wall Street, and above all the Arab revolutions that overthrow dictators in first Tunisia, then Egypt, and then flowed to Libya, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen.

Britain too was not immune with a year marked by a mass student rebellion in 2010 followed by a huge trade union demonstration, riots across England's cities and some 2.5 million public sector workers on strike in November.

But more than two years later, the hopes inspired by the revolts of 2011 and seem misplaced to many as austerity continues across the eurozone and Britain, and the counter-revolution gathers confidence in the Middle East. This has given rise to a "new pessimism" among sections of the left, and this has had an echo inside the SWP. But it would be a huge mistake to conclude that the process of radicalisation and revolt is in retreat on a global scale.

There is no simple, direct, relationship between crisis and resistance. The political situation we face is one marked by contradiction, instability and rapid shifts. There is neither a pattern of relentless advance for our side or nor just endless defeats.

Writing in 1928, Trotsky contrasted the period that preceded the First World War with the years that followed. Before the war there was an "the organic accumulation of contradictions which, so far as the internal class relations of Europe are concerned, almost never overstepped the bounds of legal struggle."

In contrast the period that followed the war possessed "an explosive character", marked by "abrupt changes of the political flows and ebbs", with "constant spasmodic class struggle" and "frenzied oscillations of the political situation towards the Left and towards the Right."

The period today contains elements of the second period Trotsky identified. A key conclusion that Trotsky drew was that such a period of rapid shifts and transformations placed an even greater premium on political leadership and revolutionary socialist organisation.

### Global economy: in the slow lane

The key reason for deepening political volatility, and the constant renewal of the potential for struggle and radicalisation, is the entrenched nature of the global economic crisis.

This is true despite the fact that signs,

however meagre, of economic growth across the advanced economies have led to increasing talk of recovery. The US central bank, the Federal Reserve, has even begun to signal moves to wind down its massive \$85 billion per month bond-buying programme. Yet talk of sustained recovery across the US, Japan and the Eurozone is as yet misplaced.

While the US economy is growing, it is experiencing the weakest recovery from recession on record. The unemployment rate fell slightly to 7.3 percent in August but the key reason was that over 300,000 people gave up the search for work and withdraw from the labour market.

The Economy Policy Institute estimates that there are 3.8 million "missing workers" in the US, who have dropped out, or never entered, the workforce due to the Great Recession.

In the middle of this year the eurozone came out of an 18 month long recession that began in late 2011. But any recovery remains uneven and fragile. Indeed, Eurozone industrial production fell in July, while the picture across Southern Europe remains one of deep crisis, with depression-like conditions in Greece and Spain.

Greece has now been in recession for five years with GDP more than 20 percent below its 2008 level and unemployment at 28 percent (and at a staggering two out of three for those aged 15-24 not in education).

Nor has Greece's brutal "internal devaluation" succeeded in reducing its public debt, which is now higher than when the Troika arrived to impose austerity. Wolfgang Schäuble, the German finance minister, has talked about a third bailout in exchange for a further round of cuts. In Spain, unemployment stands at 6 million, out of a population of 47 million. Italy, the eurozone's third biggest economy, remains in recession after two years, even if the rate of contraction has slowed, and has public debt levels second only to Greece in the eurozone.

The move last year by Mario Draghi, the head of the European Central Bank, to "do whatever it takes" to save the euro, helped reduce the borrowing rates for Southern European governments which were reaching unsustainable levels. But Europe's banks remain chronically weak, weighed down by huge toxic debts. As the economist Barry Eichengreen has put it, "Doing just enough to prevent the eurozone from collapsing is not the same as setting the stage for sustainable growth."

China, the world's second largest economy, continues to grow at a pace that the US, Eurozone or Japanese economy can only dream of. China has provided an crucial engine of growth during the global crisis, but its growth rate is slowing. The Chinese state responded to the crisis with a massive stimulus programme in 2008-9 which led to an investment boom in infrastructure, property and factories.

While underpinning continued growth it has come at the expense of accumulating major problems in the form of a property bubble, massive overcapacity across a range of industries from shipyards to solar manufacturing, and a banking system increasing weighed down by bad debt.

Currency and stock market turmoil has hit India, Indonesia, South Korea, Brazil, Turkey, Ukraine and others in recent months. This reflects that fact that growth in these economies has been at least partly due to the huge expansion of credit by Western central banks, much of which has flowed into speculative bubbles in emerging economies. The IMF has expressed fears that countries such as India or Brazil could face the kind of "credit crunch" that hit the West in 2007-8 as banks refused to lend to businesses or each other.

Marx argued that crises are inbuilt into capitalism. Neither his, nor our, view is that this leads to permanent slump. Capitalism also has inbuilt mechanisms for resolving crises, the most important of which is the way the crisis itself drives up unemployment and lowers wages, pushing down raw material costs and driving weaker, less profitable, capitals out of business.

Some of this has taken place, especially the shifting some of the cost of the crisis onto workers' shoulders through austerity and wage squeezes. But the destruction of capital has been on too limited a scale, so far at least, to lay the basis for a healthy recovery and a new round of robust accumulation in the core of the system. Hence all the talk of "zombie" banks and firms, kept alive despite weak profits and cash flow or even underlying bankruptcy.

The Marxist economist Michael Roberts describes the world economy as facing a period of "slow crawl" and draws a parallel with the period of low growth interspersed between more acute phases of the crisis in 1932-37 or the 1880s during the Long Depression. All this means that the pressures on working class living standards and the erosion of the "social wage" are likely to continue and in turn continue to place enormous pressure on the political and social structures built up in the preceding decades. There will be both austerity and explosive responses to austerity.

## Volatility, revolt and politics

This explains why the pattern of sudden upsurges of mass revolt and upheaval continues. Two recent examples stand out. In Turkey, protests over the development of Istanbul's Gezi park in the early summer turned into mass demonstrations against Erdogan's ruling Islamist administration. An estimated one million people took the streets across 77 cities.

In Brazil, at almost the same time, demonstrations over bus and train fare hikes became a mass revolt about poor public services and rising inequality. Both Turkey

and Brazil had been held up as success stories, transformed by rapid economic growth over the last decade that had allowed for relative social peace. The sudden eruption of protests on such a scale pointed to the deep bitterness below the outward calm and political stability.

But the events in Brazil and Turkey also underlined the reality that questions of politics, leadership and organisation are not simply banished by mass revolts. In both cases a variety of forces, including Kemalist nationalists in Turkey and the previously despondent political right in Brazil, intervened in the movements and sought to shape them. Seamus Milne, writing in the Guardian, put it well,

"In the era of neoliberalism, when the ruling elite has hollowed out democracy and ensured that whoever you vote for you get the same, politically inchoate protest movements are bound to flourish. They have crucial strengths: they can change moods, ditch policies and topple governments. But without socially rooted organisation and clear political agendas, they can flare and fizzle, or be vulnerable to hijacking or diversion by more entrenched and powerful forces."

The question of politics has also come sharply to the fore in the Arab revolutions, above all in Egypt. The mass killing of supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood by the army represents a significant and dangerous advance by the counter-revolution.

Key to its ability to do so has been a double failure of reformist politics. Firstly, the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood in office to deliver on the aspirations of the revolution. Instead, its record was one of neoliberal policies, increasingly authoritarian actions and protection of the army's privileges. But the army's ability to exploit the gathering discontent with the Brotherhood also depended on the liberal-left opposition forces, grouped around the National Salvation Front, which had given political cover to the army's actions.

The revolution has not been snuffed out. Millions have tasted their collective power, and none of the underlying demands of the revolution for "bread, freedom and social justice" have been, or can easily be, satisfied. In particular, the workers' movement leapt forward over the past 18 months, with Egyptian workers engaging in the highest level of strike action anywhere in the world. Since the generals took over in government the number of strikes has slumped, although this may not continue for long.

But the army repression directed against the Brotherhood, and increasingly against striking workers and revolutionary activists, demonstrate a real danger, and underline the fact that revolutions do not simply inexorably advance but must overcome major political challenges if they are not to face serious setbacks and retreats.

## Polarisation in Europe

The process of political polarisation in Europe continues with the rise of both radical left forces, notably Syriza in Greece but also the Front de Gauche in France, the rise in support for the Socialist Party in the Netherlands or the Red Green Alliance in Denmark, as well the rise of the far right whether in "Euro-fascist" guise (the Front National in France) or openly Nazi (Golden Dawn in Greece).

The pattern of workers' struggles in Europe is still one of episodic one (or occasionally two) day mass strikes punctuated increasingly by militant sectional action. So in Portugal both major union federations held a one day general strike in late June, the same month saw a major education strike in Spain and a two day general strike in Greece was due in mid-September. Denmark also saw a major teachers' lock out in the spring.

As Joseph Choonara explained in ISJ 138 ("Class Struggles in Europe") though the overall picture is not yet one of a sustained rise in workers' militancy, there is a "developing cycle of struggle".

Crucially, the interplay between official action and rank and file initiative, with continued pressure on the trade union bureaucracies to call strikes, offers the potential to rebuild working class confidence and rank and file organisation, a process that has gone furthest in Greece.

## US imperialism: damaged by the past

The use of chemical weapons in Damascus in late August saw the Obama administration move towards a military attack on the Syrian regime.

Yet the events that followed - Cameron's defeat in the House of Commons for his motion paving the way for British participation in such an attack, Obama's decision, largely in response, to go to Congress and postpone what appeared to be imminent missile strikes, and then faced with mounting difficulties in securing a majority in Congress, the acceptance of a Russian initiative to pursue a diplomatic strategy and put military action on the backburner, at least for now.

These events underline the scale of the defeat that US (and British) imperialism suffered in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s.

The neo-cons who shaped George W. Bush's administration saw wars in the Middle East as a means to re-assert US power in a key strategic region and enable the US to decisively shape a "new American Century", thus ensuring continued US hegemony, despite relative economic decline, against emergent rivals.

Instead, the failure to break mounting resistance to occupation in both

Afghanistan and Iraq has left US imperialism considerably damaged. Obama's presidency has been marked by a drive to extract the US from land wars in the Middle East combined with a "pivot" towards Asia, where China is increasingly translating its rising economic power into greater regional influence.

Obama has largely avoided intervention in Syria since the revolution and civil war began two and half years ago. Whereas much of the left has viewed the events in Syria through the lens of a presumed mighty US imperialism and a (at best) puny revolutionary impetus from below, in truth what has been striking is the real limits of the US's ability to shape events in Syria, especially in the face of a popular revolution that it has feared may represent a greater challenge to its interests than the Assad regime itself.

The legacy of Iraq has created divisions in the US ruling class over the risks of military action - with Democrats and the Republicans both deeply split - and mass popular hostility to a new Middle East war (an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll in the US found 58 percent opposed to military action over Syria, with just 33 percent in favour).

Mass anti-war feeling was critical in Britain too. Indeed Cameron was forced to bitterly acknowledge this fact during the debate on Syria in parliament when he conceded that Iraq had "truly poisoned the well of public opinion".

The Labour Party was particularly scarred by the experience of Iraq and Miliband faced a growing internal revolt over his initial willingness to go along with Cameron's support for military action.

His decision to express some reservations about the rush to action, and demand at least some attempt to go to the UN to strengthen the legitimacy of any military action, fractured the normal bi-partisan consensus in parliament over war for the first time since the Suez crisis in 1956-7.

This both reflected the wider anti-war mood in society (with polls showed up to 74 percent opposing military action) and allowed it have a much greater impact.

As against those on the left, and again echoed by some in the SWP, who argued that opposition to war in Syria was as much an expression of nationalist "isolationism" as anti-imperialism, it is important to stress that the great legacy from the huge mobilisations by Stop the War over Iraq is how deeply anti-war arguments (as well as arguments over Palestine, the credibility of intelligence provided by the security services, opposition to Islamophobia and so on) have been driven into British society.

It is important that we remain involved in Stop the War on both a national and local level, even if its mobilising capacity has not been on anything like the same scale as 2002-4.

On Syria we argue for two things. Firstly, that Stop the War, as a broad united

front, should continue to hold its current position of opposing any Western intervention without taking any position over the internal political situation in Syria. Secondly, as revolutionary socialists we oppose military intervention and support the ongoing revolution against the regime.

## Britain: In recovery?

The major blow to Cameron's authority represented by the government's defeat over Syria came just as the Coalition appeared more confident in claims that its policy of austerity was finally bearing fruit. It is true that the British economy avoided a triple dip recession and has started growing again, expanding by 0.7 percent in the period April to June this year. The mood of despair that surrounded George Osborne earlier in the year, when Britain suffered the ignominy of two rating agencies downgrading the UK's triple 'A' credit rating, appears to have evaporated.

Yet recent growth is from a very low base. Over five years after the onset of recession, output has still not returned to pre-recession levels, with the economy still 2.7 percent smaller than in January 2008. As a recent paper from the Institute of Fiscal Studies noted, "Five years after the beginning of the recessions of the early 1980s and early 1990s, and indeed at a similar stage even in the 1930s, output was once again growing rapidly and had surpassed pre-recession levels." ("This Time is Different", Fiscal Studies, 2013)

The Coalition originally conceived growth returning based on a "sustainable" and "re-balanced" economy with burgeoning private sector investment, revived industrial production and driven by exports thanks to a lower sterling. In fact, UK industrial output was flat in July and export to countries outside the European Union fell sharply in the same month while business investment has slumped.

The uptick in the economy comes rests particularly in the service sector and there are signs that its is underpinned by a new bubble property centred on London and the South East, encouraged by the government's Help for Lending and other schemes, and rising consumer debt.

Osborne's attempt to reap political benefit from signs of growth are likely to founder in the face of the unprecedented squeeze on workers' living standards. The Great Recession has not just lasted longer than its predecessors in the 1990s, 1980s and 1930s but has also had affected the working class differently. Unemployment has risen, but by less than it did in the early 1980s and 1990s and there has been a substantial fall in wages, with real wages 6 percent lower at the end of 2012 compared to the beginning of 2008.

In these circumstances, triumphalism about the talk end of recession (the London Evening Standard even ran a headline over

the summer proclaiming "Boom Britain") is liable to only increase bitterness among workers and encourage further resentment towards continued austerity and wage squeezes.

The government remains weak. One important aspect of the failure by Cameron to win a vote in parliament paving the way for British support for a military strike on Syria is the lack of command he is able to exercise over his own party. Over 30 Tory MPs voted against the government while another 31 (including several ministers) failed to vote. The ultimate roots of this weakness is Cameron's failure to deliver a majority for the Tories at the last election, with a section of the party particularly bitter that this was despite Cameron's "modernisation" drive to distance the Tories from its Thatcher's legacy.

## Class struggle in Britain: New possibilities

The overall level of resistance to the government and employers remains, of course, too low. In 2012 there were 248,000 working days "lost" to strikes in Britain according to official figures, down from 1,389,700 in 2011. Overall the number of strikes remains dramatically lower than during the 1970s and 1980s. Total trade union membership stood at 6.5 million in 2012, a slight increase of 59,000 over the previous year, though of course at half the 1979 peak of 13 million. Trade union membership fell sharply in the 1980s and early 1990s, mainly due to job losses among unionised workers, but membership stabilised from the mid-1990s until 2007.

Overall trade union density is at 56.3 percent in the public sector (3.9 million) and 14.4 percent in the private sector (2.6 million). Despite the fall in trade union membership, the overall proportion of workers in unions is higher than it was before the two of the decisive upsurges in working class militancy in the last century - The Great Unrest in the run up to the First World War and the years that immediately followed the War in 1919-20.

The central reason for the relatively low level of fightback is for two reasons. Firstly, the failure of the leadership of both the unions and Labour Party to offer an alternative that matches the scale for the crisis and mood of bitterness among large numbers of workers. Secondly, workers on the whole have lacked the confidence to act without an official lead.

The immediate phase of the class struggle continues to be shaped significantly by the mass public sector strike on 30 November 2011, when 2.5 million workers struck over pensions, and 19 December 2011, when a group of unions leaders from the biggest unions moved to accept a deal to avert any repeat of "N30", and in turn diminishing the mood to fight among union

leaders in more left led unions - particularly the NUT and PCS.

It is a mistake, however, to see the resulting faltering and retreat of the strike movement as reflecting any decisive sense of defeat among workers, let alone a new "downturn". Instead, bitterness at the squeeze on living standards and assault on public services means that there are still major pressures on union leaders to call action against the onslaught on conditions, wages and pensions. This is creating significant new possibilities on the industrial front and signs that we may be entering a new phase after the setbacks of the abandonment of the pensions battle.

And talk of "recovery", however misplaced, can encourage workers to say "if the crisis is over where's my share of growth", stoking the mood for a fight on pay.

A renewed round of strikes by public sector workers could in turn act as a major focus and encouragement to workers in the private sector. Any disdain for supposedly privileged and conservative public sector workers is highly misplaced.

The two biggest teaching unions, the NUT and NASUWT, have called regional strikes for 1 October (Yorkshire, Midlands, East England) and 17 October (London, South East, North East and South West), and there is pressure for a national teachers' strike across England in November. This builds on the successful strike in late June by teachers across the North West of England, which also saw sizeable marches and rallies in Manchester (5,000), Liverpool (2,000) and Preston (1,000).

The CWU has been holding reps' meetings in the run to a ballot of its 125,000 members in Royal Mail and Parcellforce over the threat to pay, conditions and pensions from the government's plans to privatise Royal Mail - something even Margaret Thatcher shied away from. A third potential confrontation between a group of workers and the government also looms in the fire service, where firefighters in the FBU have voted four to one for industrial action, including strikes, over attacks on the pension contributions and a plan to raise their retirement age. The PCS union has also been carrying out a consultation over further industrial action over pensions, pay and jobs and the executive will meet in October to discuss the outcome. There is also the potential for the UCU and Unison to ballot for action in Higher Education.

There are a number of points to be made here.

i) The moves to action reflect a mood to fight among significant layers of workers. This is placing pressure on union leaders to offer some resistance to the bosses and the government. The rank and file may not feel confident in general to act independently of the officials but they are still able to have an impact. This puts pressure on the union leaders to give some expression to

that mood. So the TUC in September was dominated by talk of coordinated strikes, a re-affirmation of "consideration" of a general strike and support for a midweek day of action. Even Unison's Dave Prentis had to tell the press that strikes over pay were inevitable at some point. He said, "No pay policy has ever lasted in this country for more than four years before there has been an explosion. My very, very strong view is that by the end of this pay cycle into 2014 there will be major action around pay. It will be coordinated."

None of this means the union leaders will act decisively, but they provide an echo, at a remove, of the mood on the shop-floor among workers.

ii) When an official union lead is given, it gets a major echo among workers who want to fight but lack the confidence to do so independently.

iii) In none of these cases are strikes inevitable. Unions leaders may well still look to using ballot results and the threat of action to secure deals that avert action.

iv) The failure to build on N30 and to lead a serious, sustained fightback in the period since, has led to an important degree of differentiation among a minority of workers and even the left wing officials. This was most visible in the 36 percent of the vote Jerry Hicks received for Unite general secretary against Len McCluskey at the start of 2013 but is also underlined by the 42 percent of the vote for SWP member Ian Bradley in a by-election for a seat on the Unite executive, running against a McCluskey supporter.

But was also a thread that ran through many of this year's union conferences, with around 40 percent of delegates at the NUT conference, for example, opposing the executive's decision not to call a national strike. Unison's Local Government executive faced widespread criticism from conference delegates over its failure to give a lead over pay.

The same tension between union leaders and a layer of activists was also evident at the 2,000-strong CWU rally in Birmingham to build for the union's strike ballot, as some CWU reps argued that the union leadership had been wrong to call off national strikes in 2009 and that a different approach will be needed in the fight over privatisation.

Turning potential industrial battles into reality, arguing for a programme of action that increases the prospect of winning, including a strategy that doesn't just talk about pay and conditions but presents any strikes as part of a wider political fight for public services is a key task for socialists in those unions and from the outside (we should try to re-establish sales at postal depots where these have dropped off, for example).

We should also argue for solidarity with any strikes that take place, for co-ordinating action wherever possible and for the motion at the TUC for a mid-week demonstration to be turned into a reality.

There are two important stepping stones if we are to turn the potential into reality. Firstly, we want to fight to ensure the biggest possible turnout for the TUC backed demonstration outside the Tory party conference in Manchester on 29 September.

Secondly, the Unite the Resistance conference in London on 19 October. UtR is not an alternative to the kind of broad anti-austerity campaign that the Peoples' Assemblies is focused on, rather it is attempting to home in on the specific role that the unions can play in the resistance. This fits for two reasons. Firstly, the number of potential ballots and strikes together with a rash of local disputes taking place and how we can maximise solidarity and co-ordination of disputes. Secondly, the existence of a minority in the unions who want to go further than the union leaderships and understand that it is not enough to simply rely on the union leaders.

We cannot yet build national rank and file organisation - something which, however desirable in the abstract, has no real basis in reality currently. UtR works with those sections of the left officials who are heading up a fight as part of strengthening workplace organisation and rank and file confidence. But the desire for a generalised fightback and a layer of activists who sense a gap between the union leaders' words and deeds, means that UtR can play an important role in drawing together activists inside the working class. Such networks can organise real solidarity to any fightback that does take place.

It is not just big strikes that are on the agenda. Though the overall level of strikes remains low, a number of important local disputes have been taking place over the last few months. Workers at Hovis in Wigan, have forced management to end zero hour contracts for directly employed staff (the strike is continuing over the use of agency staff). Construction workers at Crossrail won a major victory over the blacklist with the re-instatement of sacked union rep Frank Morris. The last few weeks have also seen a flurry of local disputes in the CWU and a 5-day strike against pay cuts at One Housing.

Any industrial confrontations will also raise the question of Labour, its relationship to the unions and what a future Labour government will offer. Ed Miliband's attacks on the unions' role in the Labour party is also creating an important debate inside the unions about the direction Labour is taking and what the alternative is. The decision to investigate Unite's role in the candidate selection process in Falkirk, at the prompting of Blairites like Peter Mandelson and the Tory press, and then to announce a special conference next March to vote to change the relationship between the party



and affiliated trade union members has provoked real anger in parts of the trade union bureaucracy. Miliband is looking to create a relationship with Labour supporting trade unionists that is both less mediated by the trade union bureaucracy and more individualised.

It is unclear whether in practice it will reduce the party's dependence on union finance, as any fall off in the affiliated levy will go into the union's general political funds which can still be given to Labour, but only at the discretion of the union. But the union leaders resent Miliband joining in an attack on their right to have a political voice and fear that the ultimate agenda may be to further reduce their 50 percent vote at Labour's conference and their 33 percent vote in the election for Labour's leader, though Miliband appears to have retreated from this for the time being.

The decision of the GMB to cut their affiliation fees to Labour from £1.2 million to £150,000 underlines the depth of anger felt by some union leaderships. The row between the unions and the Labour leadership in a situation where there is widespread disquiet about Labour's acceptance of much of the government's austerity agenda - including its spending plans for 2015-6, the first year of the next government - deepens debate about political representation. This particularly revolves around whether Unite under Len McCluskey might, at some future point, abandon attempts to shift Labour left and break to create a new party.

A deepening debate over working class and trade union political representation is a favourable one for revolutionary socialists should intervene in. Strikes by postal workers, or by teachers or firefighters are all certain to raise sharp questions about the attitude of the Labour leadership and what workers can expect from a Labour government and underline the need to fight now and not wait to 2015.

Though there has been no generalised revival of the anti-cuts movements, over both the bedroom tax and the NHS we have seen major campaigns. The huge demonstrations around the NHS in Lewisham, Stafford and the Whittington point to the deep opposition to the government's drive to implant the market ever deeper into the health service - and over Lewisham and Whittington have forced government retreats.

The bedroom tax campaign has seen the most significant fightback of the government's assault on the welfare state so far. Very large numbers of tenants are not paying some or all of the shortfall in their rent resulting from the bedroom tax, putting councils and housing associations under real pressure. They will have to decide if they are going to start evicting tenants - something for which there is likely to be a high political price and mass opposition.

The government was clearly rocked by the report of the UN Rapporteur into

housing who called for the bedroom tax to be abolished and Ed Miliband is under increasing pressure to commit Labour to repealing it if he wins in 2015. The campaign has also seen a new layer of working women tenants emerge as leaders. The SWP has been at the heart of the campaign and it offers the opportunity to deepen our roots in working class communities.

The Peoples Assemblies have attracted very large audiences - not just the 4,000 who attended the national one in London but many of the subsequent regional events have also continued to be large (over 500 in Liverpool, 200 in Norwich, for example).

The PA project has received a powerful resonance for a number of reasons. It reflects the desire of large numbers of people to see a greater fightback against austerity. The collapse of the pensions dispute, the subsequent weakness of industrial struggle over the last 18 months and the revival of anti-cuts protests around both the bedroom tax and the NHS this year have meant that a broad anti-austerity initiative has fitted many people's experience more than one focused on the unions. It also reflects the fact that when a section of the official leadership move to express that mood - crucially Len McCluskey, the key backer of the PA initiative - then it gets a strong resonance.

But the PA also contains a number of faultlines. In particular the role of the union leaders in the project raises the question not just of street protests against austerity but of strikes, a much sharper test for the union leaders.

As Charlie Kimber wrote in the June issue of Socialist Review, "The role of the bureaucracy is one of the reasons why putting together a 'united front against austerity' is different to a united front against fascism or the 'war on terror'. The union leaders' role in the battle against cuts and job losses is much more direct than their role in the fight against the Nazis or the opposition to imperialist intervention."

A second, related, faultline is over the question of Labour and whether it offers an alternative. SWP members got a real hearing at the PAs when they have welcomed the initiative but took up both the need for the strikes and were critical of Labour's embrace of austerity. We should continue to participate in the PAs and be part of initiating and shaping local events. But we also want to take up the arguments about the most effective form of any fightback and the need to build a movement independent of Labour.

McCluskey's role in the PA reflects more broadly his drive to rebuild the Labour Left. For the first time since the disintegration of Bennism in the 1980s, there are signs of a revival of the Labour left. The rise of Owen Jones has a highly popular commentator and speaker is another expression of this. A key aspect of McCluskey's strategy is to reach out to activists across the movement and to seek to pull them towards Labour.

This was given expression, for example, by Owen Jones when he called for a new movement not a new party - because a party already exists in the form of Labour. This was coupled with an attack on the SWP in particular and Leninism more generally.

A rival project to McCluskey's is that of Left Unity, initiated by a call from Ken Loach and others to form a new party of the left. This has received a considerable echo, with over 9,000 signing a statement in support of this idea. The success of Syriza, and the radical left in Europe more generally, as well as the paucity of Ed Miliband's challenge to austerity, has contributed to the interest in a new left of Labour party.

Though it is still unclear how this will develop, we should seek to work with Left Unity in local campaigns and look for electoral agreement between Left Unity and TUSC and other left forces to avoid standing against each other in next May's local council elections. These elections which will take place in the big cities offer a much more favourable terrain for the left than the country council elections earlier this year.

The continuing debate inside the working class movement about political representation, one that may well grow even sharper if Labour is returned to office in 2015, mean that it is important the SWP continues to seek opportunities to stand in elections.

Unlike the approach too often taken by the Socialist Party, we favour standing where we have credible, well rooted local candidates and are able to run a serious campaign that has a realistic prospect of securing a respectable vote. Decisions about where to stand should be taken in consultation with the SWP national office.

More generally, we need a dialectical approach to the revival of left reformism in Britain and internationally. As a break politically, and in some cases organisationally, from the mainstream of social democracy and its embrace of neo-liberalism, it helps to shift political and ideological debate to the left, something that is highly favourable. But left reformism has also acted to put pressure on revolutionary socialists to abandon building independent revolutionary organisations (as we saw for example in Greece last year with a chorus of calls for Antarsya to join Syriza, for example) and this is something that has to be resisted even as we seek to engage left reformists in united front against austerity or the Nazis.

## Threat from the Right

The deployment of UKBA police to a number of transport hubs around London and the south east over the summer and the Home Office's racist "Go Home" vans is a sign that immigration is being pushed up the political agenda. We are likely to see a bidding war between the parties over immigration, especially in the run to the

European elections next year.

The electoral breakthrough by Ukip in the country council elections this year marked a major development in British politics. Ukip is not a fascist party, but for the first time a right wing populist party has established itself as a significant force. Ukip has moved beyond its initial focus just on the European Union and used Islamophobia and the scapegoating of immigrants to pick up particularly, though not only, disillusioned Tory voters. This in turn will further encourage the Tories to whip up anti-immigrant sentiment and Labour has shown little sign that it will do anything other than accommodate to such arguments.

There was a major upsurge in Islamophobia in the wake of the killing of soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich in May. This breathed new life into the EDL. As we outline in a separate CC document, UAF was critical to containing and limiting the advances the EDL were able to make. Building UAF locally and nationally is a key task for us over the coming months.

## The SWP

The political issues that underlie the ferocity of the faction disputes that broke out around the Disputes Committee case have become even clearer since the March conference. The politics of the group that left with Richard Seymour and who now form the International Socialist Network represent an abandonment of Leninism and a scepticism about the potential for the organised working class to resist austerity. Seymour, for example, told a meeting of the ISN that neoliberalism now dominates working class consciousness, indeed is in workers' "souls".

But wider political arguments also lie just below the surface among the organised opposition inside the party. Indeed, the former secretary of the IDOOP faction, wrote in a document in the run up to the last Party Council that a "wider malaise" afflicted the party beyond the DC issue.

A series of arguments have begun to emerge on the opposition blog and at Marxism. These focus around the character of the period, the impact of neoliberalism on the shape and power of the working class, how the working class movement can be rebuilt, the nature of oppression and feminism, anti-fascist strategy, the relevance of Leninism in the 21st century, and our approach to both the Peoples Assembly and Left Unity.

The roots of this crisis lie in the period that since the great anti-capitalist demonstration at Seattle in 1999 has seen recurrent mass movements, shaped by an anti-capitalist mood, but where the collective power of the working class to change the world has only been fitfully glimpsed.

It is this contradiction that ultimately

explains why we have seen a series of splits towards movementism over the last six years - the small group who left over the Respect crisis, the group around John Rees and Lindsey German that left to form Counterfire, Chris Bambery and the group who formed the ISG in Glasgow.

The politics that predominates among the opposition is characterised by a tendency towards pessimism over the potential for resistance by the organised working class, combined with an exaggerated optimism towards the current ideological radicalism, tending to downplay the gap that exists between broader anti-capitalist ideas and revolutionary Marxism. Above all the centrality of the working class, the heart of our politics, is not the common sense among many of those deeply questioning the system - it is rather a position that has to be argued for and won. In the next issue of International Socialism Journal, Charlie Kimber and Alex Callinicos have an important article that examines further the political roots of the crisis in the party.

The CC is strongly committed to debating and drawing out the various arguments that exist in the party. The forthcoming party conference will discuss and decide on some of the key issues at stake, including votes on proposals to make changes to the Disputes Committee procedures.

The SWP is a revolutionary party that seeks to act collectively in the class struggle, arguing and debating within our structures about the experiences that flow from such interventions, taking decisions and votes where there are disputed issues and then testing those out once again in the outside world.

It is this method of acting collectively, and not just as a loose grouping of activists, that allows us to "punch above its weight" in the struggle, something that even our political rivals are forced to concede about the SWP.

And while conference decisions will not, of course, signal the end of argument and debate in the party, the CC is also strongly committed to the view that it will mark the restoration of the collective discipline of the party and the termination of what has been the effective existence of permanent factions. Unless the conference votes to support permanent factions, then any attempt to continue such factions outside a pre-conference period, and in defiance of the decisions of successive conferences, will lead to disciplinary action.

The SWP is an interventionist party that tests its ideas and perspectives in the class struggle.

Over the coming period we need to do a number of things

- i) continue to intervene in the outside world - building resistance to austerity, to racism and fascism and fighting to rebuild a strike movement,
- ii) fighting to ensure that our branches are healthy, to build and where necessary

rebuild in the colleges, to push the sales of Socialist Worker and our other publications, to recruit and to ensure that the rallies around the 'Say it Loud' book are a success,

iii) hold open political debate around the questions outlined above, discuss the review of the disputes committee and resolve concerns about the process,

iv) end the existence of permanent factions in the organisation.

## Central Committee

# FACING THE CHALLENGE OF FASCISM

The 7 September demonstration against the English Defence League (EDL) in the London borough of Tower Hamlets was a big victory for Unite Against Fascism (UAF) and the methods we have developed for fighting fascism, and an even bigger defeat for the EDL.

UAF, supported by United East End (UEE), built on the alliance of Muslim organisations, local and national trade unions, along with anti-racists and the left, that had been forged during two previous anti-EDL demonstrations—creating an even broader movement. This time the TUC and the local Labour Party supported our protest. On the day 5,000 joined the demonstration against the EDL. There were banners from the following unions and organisations:

East London NUT, Redbridge NUT, Waltham Forest NUT, City & Islington 6th form NUT, Haringey NUT, Barking & Dagenham NUT, Ealing NUT, Islington NUT, Central Foundation Girls School NUT, London Fire Brigade Unison, Homerton Hospital Unison, Cambridge Unison Health, Tower Hamlets Unison, Camden Unison, Greenwich & Bexley Trades Council, Brent Trades Council, Hackney Trades Council, Waltham Forest Trades Council, Harlow & District Trades Council, National UCU, London UCU, Lambeth College UCU, City & Islington College UCU, Paddington no. 1 RMT, National PCS, Tower Hamlets BMA, NUS Black Students, Unite Community London & Eastern, Tower Hamlets Labour, Tower Hamlets Cooperative Party, Green Party Women, Brent & Harrow UAF, Leicester UAF, Sikhs Against EDL, Lewisham Unite Against Racism, United East End, Kick Racism Out Of Football, One Tower Hamlets, Jewish Socialist Group, Queers

Against Cuts, Da'watul Islam UK & Eire, Taj Uddin Foundation, Greater Sylet Development & Welfare Council in UK (East London branch & South East region), Ummah Welfare Trust, Disabled People Fighting For Our Future, Progressive Youth Organisation, Feminist Network, South London Antifascists, Sisters Against the EDL and the Association of Musical Marxists.

The sheer scale of the opposition meant that the police would not let the EDL march into the borough—the anti-fascist mobilisation achieved its main goal in Tower Hamlets. Tommy Robinson, leader of the EDL, was once again arrested.

There were, however, tactical arguments on the day, and these have continued in the wake of Tower Hamlets. For instance, a group of nearly 300 people were involved in a breakaway march which was kettled by police, with many of those involved being arrested. Once again, this shows that the police are not neutral and that they see anti-racists and anti-fascists as the main enemy. We stand in solidarity with anti-fascists who are arrested. At the same time, we have to be able to explain to them why they were arrested and why they were not able to confront the EDL directly as they had hoped to do.

Some activists have likewise argued that because the EDL were able to march, albeit outside of the borough, and there was no major direct confrontation with them, 7 September must have been a defeat for our side. This is a dangerous position to take. To draw a comparison with one of the previous high points of anti-fascist mobilisation, at the Battle of Cable Street in East London in October 1936, it is not true that Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists (BUF) did not march. After the mass mobilisation on Cable Street stopped police clearing a path for the BUF, Mosley turned his march around and set off into the City of London. The Communist activists did not chase after them—instead they celebrated stopping the fascists achieving their goal of marching through the East End.

Similarly, every trade union Muslim group who participated, and the entire UAF committee, saw the protest in Tower Hamlets as a success for our side. Of course we should not be complacent about the challenges ahead, but we nonetheless should start from our successes and seek to build on them. What we saw in Tower Hamlets was a massive antidote to the poison injected into British political life in the wake of the Woolwich killings.

## After Woolwich

Just five months before Tower Hamlets, in May 2013, anti-racists and anti-fascists faced a serious challenge. We were hit by a double wave of racism. On 3 May 2013 the racist Ukip gained 25 percent of the vote in the county council elections, coming

third in the polls. The party's triumph followed a campaign based on anti-immigrant scaremongering. May ended with a huge surge in Islamophobia in the wake of the murder of the soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich, south east London. This injected new life into the EDL, giving them the confidence to overcome the organisation's prior demoralisation and to mount a recovery from their recent splits.

The racist backlash after the Woolwich murder was on a far greater scale than that which followed the 7/7 bomb attacks in London in 2005. Over 50 people had been killed in those attacks, and 500 injured, but back then there were only sporadic attacks on Muslims and their property. By contrast, the police reported in the first seven days after Woolwich there were 15 attacks on Mosques and 240 other Islamophobic attacks. A report published by MAMA, an organisation which monitors racist attacks on Muslims, in June found:

- Nearly 70 percent of online incidents reported a link to the far right.
- Of the online incidents that reported a link to the far right, it was the EDL, rather than the BNP, that was specifically named in 49 percent of cases.
- EDL supporters are most implicated in disseminating anti-Muslim hate online.

We are continuing to see an increase in the number of attacks on mosques and Muslim property.

There are a number of interrelated reasons for this vicious racist backlash. First, generally in Britain we have seen a marked rise in Islamophobia since 9/11 but more significantly since 7/7. Second, politicians and the press are increasingly scapegoating migrants in the course of the economic crisis, blaming them for the lack of jobs, housing and services. Third, there is another dynamic at play here—the right-wing and racist UKIP and the fascist EDL and BNP are pulling the political agenda to the right.

## UAF's response to the racist backlash

In the aftermath of the murder of Lee Rigby, the EDL and the BNP attempted to organise and regroup. On the night of the murder, the EDL went on the rampage around Woolwich. That weekend over 1,400 joined an EDL demo in Newcastle and 1,000 assembled at the Cenotaph in London—their biggest protests in two years.

The following weekend, UAF stopped the BNP marching on the Cenotaph. And around the country, UAF organised 34 anti-EDL counter-protests—in Sheffield we blocked the fascists from marching and we outnumbered them in all but two towns. Local UAF groups called vigils outside mosques that had been firebombed. The largest was in Muswell Hill in north London, where hundreds joined the local vigil.

UAF also launched a national statement in opposition to the EDL and BNPs attempts to capitalise on the murder of Lee Rigby. Over 20,000 people signed, including a number of unions, Labour MPs/MEPs, faith groups and celebrities.

The EDL have continued to call protests across the country, and they have been significantly bigger than any of their mobilisations since Tower Hamlets in 2011, but they are not as large as their mobilisations in Stoke and Dudley in 2010. That said, in some areas of the country our mobilisations have not been as big as they should have been.

## The rise of fascism across Europe

There is a wider context for the rise of the EDL (and its Welsh and Scottish counterparts) in Britain. Across Europe we are witnessing a rapid growth in fascist and far right racist parties. The growth of the extreme right and fascist parties has taken the form of four general political trends:

- Racist far right populism. Parties such as Ukip, the Swiss People's Party and the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands are not fascist parties, even if they may sometimes have some individual fascist members; they seek to pursue their racist and nationalist agendas through the democratic system.
- Euro-fascism. Parties such as the Front National in France, the Swedish Democrats and the British National Party (BNP) present themselves as right-wing, populist parties, but behind the facade they retain their core fascist ideology.
- Openly fascist parties. Golden Dawn in Greece and Jobbik in Hungary do not attempt to hide their fascist ideas and pursue both a strategy to win parliamentary support and create paramilitary and street fighting movements, which terrorise ethnic minorities and democratic forces.
- Streets movements. In many Eastern European states we are witnessing the rise of violent ultra nationalist racist gangs that carry out violent attacks on the Roma, Jews and other minorities. In Britain we have seen the rise of the English, Scottish and Welsh Defence Leagues.

Greece is where fascism is at its apex. The 2012 general election saw Golden Dawn poll 6.9 percent of the vote, gaining 18 MPs—an astonishing vote given that only a year before it was unable to register even a half percent of support in national opinion polls. Golden Dawn has also created a significant street movement that has carried out murderous attacks on migrants. The rise of Golden Dawn is primarily due to the deep economic crisis sweeping the country. Unemployment currently stands at 27 percent and among young people aged between 15 and 24 it has reached 59.3 percent. Reductions in wages, unemployment

and huge public sector cuts are creating enormous bitterness and instability. This in turn creates fertile ground from which Golden Dawn can grow.

But Greece is not alone. In France the fascist Front National came third in the first round of the presidential elections in 2012, polling 17.9 percent of the vote. The Hungarian fascist party Jobbik has 47 MPs, gaining 16.67 percent of the vote in the parliament elections in 2010. Even in relatively prosperous Sweden the fascist Swedish Democrats broke through the 5 percent threshold for the first time in 2010, gaining 20 MPs. You would have to go back to the 1930s to witness a time when fascism and the far right have gathered such support around Europe.

But it is not just at the ballot box that the fascists are making their presence felt. Since the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe we have seen the growth of fascist and racist gangs. They have been involved in murderous attacks on ethnic minorities especially the Roma. And we have seen murderous attacks carried out by Anders Breivik in Norway, Wade Michael Page in the US and David Copeland in Britain. Such bombings and shootings show that a small number of Nazis are, out of desperation, prepared to turn to terrorism in order to try to spark a “race war”.

## State racism

Fascist and far right movements are not growing in a vacuum. From the Second World War until the early 1990s most of Europe’s leaders placed a “cordon sanitaire” around extreme right parties; they refused to work with them and shunned their policies. This is no longer the case.

Mainstream parties, the state and the media have vilified minority communities. Since the 1990s European governments of all political persuasions have implemented laws that criminalised and persecuted asylum seekers. This process massively sped up after 9/11. Muslims became the new “enemy within”. Islamophobia—anti-Muslim racism—is the anti-Semitism of the 21st century.

In Eastern Europe the Roma have been the main victims. At best the authorities have turned a blind eye to the racist attacks this minority faces; at worse they are implementing segregationist policies. For example, in Slovakia 14 Roma communities have had ghetto walls erected to separate them from the “local” Slovakian population. Also, the Hungarian government is promoting separate schools for Roma children. The French government has deported Roma “back to their country of origin”. Once again we are also witnessing a rise of anti-Semitism across much of Eastern Europe.

Without exception every European leader has denounced multiculturalism and preached a form of mono-culturalism (the only way of life is the host’s culture).

Muslim communities find their loyalty and patriotism constantly questioned and at the same time they are accused of failing to assimilate and integrate.

The electoral success of far right/fascist parties has seen mainstream parties adopting even more severe xenophobic and anti-Muslim policies. Cameron and Merkel have continued to attack multiculturalism and blame Muslims for not integrating. Social Democratic parties across Europe have joined in, with the French Socialist Party supporting banning of the Muslim headscarf in public and the German SPD making public statements claiming migrant workers do not want to integrate into German society. Even more shocking was the fact that the SPD press spokesperson Rolf Klein defended the author of a racist diatribe “Germany abolishes itself”, Thilo Sarrazin.

In Britain, Ed Milliband and the Labour leadership have also pandered to the racism of the Tories and Ukip and have made a number of statements suggesting that Labour’s supposed “softness” on immigration helped cause their defeat in the most recent general election. Depressingly some sections of the left have also gone along with the idea that Islam is more backward than other religions and have, in some cases, even supported anti-Islamic legislation.

Far from marginalising the extreme right and fascist parties, the adoption of some of their policies and the language of the racists by the mainstream parties has enabled many of these groups to move out from the political fringe. Ruling coalitions in Norway, Italy and Austria have even invited fascists into their governments.

One thing has become clear to many in the anti-fascist movement—the police, a key part of the capitalist state, are not neutral. They always protect the Nazis and come down hard on anti-fascist protestors, as we saw clearly at Bolton and more recently in Tower Hamlets. It is important UAF groups set up defence campaigns and raise money to help pay costs for those arrested on anti-fascist mobilisations.

## What is fascism?

In this context, it is worth reminding ourselves what we mean by fascism. Fascism is not the same as other more traditional forms of authoritarian reaction—military coups and state clampdowns. Historically fascism has come to power in periods of extreme economic and political crisis. Fascism uses a dual strategy of participating in democratic politics, while also organising terror gangs on the ground against the left. Fascism has never taken power in a country simply through elections—fascist parties have always been handed power by ruling classes in crisis.

Fascist movements build their base among the middle class and what Leon Trotsky called “human dust”—those peo-

ple who, in times of crisis, are not part of a wider social force with a radical and collective tradition—as workers are—that can fight back.

Fascist movements often use racist ideology to glue their supporters together and create a scapegoat for the discontent that exists—with a devastating impact on those targeted. This was shown most clearly in the Nazi “Final Solution” in which millions of Jews and others were butchered. However, the main aim of fascism is not the annihilation of one racial group within society. It is to smash all forms of democracy and take away the rights of the entire working class—black and white, Jewish and non-Jewish, Muslim and non-Muslim.

Modern fascist parties have had to distance themselves from their historical counterparts—the barbarity of Nazism has generally made it impossible for openly Nazi type parties to win political influence (Jobbik is an important exception to this rule). So today’s fascists have modified their rhetoric and replaced genocidal racism with notions of “identity” and “culture”.

## UAF and the spirit of the United Front

Some commentators argue that Britain is intrinsically different from other European countries and its political culture means it is not susceptible to fascist type parties. Yet if we go back to 2010, it was a different picture. The BNP had won two MEPs, a member on the Greater London Assembly and close to 60 councillors. The fact is that the objective conditions for the growth of fascism exist in Britain. The rapid rise of the EDL is another sign of the space that exists for such forces to develop.

One obvious subjective factor that has prevented fascism from taking hold in Britain to the same extent as in many other European countries is UAF. For 13 years it has played a central role in breaking the back of the BNP and EDL. The SWP has played a pivotal role in its formation and development. It is built in the spirit of Trotsky’s theory of the united front.

The United Front tactic was first theorised by the Communist International in the years following the Russian Revolution. Trotsky argued: “The united front tactic is simply an initiative whereby Communists propose to join with all workers belonging to other political parties and groups, and unaligned workers, in a common struggle to defend the immediate, basic interests of the working class against the bourgeoisie. Every action, for even the most trivial everyday demand, can lead to revolutionary awareness and revolutionary education; it is the experience of struggle that will convince workers of the inevitability of revolution and the historic importance of communism.”

In the 1930s Trotsky further developed the united front tactic, which he saw as

central weapon in the fight against fascism, in particular in Germany. Before the Great Depression, Hitler and his Nazi Party polled just 2.6 percent of the vote in German general election of 1928. The two main parties of the left were far stronger. The social democratic SPD (the equivalent of the Britain's Labour Party) had a million members and polled almost seven million votes, and the Communist Party (KPD) got three million votes.

Two years later the German economy was in ruins as the worldwide slump hit. Industrial output fell by half, public sector jobs were decimated and the official unemployment figure reached over three million. From nowhere, Hitler's Nazis became a major political force. They gained 18.3 percent of the vote in 1930 and 37.4 percent in the July 1932 elections. This was the highest vote they achieved, and by the November 1932 elections it had fallen to 33.1 percent. But Hitler's Nazis were not primarily an electoral machine. The Nazis built a terrifying organisation that attacked democratic organisations and Jews. They had over one million members and a private army of 400,000 SA and SS stormtroopers. They also had the support of some major sections of German capitalism.

The combined vote of the SPD and KPD was greater than that of the Nazis in every free election except July 1932. But, as Trotsky wrote in 1931, you cannot judge the balance of forces by votes alone: "The main strength of the fascists is their strength in numbers. Yes, they have received many votes. But in the social struggle, votes are not decisive. The main army of fascism still consists of the petty statistics, 1,000 fascist votes weigh as much as 1,000 Communist votes. But on the scales of revolutionary struggle 1,000 workers in one big car factory represent a force 100 times greater than 1,000 petty officials, clerks, their wives and their mothers in law. The great bulk of fascists consist of human dust."

But there was a massive problem. The two main left parties failed on a national and local level to unite against the Nazis in the workplaces and on the streets. They did not come together to campaign against the Nazis during the elections.

The failure to unite the two wings of the left in a common struggle against the Nazis enabled Hitler to drive through the middle. In a series of articles about the events in Germany, Trotsky argued, "Worker communists, if fascism comes to power it will ride like a terrific tank over your skulls and spines. Your salvation lies in merciless struggle. Only a fighting unity with Social Democratic workers can bring victory."

Unity, Trotsky urged, should include all those prepared to back a struggle: "The policy of the united front has as its task to separate those who want to fight from those who do not." That did not mean burying the differences between those who wanted to reform the system and those who wanted

to topple it. It meant agreeing to fight around one issue, while continuing to argue their positions and to debate the tactics to apply in the struggle. Trotsky summed it up: "March separately but strike together! Agree only on how to strike, who to strike and when to strike."

Tragically that never happened. The result was undoubtedly one of the greatest defeats of the working class.

The SWP is not a mass party, and therefore we cannot just copy the arguments and demands developed in Trotsky's writings on Germany, but it is important to understand that we are adopting the spirit of the united front with UAF.

## Some lessons of the United Front for today

Contained in Trotsky's polemical writings are useful lessons for us. Throughout, Trotsky implores Communist and Social Democrats to work together to beat the Nazis. This was despite the fact that there was a river of blood between the two organisations—many of the Social Democrat leaders had helped to contain and break the German Revolution of 1918-23.

Today many activists are rightly angry with Labour's failure to defend working people from the ravages of the economic crisis and their attacks on migrants. Some argue it is wrong to have Labour MPs on UAF platforms. For instance, in the run-up to UAF's annual conference some comrades opposed Labour's Peter Hain speaking because of his support for the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. We have to patiently explain that while we do not agree with Peter Hain's position on Iraq, and for that matter the need for a socialist society, we are able to work with him and other Labour MPs/councillors on a principled basis around single issues.

Of course the Labour Party has less influence than it did 30 years ago, but it is a fact that it influences tens of thousands of activists and millions still vote Labour at election time. Including figures from Labour still helps us to broaden the base of UAF. We have to build the widest possible alliance of working class organisations, the oppressed and the poor in order to beat the fascists.

## Squadism

UAF has played a central role in organising some large protests against the EDL. All of us would like to see bigger protests. But out of frustration, some on the left, including some of our own members, have turned towards "squadism" and ultra-left stunts to try to defeat the EDL. Squadism is a rejection of mass mobilisations against fascism and instead encourages small groups of activists to physically confront the fascists. We have seen movements like this in the past—in Germany 1932-3 and in Britain in

the early 1980s.

We do not believe actions by a handful of activists, however courageous, can beat fascism. They cannot deal a decisive blow. Such actions reduce the masses to mere observers and many Nazis thrive on street fighting.

We have to convince activists that there are no short cuts to beating fascism. Mass mobilisations are vital. The confrontations at Cable Street and Lewisham in the past, and more recently Tower Hamlets and Walthamstow, show how mass protests are the most effective way to fight fascism. Building broad-based campaigns and tireless work inside unions, colleges and community/faith groups is the key.

## Accommodating to the right

If revolutionary socialists are going to build serious organisations against fascism, they will have to work with those to the right of them. It is important we work in a comradely way with reformists, but we do not duck political arguments such as the need to have a physical presence on the streets to combat fascism, opposition to Islamophobia, or our opposition to state bans on fascism.

This requires tactical judgment, finesse and some understanding of political, cultural and religious views. For instance, when a comrade involved in "Sisters against the EDL" sent out an email to the Tower Hamlets UEE/UAF group stating they were meeting in a pub, it was not only insulting to Muslims' religious views, it appeared to many that the left was trying to exclude Muslim women.

Likewise it is important we don't turn every tactical disagreement with reformists into points of principle. At the same time, where necessary, the SWP has to be prepared to act independently of the wider united front and put forwards its own politics.

## Different fascist movements—different tactics

Over the past 12 years UAF has had to combat two different types of fascist movements. We are also currently witnessing the rise of Ukip a racist populist electoral party.

Because of the major defeats the BNP and NF suffered during the 1970s and 1990s, a key section of British fascism moved away from building a street movement and instead concentrated on building electoral support. Talk of smashing the BNP on the streets was not serious when the BNP was not marching (the first ever BNP demo called under Nick Griffin's leadership took place after Lee Rigby's murder). Instead it required campaigning on estates,

and building up influence in places like Burnley, Barking and Stoke.

UAF had to develop local strategies to undermine the BNP's vote and support. Hard work, mass propaganda and Love Music Hate Racism carnivals and gigs helped ensure the BNP was beaten back. In 2010 and the following years UAF played a key role defeating them in Barking and Stoke.

At the high point of the BNP's electoral success in 2009, we saw the rapid rise of the EDL, a street fighting, fascist movement with links to football hooligan firms. UAF and the SWP played a central role in identifying this new threat. Again we had to politically challenge those who said we should ignore them and those who said we should force the state to ban them. Just as importantly, we argued that to combat a street fighting fascist movements you had to take to the streets, mobilising mass forces to oppose them. Again over the past two years we have on many occasions successfully out numbered them and stopped them marching. We have created splits in their organisation and demoralised their activists.

But there can be no room for complacency. As much of Europe shows, the objective conditions for the revival of fascist and racist populist movements remains. This means anti fascist work remains central to the SWP.

## Where next for UAF?

We have to come away from our annual conference determined to build UAF groups in every city, town and college. The last few years have taught us that where we have well-rooted groups we can isolate and defeat the BNP and EDL. Where possible we should encourage the setting up of local LMHR gigs. On a national level we are in negotiations with bands to hold a NW carnival against the BNP and a gig against Ukip.

## Student work

We have neglected systematic UAF/LMHR work in many colleges and universities. This has proved to be a mistake as other political currents have set up anti-fascist groups and we have failed to capitalise on the mood among many students to fight fascism. We are asking every SWSS group to help set up college UAF groups. College UAF groups should hold at least one major meeting a term, encourage student activists to get involved in anti EDL/BNP activities and hold a UAF night to raise money and set out the anti-fascist message on campus.

## The BNP

Next year is going to be an important one for the fascists. They are going to do every thing they can to hold onto their two MEP seats in the north west of England and Yorkshire. UAF is going to do everything it can to stop them winning. We have launched a "Nick Griffin must go campaign". Once again it involves a wide range of trade union branches, Labour MPs/MEPs etc, faith groups and anti-racist campaigners. We will be running a similar campaign to those that beat the BNP in Stoke and Barking—mass leafleting, publicity, union and community work.

It is important that other areas of the country do not ignore the BNP and other fascist parties' election campaigns.

## The EDL

Recent events have shown that the EDL are not going away. That means we have to generalise from our best UAF groups such as the ones in Cambridge, Scotland, Wales and Walthamstow, who have built broad based UAF groups that can mobilise serious forces if the EDL come to their areas.

## Ukip

The rise of Ukip is going to force us to confront a new problem—how do we undermine and beat a far right populist electoral party. This cannot be resolved solely by UAF. Ukip is a viciously racist party, but it is not a fascist party. At present it is solely an electoral party (though that can of course change if there is a change in the political climate).

LMHR and One Society Many Cultures, backed by UAF, have launched a "Stand up to Ukip" campaign, which over the coming months will attempt to both undermine Ukip's racist policies and expose its bigotry and anti-working class policies.

## Central Committee

# STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

## Crisis, war, austerity and neo liberalism

For students starting university this year their entire teenage life has been shaped by economic crisis, war, growing inequality and increasing pressure as neoliberalism wreaks damage to education. The collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 took place when they were 13, the war in Iraq when they were 8.

As they worked their way through

school, the cost of university education became increasingly more expensive piling on both the pressure and debt.

Austerity and cuts are the norm; the future characterised by insecurity and with it a sense of foreboding. Even having a degree does not guarantee a job.

Such a world, one of turmoil and crisis, war and violence, increasing authoritarianism but little hope, raises big ideological questions about the nature of the system in the minds of many young people.

Why doesn't capitalism provide? What can be done about poverty, inequality, racism and oppression? Why is there a drive to war? Can there be a better way of organising society? How can we bring about change? Can revolutions win? What is happening in Egypt and Syria? Is there an alternative to Ed Miliband and Labour?

SWSS needs to provide ideological and political answers to these questions and many others as we seek to win a layer of students to Marxist ideas.

## Instability, volatility and resistance

Many of those starting university will have been touched in some way, albeit indirectly, by the mass protests and explosions of resistance that have occurred over the last few years. An 18 year old starting University this term would have been in their final year of GCSEs when the Millbank protest broke out in autumn 2010. Perhaps they joined the subsequent street demos against the axing of EMA, or led a walkout from their school in protest. Even if they were not a direct participant maybe they cheered on those students kettled in Whitehall on a cold December night and shared the outrage at the police brutality.

Of course many new students starting university this year will not have been involved in any previous protests, and it is perfectly possible to draw pessimistic conclusions about the nature of resistance from the experience of the student movement.

Yet a backdrop of global economic crisis and international protests continues to place both a questioning of the system and potential resistance on the agenda.

## What does this mean for the SWP and SWSS?

Students have always played an important role in the SWP. Although students are not workers, and do not have the same economic power, their ability to move quickly into struggle, even as a minority on campus, can have an impact on wider society.

It is also true that universities are highly ideological places where students, despite the actuality, expect to gain a greater understanding of the world.

For the SWP, recruiting students on the

basis of revolutionary socialist politics has been one of the ways the party has historically grown. Building among students remains central to the future of the SWP. The crisis in the SWP over this last year has had a particular impact on our student work.

There have been a number of sharp arguments, reflecting wider political disagreements and a section of student members have left the organisation.

However it is also true that a number of students stayed in the organisation and have played an important role in the party over the last few months including at Marxism 2013. In order to rebuild our student work it is a necessity for the whole party to put considerable resources and energy into rebuilding our student work.

There is clear potential to do this. Over 1,000 students booked in advance for Marxism 2013. In districts like North London, building Marxism on campus has given us a base to go forward with in this new term. There has already been a great response to SWSS at the early Freshers Fayres.

## How are we going to approach the new term and rebuild?

Every district/branch should target a university. Student work is a priority for the whole party. That means every branch or district operating regularly round a university, whether or not there are currently student members there.

This starts with Freshers Fayre. Even if we can't book an official stall we should do one on the street outside. Comrades should take time off work to help. As many comrades, of whatever age, should be involved. Aim to get as many names as possible for SWSS while at the same time recruiting to the party and selling Socialist Worker.

The new term has already started well and shows the potential. At Dundee 63 students signed up to SWSS and one joined the SWP. Comrades in Edinburgh hit the ground running last week. They signed up 117 students to SWSS and sold 44 copies of SW. One student who joined SWSS came to the branch meeting that night, another joined the SWP on line the next day.

At Manchester University 20 students have applied to join SWSS via the Student Union societies web page and that's before term has even started.

Where SWSS is not an official student society effort should be made to register SWSS as soon as possible after Freshers Fayre. This makes it much easier to both book meeting rooms and work with the Student Union.

As well as operating round the local university do not forget the FE colleges. There has already had a great response. At Langside College in Glasgow comrades got 35 contacts for SWSS and sold 13 SW, at Anniesland College Freshers they got 20

contacts for SWSS and sold six SW, while 48 joined SWSS at Glasgow School of Art with ten papers and three pamphlets sold.

There are four main parts of our strategy for building SWSS in the first term.

### 1. Regular SWSS meetings: ideological poles of attraction

These should be the backbone of SWSS. If we start from an understanding that the current period raises big ideological questions about the nature of the world and capitalism then we should be attempting to answer them and win students to Marxist ideas.

At Freshers Fayre there should be a leaflet for the first SWSS meeting on "Capitalism in crisis: what's the socialist alternative?" set up for the week after.

The potential for SWSS meetings is great. Aim to hold these weekly and to attract as many students as possible, interested in ideas and drawn to a high level of debate. There are often few other places on campus offering the chance for such political discussion. By building meetings widely we can create a much wider periphery and be at the centre of ideological arguments.

That means planning and building the meetings. Choose titles and book speakers well in advance. The student office has suggested a range of titles aimed at covering many aspects of our politics in the first term.

Contact all those who join SWSS quickly using email, facebook, text and calling directly by phone. But don't just limit building SWSS meetings to the Freshers list. It should be hard to miss that SWSS meetings are happening. Cover the campus in posters. Leaflet at busy times or target particular departments and lectures.

A good SWSS meeting is just the start. Although we aim to attract many students to meetings, we also want to win whoever we can to revolutionary politics. That means sitting and talking politics, listening and answering questions. Every student that joins us or is interested should be taken very seriously and time spent with them discussing our politics.

When anyone joins the SWP they will immediately be asked to explain their decision to belong to a revolutionary Leninist party to their friends and family. How confident they are in answering questions will play a large part in determining whether they remain in the organisation. From anti fascist strategy and the united front to state capitalism, combating oppression to the centrality of the working class; if students are not won on these sorts of issues then it is unlikely we will hold them in our organisation.

All these and many, many more questions will come out in meetings but informal discussion with new members can play a big role. Comrades need to plan in

spending time talking politics on campus, perhaps after a SWSS meeting, after a stall, meeting people for coffee etc. Time should be factored in after a SWSS meeting to go for a drink with SWSS members rather than rush off.

Every SWSS meeting needs an up to date and relevant bookstall.

Bookmarks has put together SWSS book packs that can be bought at reduced price. Districts need to order these in and use them on stalls and at meetings. New members or those around us should be encouraged to read, and books, articles and our publications discussed with students.

### 2. SWSS should be at the heart of any resistance.

#### i) Demonstrate at Tory Conference, 29 September in Manchester

The demonstration at Tory Party Conference in Manchester is a crucial start to the term. The bigger it is the more confidence it can give to all those – students, workers, unemployed, disabled, pensioners – who want to fight the Tory cuts and austerity.

There is a deep class hatred of the Tories among many young people – just think of the celebrations following Margaret Thatcher's death. At every Freshers Fayre there should be flyers and sign up sheets for local transport. Aim to get as many students as possible to come to the demo. Set up SWSS campaign stalls to build for the demo involving anyone who wants to help build for it. Approach student unions and sabbatical officers to be involved in building for the demo too.

As well as universities, every branch should target an FE college to build for the demo. Take lots of publicity for students to take and use themselves. At the time of writing two new student members of the SWP at Pontefract College, near Leeds have signed up 17 of their friends to come on the demo. The local TUC is going to subsidise a coach.

#### ii) Localised resistance

The impact of neo liberalism on education continues to shape the experience of students at university and college. The extent of that experience differs from place to place and is not generalised, despite there being a generic source. If you were a SWSS member at University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) last year you would have been involved in a campaign against the whole scale privatisation of the university. In a university with little tradition of political activity, a good campaign managed to halt the privatisation.

At the University of the West of England our comrades were involved in leading a successful campaign against the closure of a course. At Sussex University, the impact was again different with the campaign

being against the outsourcing of catering services, meaning over 200 staff would be outsourced to companies like Sodexo.

In this instance the campaign involved an occupation that lasted for two months, and a solidarity demonstration of over a thousand students. With a long standing campaign, raising solidarity is not just possible, but necessary. However, it is possible to see from just three examples that the impact of and resistance to neo liberalism can be different from campus to campus.

The prospects for resistance will raise themselves as this agenda continues to impact at educational establishments across the country. SWSS should be at the heart of any of these campaigns and we should seek to raise solidarity where possible. It is also essential that we look nationally to any forums that can help generalise these struggles, the student assembly, being one such forum.

The most recent example of resistance that is of real significance is the struggle at Birmingham Metropolitan College over the banning of the veil. The quick response of students and the local community to this meant the college very quickly reversed their decision, just before a demonstration was due to take place.

However, the disgusting racist statements from the Tories claiming we should have debate over the issue of the veil means that this issue will not go away, and just as in Birmingham, it will require a swift and decisive response. In a section below we refer to the necessity of our anti-racist and anti-fascist strategy in the colleges this term. The building of UAF groups and an anti-racist current on campus and in the colleges will be a central part of our strategy.

### iii) Other campaigns

Of course it is likely that as term gets underway that more issues and campaigns will arise that SWSS can be involved in. For example, the Defend the Right to Protest conference on Sun 27 Oct should be advertised and materials used on SWSS stalls. Although the threat of attack on Syria has lessened we need to be ready to respond to any bombing attacks.

## 3. Unite Against Fascism

Building UAF is central to our student work. The EDL continues to try and march in towns and cities across Britain. Just as we build UAF groups ready to respond prior to the EDL announcing they are marching we should do the same on campus. The fantastic UAF demonstration in Tower Hamlets this month involving thousands of people blocking the EDL from entering the borough will give confidence to all those who want to oppose the EDL and shows a clear strategy of how we can build a broad united front. Not only do we want to be ready to stop the EDL when they come to town

but we want students in Yorkshire and the North West to be part of the campaign to stop Nazi Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons's re-election as MEPs next year.

Continued racism from this government and the recent election results for UKIP have provided the fertile ground from which the EDL built after the murder of Lee Rigby. Our approach of building united front organisation to combat racism and fascism is one that should be echoed in every college and university possible.

We should approach student unions and sabbatical officers to work with us and others in setting up UAF events. For example, could the student union host a launch meeting for UAF with national and local speakers? In some universities politics departments will sponsor such meetings. Is it possible to set up an LMHR gig in the student union? Each university should aim to hold one big UAF event during the first term.

UAF has organised a trip to Auschwitz in early November which is already booked up, including many students. Fundraising events are being put on to help finance the trip and students are gaining sponsorship from lecturers and other students. Report backs can be set up afterwards with a platform of speakers.

Sustaining UAF work will depend on what's happening in your area, but again we should think about holding different events that will educate people over the experience of the Roma for example or holding events around Holocaust memorial day early next year.

## 4. The Student Assembly: 2 November, London

Taking inspiration from the extremely successful Peoples Assembly held in June which drew over 4,000 people, a Student Assembly is planned for 2 November. This will feature speakers such as Owen Jones, Tony Benn, Francesca Martinez as well as hosting workshops on a range of topics including education, climate change, war and anti-racism. We support this initiative and should build it on all campuses, working with other students. In some areas we can work directly with other forces to build it and hold local student assemblies.

The national Student Assembly offers an opportunity for students to come together nationally to discuss some of the big questions raised by the current period but also to generalise from local campaigns that have taken place.

In this way we can be part of both building confidence and student networks. We should use the publicity widely on campus, work with Student Union officers and others to build it and encourage all SWSS members to attend. At the same time we will go to the assembly with our own politics and our own proposals for militant

resistance to austerity.

## Students and SWP districts

Comrades in districts can help both initiate where necessary and support all of the above. Wherever possible we should aim to integrate student members into the local SWP district. The public meetings "Racism, resistance and revolution" to launch the new "Say it loud" book taking place during Black history month will be a brilliant place to take new students. These should be built on campus and at FE colleges as much as possible. Student comrades should prioritise their work on campus but when they can should be encouraged to do their local Saturday stall and an industrial sale. If the potential industrial action turns into reality this autumn, strike picket lines and protests will be great places to bring newer younger members.

If we combine a high level of politics with activity, try and build as widely as possible but at the same time be absolutely focussed on winning individuals to revolutionary Marxist ideas while staying alert to possibilities of much wider resistance this will help us rebuild our student base.

### Central Committee

## PROPOSED CENTRAL COMMITTEE

The Central Committee (CC) proposes the following names for election to the CC at conference December 2013:

Weyman Bennett  
Michael Bradley  
Alex Callinicos  
Sally Campbell  
Jo C, Walthamstow  
Sue C, North London  
Esme C, Walthamstow  
Joseph Choonara  
Charlie Kimber  
Amy Leather  
Paul McG, East London  
Judith Orr  
Brian R, East London  
Julie Sherry  
Mark Thomas

Some names have been shown only as an initial to protect comrades at work. Full names will be given by CC members at the aggregate meetings. Any comrade who wants these details in advance of their aggregate meeting should contact charlie@swp.org.uk or ring the National Office.



## WHY I AM NOT RESIGNING FROM THE SWP

As we all know a number of ‘letters of resignation from the SWP’ have appeared recently on Facebook and assorted blogs. In this article I want to explain why, far from resigning, I intend to remain an active member of the party.

Let me say, first, that this is not because I think we made no mistakes in our handling of the Delta case. Given that I absolutely do not believe that the party or its leadership deliberately covered up or attempted to cover up a rape or rape allegation my commitment to remaining in the party exists regardless of whether or not, with hindsight, we can be seen to have made particular mistakes. All parties, like all individuals, make mistakes – the Bolsheviks made many mistakes and so has the SWP over the years and, of course, we should work to try to correct them. That is not the key point; the point is the fundamental nature of the party and its role in the class struggle.

My ongoing membership of the SWP is based on the answers I give to a number of questions, as follows:

### Q1. Do we need a socialist revolution in Britain and internationally?

A. Yes, we do.

### Q2. For this revolution to win do we need a mass revolutionary socialist party?

A. Yes - I agree with the answer given to this question by the SWP over many decades (and defended theoretically in numerous books and articles), and by Lenin and Trotsky before us.

### Q3. Is the SWP this revolutionary party?

A. Not yet – it remains too small and lacks sufficient roots in the working class. However, it is a substantial and serious revolutionary socialist organisation, engaged in a serious attempt to build such a party and it is part of an international tendency that is undertaking this task in many countries. Crucially it has proved *far* more successful at building a revolutionary party, quantitatively and qualitatively, than any of its rivals in Britain and one of the most successful attempts in the world.

### Q4. Are the core political ideas of the SWP correct?

A. Yes, I believe so. More than any other organisation or tendency the SWP has succeeded in preserving the classical Marxist tradition and developing it (analyses of state capitalism, of deflected permanent revolution, of permanent arms economy and the present crisis, of the trade union

bureaucracy, of women’s oppression, of racism and Islamophobia, of imperialism and so on). It has produced a range of publications and body of theory unequalled by any other group or party.

### Q5. Is its role in the class struggle a positive one?

A. Yes – overwhelmingly so. During my twenty seven years membership, from the News International strike and the poll tax through to November 30, 2011 and the bedroom tax, the SWP nationally and locally, has consistently supported, in deeds as well as words, all workers struggles against the bosses and the system.

We have backed every major strike and fought every cut. At the same time and with equal consistency we have taken up and campaigned on all the major political questions of the time: the first Gulf War, the Criminal Justice Bill, the struggle against the fascists, the defence of immigrants and asylum seekers, defence of a woman’s right to choose, the Iraq War and the whole ‘war on terror’, Palestine and solidarity with the Arab spring and on a number of occasions we have played a significant part in mobilizing very large numbers of working people.

At the same time we have attempted (albeit with limited success) to win political representation for working people at the ballot box. In all of this activity we have always sought to relate the immediate struggles and campaigns to the wider struggle for revolution and socialism.

Obviously we have made various mistakes - there have been times when we have been slow to move, times when we have been over optimistic and run ahead of ourselves, times when we’ve been ultra-left and times when we’ve been too ‘soft’ – that is inevitable for any organisation that tries to combine revolutionary principle with actual engagement with the class. But overall the balance sheet is massively positive and, in my opinion, far more favourable than that achieved by any other far left or socialist organisation in this country.

In Portsmouth the SWP has consistently punched above its weight. We are significantly involved in trade union movement and most campaigns, often in in key positions.

Through consistent hard work over years the SWP has won widespread respect from other key activists. I do not detect any unwillingness to work with us in united fronts.

Some critics may say that this due to the role of key individuals rather than the SWP itself. Of course some of us have been around longer and are more prominent in the movement.

But the reason we do have some very effective activists in the branch is because the individuals were developed in the branch and by the party. For example, without the politics of the SWP hammered into me at weekly branch meetings and Marx-

ism, and tested out by me at work and in my trade union, there is no way I would have ended up helping to organise and to MC the rally of 2,500 people in Portsmouth on 30 November 2011.

Without the SWP I am sure many of us activists would have dropped out years ago through frustration, confusion and disillusionment. At the public meeting when I joined in 1986, Tony Cliff said ‘you need the SWP more than the SWP needs you’. He was and still is right.

This brings me to my final question.

### Q6. Is there a better alternative?

A. In terms of an organisation committed to socialist revolution there clearly is not. Of course if your perspective is limited to reform then the Labour Party is at least much larger, even if it doesn’t do much in the way of delivering reforms, and if you believe that spontaneous revolt and ‘the movements’ are enough then the whole problem is avoided.

But if you believe in the need for a revolutionary party then none of the other established far left parties or groups – the SP, Counterfire, AWL, Socialist Resistance, CPGB etc – are serious contenders. None of them, in terms of their politics, their theory or their organisation on the ground come near matching the SWP.

But might it be possible to leave the SWP and build a better alternative from scratch? There are two options here: one is the perspective represented by Left Unity, the other by the IS Network. Left Unity, of course, is explicitly, *not* a would-be revolutionary party but an attempt to build a broad party of the left, to the left of Labour.

At present it is still small but even it grew dramatically and established itself as a significant electoral poll of attraction á lá Syriza (which would be a very good thing for the left as a whole) it would still need to be supplemented by a politically independent revolutionary party – unless of course one has opted for left reformism in place of revolutionary Marxism.

The IS Network is more ‘revolutionary’ than Left Unity but it is very small and also quite incoherent, united more by its anger at the SWP leadership than by any clear politics. There is a lot of identity politics and plain ‘silliness’. Not an encouraging prospect.

In short, if we are serious about building a revolutionary workers’ party in Britain, the SWP, whatever its flaws, is where it is at and where it is going to be in the coming period. Leaving the party or trying to split it is a road to nowhere.

As we go into the pre-conference discussion it would be helpful to hear all participants, including supporters of the opposition, saying this very clearly and acting accordingly.

**Jon (Portsmouth)**

# THE FIGHT AGAINST THE BEDROOM TAX

The fight against the bedroom tax:

1. Unites the class
2. Establishes solidarity
3. Provides a class anchor for the Left
4. Strengthens other struggles
5. Is an arena for recruiting to the SWP

## 1. Unites the class

For the Tories their 'welfare reforms' are designed to attack the poorest people. Those most hit by the Bedroom Tax are disabled or carers.

These attacks are primarily ideological. For the Tories it is more important to divide our class, to inflict pain and suffering on one section in order to demoralise and frighten others - than it is to 'save money' from the Welfare Bill. If workers blame the neighbours, who in turn blame 'immigrants' then our class will be divided and weakened.

The resistance to the Bedroom Tax is based upon a material reality; people cannot afford to pay the extra rent now charged due to their housing benefits being cut. Increasingly, tenants are not paying. Over 300,000 are on partial rent strike, refusing to pay the bedroom tax.

Unity is central to building the fight against the Bedroom Tax. 'You stand by me - and I'll stand by you!' as they say in Scotland. Anti bedroom tax organisations built upon this principle are growing in strength.

At the founding conference of the Anti Bedroom Tax Federation for Greater Manchester two Joint Chairs were elected. A tenant who claims benefits - with a rep from the union that administers benefits. Matching a woman living in Wythenshawe with the branch secretary of the PCS has ensured that class unity is at the centre of the anti bedroom tax organizations across the City.

As resistance to the Bedroom Tax continues to grow, Tory lies, and their weaknesses are being exposed. Tenants gave evidence to the UN investigator, who concluded with a recommendation that the Bedroom Tax should be scrapped.

The Tory 'party of the family' is out to destroy family life. The party of economic prudence brings in a Bedroom Tax that will increase spending on welfare. The Bedroom Tax makes the housing crisis even worse.

These contradictions mean that the fight against the Bedroom Tax is hitting a 'weak link in the chain' of the Tory assault on our class.

We can axe the bedroom tax. The Party needs to ensure that in every area we are building the Anti Bedroom Tax movement.

## 2. Establishes solidarity

Solidarity between those affected and those offended by the bedroom tax is growing. Examples from the anti bedroom tax movement in Greater Manchester include:

Manchester Court workers in the PCS Samba band led the 300 strong No Eviction! Bedroom Tax! March to the Court - where they work.

The Joint Stewards Cttee at Bolton Homes unanimously agreed to support any worker who refuses to take part in eviction procedures.

Stockport Unison has been revitalised sending delegations to demonstrations and the No Bedroom Tax lobby of the Council. Since building solidarity with the bedroom tax fight, they have sent delegations to the Hovis picket lines in Wigan.

Three Labour MPs led the Bolton no bedroom tax march. Solidarity can ensure we beat the Tories on the Bedroom Tax.

## 3. Provides a class anchor for the Left

There is a growing radicalisation amongst sections of the working class. People are looking for organisations that express their discontent, and provide a way forwards. The hundreds pulled to the People's Assemblies is one expression of this.

At the 700 strong launch of the PA in Manchester, we fought to ensure that a Bedroom Tax campaigner spoke. She got a standing ovation from all, including Mark Steele and Owen Jones, who publicly signed a letter to Manchester's Labour Council calling for no evictions. Subsequently Owen Jones opened the No Bedroom Tax rally and marched with us to the courts.

We have recruited four comrades that we met at the PA, all now active SWP members. A leading trades unionist from UNITE, who was an organiser for the PA, came to the Anti Bedroom Tax Federation founding conference. Seeing that a real fight against the Bedroom Tax was underway, he volunteered to be one of the Anti Bedroom Tax Federation Trades Union Officers. He is now active on the Federation Committee.

The fight against the Bedroom Tax is an open class struggle that provides an anchor that can pull the radicalised away from just talking into acting.

## 4. Strengthens other struggles

'I took the open letter to the council calling for no evictions around my school. I asked everyone and 83 people signed it. There were lots of discussions. Only two people refused to sign. When it came to the teachers strike, I expected to get thirty from school to come to the march and rally on the strike day. Fifty came. Going round with

the No Bedroom Tax letter helped build the turnout. ' This was the report from an NUT rep at the Federation Conference.

When the Gorton Against the Bedroom Tax group discovered that one of those who was active in their group was a BNP member who had stood in Council elections they came to our Federation monthly meetings to discuss what to do. At their next Gorton meeting we mobilised extra forces, and the chair told the BNP member he had to leave. 'We will not welcome as allies members of far right or Nazis groups in the Federation,' has become our policy. They can't come to meetings. The Gorton group are clear though. 'We will mobilise to stop evictions of any tenant' regardless of their far right politics.

The racists and the BNP are out to divide the resistance, where as the Anti Bedroom Tax struggle unite the class. Activists in the Bedroom Tax groups can be won to future join activity needed to build the UAF Griffin Must Go! campaign.

When Cameron was set to join the US in the bombing of Syria there was an upsurge of resistance. In Manchester at the Don't Bomb Syria rally, the Rochdale Anti Bedroom Tax group came as a delegation with their banner, which they had changed to read Stop the War On the Poor to Stop the War on Syria. They were nervous about the arguments, and how they would be received. They were cheered by the anti war rally. Amongst their delegation was a former soldier who is an active fighter in the No Bedroom Tax movement.

## 5. Is an arena for recruiting to the SWP

We have recruited tenants active against the Bedroom Tax to the SWP. Socialist Worker is widely read as the paper of the movement.

One comrade who lives in Stockport called and organised a No Bedroom Tax meeting in a local community centre, it was well supported by tenants, trades unionists and other socialists. The establishment of Stockport Against the Bedroom Tax has provided the basis on which we were able to launch a SW sale in the centre. Comrades sold 27 SW's on the first sale held there in decades. We are planning an SWP meeting in Stockport in October.

Pushing out and building Anti Bedroom Tax groups has strengthened the working class trades union, and political roots of our branches in Bury, Bolton, Wigan and elsewhere. We now have a member who is a tenant in Wythenshawe, a massive working class district on Manchester.

**Mark (Manchester Chorlton)**

# STATEMENT OF INTENT

## Introduction:

As we approach the preconference period, many of us are seeking a way out of the current crisis that can begin to reunite the party. We have produced a “statement of intent” which we are inviting all comrades to sign up to.

The statement outlines some of the key issues that need to be addressed if we are to begin to resolve the crisis and move the party forward. Not every comrade will agree with every point of the statement. But we believe the general concerns it outlines are shared by a much wider spectrum than those presently identified with the opposition.

We understand that existing divisions and entrenchment will have to be overcome if we are to avoid further damage to the party. For these reasons we are also inviting comrades sympathetic to the the statement to come to an open meeting at the beginning of the preconference period to discuss possible ways forward.

To add your signature to the statement, please email your name and branch to SWP-statementofintent@gmail.com. If you have any proposals for discussion you can email them in advance to the same address.

The open meeting will take place on **Saturday 21 September, 11am-5.30pm, Central London.**

Further details will be sent out nearer the time to all those who have signed the statement.

## Statement:

The SWP is going through the most serious crisis in its history. Comrades across the party now need to unite to ensure its survival.

The handling of complaints of rape and sexual harassment brought by two women against a leading member revealed shortcomings in the party’s ability to apply its politics on oppression to these cases. This has seriously damaged the party in the wider movement.

We have also lost around 400 members since the January conference, nearly three times the maximum losses sustained in previous splits. The vast majority of our student members have left the organization.

Belated attempts have been made to address problems arising from the disputes. In recent weeks there has been an acknowledgement by the CC that mistakes were made in the handling of the first dispute, and it has ensured that the second dispute was eventually heard. A commission looking into the way in which the party’s structures deal with such issues reported to NC on 15 September.

These developments are the product of an intense period of debate in the party. The

leadership’s approach to political argument, however, has been largely responsible for the damage caused: comrades have been kept in the dark about key issues and misled. Differences within the leadership have been hidden from the membership. The scale of the crisis has been consistently underestimated.

These flaws are the same ones that characterized the last major crisis faced by the party, around Respect. Although these flaws were widely acknowledged in the party at the time, they were only partially dealt with by the democracy commission: many of its recommendations remain unimplemented.

Alongside resolution of the immediate issues around the dispute, a political reckoning is therefore required if we are to learn lessons from what we have been through, in order to prevent it happening again.

It is therefore up to all those who recognize the urgency of the situation, irrespective of what side they took over recent months, to stand together to ensure that all the issues surrounding the dispute are dealt with and that the roots of the crisis are addressed within the party.

The alternative is a repeat of the tactics used around the March special conference when false polarization was used to avoid frank debate. The result will be further entrenchment inside the party, political isolation in the wider movement and the loss of a significant number of comrades.

This means taking some basic immediate steps:

- Publicly acknowledging the specific nature of the mistakes that have occurred
- Apologizing to the two women involved
- Implementing measures to improve the organisation’s disputes procedures
- Addressing the CC’s role in the crisis and holding it to account
- Intervention to stop the ostracism in certain districts and branches of comrades who have been critical of the party’s handling of the dispute

We also need to make strenuous efforts to regain confidence in our ability to act as a tribune of the oppressed. This should include:

- A period of debate about how we equip the party, in theory and practice, to lead and intervene effectively on questions of women’s oppression
- Showing in practice the party’s commitment to zero tolerance of sexist comments and behaviour

But it also means facing up to how we got here and addressing longer term flaws in the party’s internal functioning and relationship to the wider movement. Otherwise the party risks further splits, and a continuing cycle of crises. We are not strong enough to sustain such damage.

We need a serious examination of the party’s internal political culture, including:

- The democratic procedures of the party

- The relationship of leadership bodies to each other and the wider membership
- The composition of these bodies
- The scope for meaningful and frank debate within the organization

As part of this process a campaign should be launched to win back those comrades who have left the organization over the dispute.

For this to take place there must be a commitment from the CC that faction speaking rights and the election of delegates to conference will be organized to maximize debate and to reflect the real differences that exist within the party.

These questions are fundamental to the party’s ability not just to speak to those beyond its ranks, but to listen to them. Without this interaction the party will be unable to locate its activities within a wider strategic framework, giving members and non-members alike a clear sense of the organisation’s purpose and function.

Such preoccupations are not the preserve of any one grouping within the party. Addressing shortcomings in our political culture is essential if we are to develop our theoretical tradition to meet the challenges of the 21st century. It is a process that needs to go beyond factional divisions.

These are concerns that are widely shared across the organization. As we head into the pre-conference period it is looking increasingly unlikely that the CC intends to provide adequate leadership on these issues. It is therefore up to all comrades who want to find a way out of the crisis and begin to re-unite the party, to come together and assert a way forward.

A national meeting will be held on 21st September for all those committed to ensuring that the above issues are addressed and overcome.

**Adam (Hackney East), Adam (Wood Green), Adria (Essex SWSS), Alan (Dundee), Alan (Canterbury), Alberto (Islington), Alec (Lowestoft), Alexis (Euston), Ali (Euston/KCL SWSS), Alice (Euston), Amy & Andrew (Cambridge), Andy (Manchester City Centre), Andy (Kings Heath), Andy (Dalston), Andy (Leicester), Angela (Dalston), Anindya (Tower Hamlets), Anne (Edinburgh), Anne (Bury & Prestwich), Arjun (Brixton), Arthur (Canterbury), Bartley (Manchester Chorlton), Bea (Norwich), Becky (Southwark), Bettina (Hackney), Brendan (Derby), Brian (Leeds Harehills), Bunny (Canterbury), Camilo (Glasgow South), Cathy (Oxford), Charlie (Hackney East), Charlotte (Lewisham), Chaz (Walthamstow), Chris (Leicester), Christian (KCL SWSS), Christina (Hornsey & Wood Green), Christine (Glasgow South), Christine (Manchester City Centre), Clinton (Kingston), Colin (Manchester Chorlton), Colin (Lewisham), Colin (Thanet), Colin (Dalston), Dan (Norwich), Daniel (Rusholme), Dave (Oxford), Dave (Leicester), David (Brent & Harrow), David (Euston/KCL SWSS),**

David (Kings Heath), David (Euston), Deborah (Hackney), Debs (Liverpool), Deni (Swansea), Despina (Dalston), Dod (Aberdeen), Dominic (Liverpool), Duncan (Edinburgh), Elizabeth (Leeds), Emily (Colchester & Essex SWSS), Emma (Rusholme), Emma (Southwark), Estelle (Brixton), Ewa (Chorlton), Fraser (Brixton), Fraser (Thanet), Geoff (Canterbury), Geoff (Bury & Prestwich), Gill (Hackney East), Graham (Glasgow North), Greg (Lewisham), Hanif (Liverpool), Hannah (Euston), Hazel (Ealing), Helios (Hornsey & Wood Green), Ian (Bury and Prestwich), Ian (Enfield), Ian (Lewisham), Ian (Edinburgh), Ian (Ealing), Imelda (Hackney East), Ioanna (Ealing), Iris (Euston), Isabel (Bury & Prestwich), Jack (Merton & Wandsworth), Jacqui & James (Walthamstow), James (UEL SWSS), James (Brighton), James (Oxford SWSS), Jamie (Cambridge), Jamie (Newham), Jamie (Goldsmiths & Lewisham & Tottenham), Jaz (Brixton), Jelena (Brighton & Hove), Jen (Glasgow South), Jen (Tower Hamlets), Jim (Euston), Joel (Euston), John (Oxford), Jon (Thanet), Jonas (Tower Hamlets), Jonathon (Chelmsford), Jonny (Tower Hamlets), Jonny (Newcastle), Judith (Manchester City Centre), Judy (Bury & Prestwich), Jules (Walthamstow), Julian (Lewisham), Justin (Kingston), Kaiya (Cambridge), Keith (Burnley/Colne), Keith (Wood Green), Keith (Aberdeen), Kevin (Leicester), Kim (Kings Heath), Kirsti (Lewisham), Kyri (Hornsey & Wood Green), Laura (Walthamstow), Laura (Rusholme), Laura (Lewisham), Leo (Lewisham), Leon (Cambridge), Lesley (Luton), Liam (Thanet), Lis (Walthamstow), Lois (Brixton), Louis (Islington), Lukas (Euston), Luke (Lewisham), Luke (Edinburgh), Luke (Hornsey & Wood Green), Marie (Thanet), Marilyn (Edinburgh), Mark (Tower Hamlets), Mark (Southwark), Martha (Lewisham/ Goldsmiths SWSS), Matt (Walthamstow), Matt G (Euston), Matt W (Euston), Matthew (Dalston), Megan (Walthamstow), Michael (Manchester), Michal (Bristol North), Mike (Glasgow), Mike (Leicester), Mike (Bristol East), Mikhail (Bury & Prestwich), Mireia (Hornsey & Wood Green), Miriyam (Oxford), Mitch (Cambridge), Mona (Walthamstow), Naina (Hackney), Nanda (Leytonstone), Nathan (Medway), Neil (Colchester/Essex SWSS), Neil (Edinburgh), Neil (Kingston), Nicholas (Fife), Nick (Birmingham Stirchley), Nick (Oxford), Nick (Brixton), Ollie (Colchester), Owen (Cambridge), Owen (Southwark), Pat (Euston), Patricia (Brighton & Hove), Patrick (Hull), Patrick (Tower Hamlets), Paul (Manchester), Paul (Hornsey & Wood Green), Pete (Lewisham), Pete (Edinburgh), Pete (Hackney), Peter & Phil (Hornsey & Wood Green), Phillip (Edinburgh), Pura (Liverpool), Rachel (Colchester), Ray (Hornsey & Wood Green), Rebecca

(Tower Hamlets), Rebecca (Portsmouth), Rebecca (Luton), Richard (Burnley/Colne), Rick (Manchester), Rita (Hackney), Riya (Tottenham), Rob (Croydon), Rob (Walthamstow), Robin (Euston), Roderick (Walthamstow), Ross (Euston), Ru (Wandsworth & Merton), Russel (Hornsey & Wood Green), Ruth (Brixton), Sundara (Birmingham Handsworth), Sadie (Cambridge), Sai (Tottenham), Sam (Portsmouth), Sam (Walthamstow), Sam (Bury & Prestwich), Sara (Hornsey & Wood Green), Sarah (Colchester), Sarah (Brighton), Sebastian (Rusholme), Seyd (Walthamstow), Shamma (Tower Hamlets), Shanice (Euston/KCL SWSS), Sharon (Walthamstow), Shirley (Thanet), Siân (Tower Hamlets), Simon (Norwich), Simon (Hornsey & Wood Green), Simon Furze (Birmingham Small Heath), Simon (Huddersfield), Somaye (Hornsey & Wood Green), Sophie (Oxford), Søren (Lewisham), Stef (Tower Hamlets), Stef (Portsmouth), Stella (Thanet), Steve (Dalston), Steve (Luton), Steve (Tower Hamlets), Steven (Glasgow), Stuart (Hornsey & Wood Green), Sue (Bury & Prestwich), Suhail (Hornsey & Wood Green), Terry (Edinburgh), Tim (Swansea), Tina (Hornsey & Wood Green), Tom (Longsight & Levenshulme), Tony (Leeds), Tracey (Hornsey & Wood Green), Valerie (Kingston), Vivienne (Hackney), William (Canterbury), Willie (Edinburgh)

## STATEMENT FOR OUR REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

The ruling class offensive is aggressive, persistent, and relentless. Their class is organised, they have a leadership that is determined, and resolute.

The working class struggles to overcome the ruling class. Because the class struggle is uneven across the working class we need to build an effective political party, that generalises the political and historic needs of the class.

To advance the class struggle the working class needs a party that will concentrate the political and organisational needs of the working class.

When we act together, as a combat party, with a united leadership and cadre, then we are most effective in giving a lead in the class struggle.

It is the dialectical combination of democracy and centralism that makes this possible. First we have maximum discussion, then we make a decision, sometimes with a vote, and finally we unite in

action. This is what enables us to punch above our weight.

We need to have real unity in action to test our political perspectives, in practice. This enables us to learn political lessons from the class. It is this dialectical process that makes it possible for the Party to generate new cadre and develop leadership in the Party.

Since our last conference, some members have organised in opposition to the Party, acting as a permanent group, separate from the Party, in opposition to our agreed perspectives and our elected leadership bodies.

We believe that being a member of a permanent faction is incompatible with membership of the SWP. Comrades who continue to belong to a permanent faction should be expelled, to ensure they do not damage and undermine our Party.

The Socialist Worker newspaper is at the heart of the SWP.

The Central Committee is responsible for bringing out Socialist Worker every week. The paper acts as an educator, an agitator, and organizer of the Party. We expect every member to sell the paper. It provides the ‘scaffolding’ around which the revolutionary party is built.

Our tradition is based upon the pursuit of the revolutionary road to socialism. The 1917 October revolution in Russia changed the world. The party of Lenin and the Bolsheviks won the political argument amongst the masses for the necessity of revolution, they organised the world’s first successful revolution that overthrew capitalism.

Our Party must be able to develop a determined and resolute political leadership, prepared to lead in the class and in the Party. We believe it is our historic responsibility to fight to build a leadership and a Party, fit for purpose, in the 21st century.

Adam (Bristol Uni SWSS & Bristol), Aidan (Manchester), Alan (Tottenham), Alex (Liverpool), Ameen (Manchester Central), Andy (Manchester Chorlton), Anna (North London), Anna (Euston), Arthur (Dundee/Fife), Ayesha (Edinburgh), Audrey (Lancaster), Cam (Manchester Chorlton), Carlo (Dundee/Fife), Caroline (Manchester Chorlton), Celia (Manchester Central), Charlotte (Glasgow North), Chris (Manchester Rusholme), Chris (Dundee/Fife), David (Liverpool), David (Manchester Central), Dave (Wigan), Dean (Walthamstow), Dick (Manchester Levenshulme), Donny (Edinburgh), Eleanor (Leeds City Centre), Emma (Manchester Chorlton), Eugene (Lancaster), Fergus (Hornsey & Wood Green), Gary (Tottenham), Gary (Waltham Forest), Helen (Manchester Levenshulme), Iain (Dundee/Fife), James (North London), Jackie (Cardiff), Jan (Manchester Levenshulme), Janet (Tottenham), Jeff (Cardiff), Jennifer (Hornsey & Wood Green), Jill (Sheffield South), Jim (Dundee/Fife), Joanna (Manchester Longsight), John (Leeds Harehills), John

(Tower Hamlets), Julie (Hornsey & Wood Green), Kate (Goldsmith Uni SWSS), Kate (Leeds Harehills), Kelvin (Tower Hamlets), Laila (Manchester Chorlton), Laura (Leeds), Liz (Dundee/Fife), Liz (Leeds Harehills), Lorraine (Walthamstow), Louis (Sussex Uni SWSS and Brighton & Hove), Margaret (Glasgow), Marisa (Liverpool), Mark (Manchester Chorlton), Marta (Lancaster), Matthew (Manchester Chorlton), Maxine (Sheffield), Merlin (Euston), Mick (Dundee/Fife), Mike (Hornsey & Wood Green), Mike (Manchester Levenshulme), Nahella (Manchester Rusholme), Nandini (Dundee/Fife), Nina (Crewe), Niaz (Euston), Owen (Hornsey & Wood Green), Paul (Leeds Central), Paul (Lancaster), Paul (Newham), Penny (Edinburgh), Penny (Manchester Chorlton), Pete (Dundee/Fife), Pete (Manchester Central), Phil (Tottenham), Phoebe (Camden), Rab (Edinburgh), Rahul (Brixton), Ray (Liverpool), Regi (Camden), Rhetta (Manchester Central), Roger (Walthamstow), Ron (Manchester Chorlton), Russell (Leeds City Centre), Sally & Sam (Leeds Central), Sasha (Hackney East), Siobhan (Walthamstow), Simon (Manchester Central), Steve (Crewe), Sojourner (Leeds Harehills), Sue (Leeds Central), Susie, Terry S & Terry M (Hornsey & Wood Green), Talat (Edinburgh), Tomas (Cardiff Uni SWSS), Tony (Manchester), Vivek (Tottenham)

## THE PARTY WE NEED

The revolutionary left faces uncertain times. The past 15 years have seen the growth of anti-capitalism, the massive stop the war movement, and in 2008 the start of the biggest financial crisis in recent history.

Since the national strike on November 30th 2011 we have also seen explosions of resistance - the general strikes in Greece, the Indignados movement in Spain, Taksim Square in Turkey, mass protests in Brazil and the revolutionary process unfolding in Egypt. We believe all these movements provide lessons, opportunities and inspiration, giving us a glimpse of the kind of resistance we hope to see here too.

Despite this the organised revolutionary left has remained small and has failed to grow significantly. Our own organisation's recent history has been marked by repeated internal crises beginning in 2007 with the collapse of RESPECT. In the past 6 years we have suffered three splits: Counterfire, the International Socialist Group (Scotland) and the International Socialist Network. The internal crisis preceding each split has been marked by similar features: a leadership publicly united right up until its internal tensions explode; attempts to

elevate personal failures over a collective political reckoning; and an increasing internalisation of party life. The culmination of this is the SWP today, an organisation on the precipice of a terminal crisis and further haemorrhaging of membership.

The purpose of this piece is to look beyond the current crisis to outline a picture of what we think a healthy revolutionary organisation would look like. The danger for SWP members today is we are so desperate to hold our organisation together we fail to fight for a party fit for purpose.

### Industrial struggle

Rightly, we built hard for the pensions strike of November 30th 2011. Only a handful of comrades 'in the know', though, were told of the manoeuvring by Barber and Prentis - even before the strike happened - to betray the dispute.

This meant that activists were less prepared for the sell-out that happened a matter of weeks later. Our calls for a general strike and for 'all out, stay out' were in practice abstract propaganda that did not help us build the struggle. Similarly we were promised a 'red hot autumn of struggle' for 2012 as it became ever more clear that the trade union leaders had retreated from a fight. There seemed to be a fear of demoralising our members by telling the truth - but overstating the possibilities had the effect of causing greater demoralisation.

Unite the Resistance appeared in November 2011. Many comrades remained unclear what UTR was actually for. A watered down 'Minority Movement' perspective gradually emerged: a strategy of working with the left trade union leaders to give confidence to the best fighters in the class. The difficulties inherent in this - as the trade union bureaucracy moved to the right and the levels of confidence and organisation remained low - have not been adequately explored. In practice, the Party has vacillated between tailing trade union bureaucrats and denouncing them. Our orientation on the trade union bureaucracy has led to significant tensions in several of our industrial fractions.

Our most serious failings, though, are two-fold. We have not emphasised the urgent need for comrades to patiently rebuild confidence and organisation in their own workplaces, and there needs to be a sharp refocusing of our industrial work towards this. Equally seriously, we have failed to provide any careful analysis of the balance of class forces, and the impact of neoliberalism on our class.

- The party we need must engage seriously with the impact of neoliberalism on trade union activity and confidence in the workplace. We must refocus on workplace level activity to provide examples of political and industrial trade unionism.

### Reformism and movementism

Since the crisis in the party broke publicly last January, wide sections of the left broke with us. In response an increasingly one-sided hostility to left reformism and movementism has developed. This manifested in our dismissive attitude to the People's Assembly, hostility to Owen Jones and increasingly sectarian attitude to working within groups we can't control.

If this becomes entrenched it will represent a break with the method of the united front. Our politics has always been based on the notion that ideas change through struggle and we should be drawing the maximum number of people into campaigns summarised by the phrase "keep it broad, keep it radical".

Recent struggles like the Indignados in Spain demonstrate that when people struggle they bring with them ideas based on their own experience. As the current capitalist crisis is the culmination of decades of neoliberalism, it is unsurprising that these movements include a desire for democratic space, hostility to institutions and parties, and awareness of anti-systemic anti-capitalist politics. All movements will be pervaded by reformism because reformism is rooted in contradictory consciousness. Figures like Owen Jones gain prominence because there is a large, left moving audience which they become spokespeople for. As revolutionaries, we cannot wish this reality away, but have to engage with and attempt to win people from reformism by being the most committed to developing and strengthening the movement on the ground.

- The party we need must work within movements, where possible seeking to deepen them and increase their impact. We must recognise that people's ideas change through struggle and that we can learn from as well as teach those coming into politics. Only then can we win people to a strategy based on the centrality of the working class.

### Students and young members

Since the financial crisis our students were engaged with the most radical section of the movement. The smashing up of Milbank smashed up the consensus that there was no alternative and inspired as many as it shocked. The development of the student movement afterwards was rapid and radical, creating a generation with experience of a real fight back.

Our students and younger members moved quickly, displaying the energy that is the life blood of any healthy revolutionary group. But importantly they also moved politically - building solidarity for industrial action, bringing the radicalism of the student movement into the TUC demonstration and November 30th.

Despite the recent rewriting of history they also responded ideologically, holding student Marxisms and SWSS meetings on far more ideological topics than most

branches.

Under the pretext of students not being “fully won to our politics” (and for opposing the leadership’s handling of the crisis) they have been almost completely driven out of the party. From having the largest SWSS organisation in well over a decade, we are now in a situation where the majority of members under the age of 30 have left the party. Where we had a multitude of large groups we now have only two universities with 5 or more members and have been wiped out on most campuses.

- The party we need will have to organise with those who have left the SWP but continue to operate as revolutionary socialists. We must recognise that the SWSS brand is destroyed at most universities and work within student societies and RevSocs to regroup where we can. We must organise revolutionary socialist societies where we have enough resources in order to rebuild a student cadre.

## Ideology and revolutionary socialism

The ideas of Marxism and Leninism are as relevant today as they have ever been. The strength of our tradition has been to innovate in the face of new experiences while maintaining the soul of socialism from below. However thirty years of defeat and low retention of recruits has impacted on the political culture within the party. The recent crisis has accelerated the decline and risks calcifying our tradition into an orthodoxy based on the defensive battles of the 1980s.

We need to think seriously about what are the criteria for membership in the current period. The party is in danger of defining a “real” SWP member in a very narrow way – someone who is in 100% agreement with every nuance of our accumulated thought. Alex Callinicos’ recent articles on Leninism and comments about “50 years distilled experience” are a symptom of a dangerous internalisation. His suggestion that “there are no secondary questions” implies that we are a party with no space for new ideas or insights that come from outside our central committee.

The opposition in the party has begun to show there is a different way of approaching ideological questions. We have started by looking at the situation around us and judged our ideas and perspectives on how well they explain today’s reality. We have engaged with new writers and theories on the basis of their strongest points, not to adopt or dismiss them, but to learn from them and develop our own theories. This approach has led to some positive recent work on women’s liberation, in contrast to articles which rehash an orthodoxy developed in the 1980s in an attempt to analyse today’s world.

- The party we need must promote the idea of socialism from below and recognise

we do not hold a monopoly on ideas. Our tradition gives us a variety of insights but lessons must be relearned and ideas tested in the face of new struggles.

- The Party we need must be a centre of ideological discussion which is open and appealing to activists beyond our ranks. We should have confidence in the appeal of human liberation that our vision of socialism from below entails.

## Revolutionary organisation

If this conference does not reverse the current direction of travel, it will mark the end of the SWP as a potential bridge to a mass revolutionary party.

The revolutionary possibility of 1968 gave life to our tradition. It allowed us to develop an experienced cadre who transformed the SWP into a party of thousands. But the thousands they recruited in the 70s and 80s are now themselves in their 40’s, 50’s and 60’s. Lenin’s famous quote, “let the Mensheviks have the old men in their 30’s”, has become a cruel joke. Thirty years of neoliberalism has taken its toll and we are reminded of Alex Callinicos quoting Tim Walforth on why the American SWP missed the opportunities of the 1960s:

*“The problem was the party comprised of a generation of workers and intellectuals – those recruited from the 1930s and during world war two – that was getting old and tired. Cannon did a better job than Shachtman in holding together his ageing cadre, and, on the whole, he and his followers kept the revolutionary faith. But because will and energy had departed, faith was about all they had left.”*

This is the future the SWP faces if we do not turn things around this conference. Too many good comrades have responded to the crisis by looking for solutions from a CC that has failed a serious test. To maintain its base the CC is remoulding the party around reactivated members with little experience of recent struggles and driving out younger members. This is a short term fix that will turn a sharp crisis into a slow decline. The Party we need we must:

- Have a broader leadership capable of debating openly in the party and tolerating differences within its ranks. We must build political trust between members so that we can act collectively to maximise our impact and seek to promote a new generation into leading roles.
- Recruit on the basis of our vision of socialism from below and an understanding of the centrality of politics in the neoliberal era. We must be seen to have an uncompromising stand against all forms of oppression.
- Understand the role of print publications, the internet and social media in building revolutionary organisation in the 21st century.

**Rob (Croydon), Mark (Tower Hamlets), Gill & Pete (Hackney East), Ruth (Brixton), Louis (Islington), Amy (Cambridge SWSS), Jamie (Tottenham), Luke (Lewisham), Robin (Euston), Suhail (Hornsey & Wood Green), Andy (Manchester City Centre), Dan (Norwich)**

## LEARNING LESSONS FROM THE LAST YEAR

This year’s national conference will be important in allowing the party to rebuild unity after the damaging divisions of the last year. We need to be able to learn lessons from what has happened if we are to really move on.

Of course we need to move forward with the debate over some quite key differences about our politics, strategy and the kind of party we want that have emerged in the course of the arguments. These debates will be crucial in establishing the future direction of the party.

But this will not be enough if we do not honestly look at what went wrong over the last year and learn from it. To do this we need open and honest reflexion that should not just be seen through the prism of past factional differences.

Some of us writing this document have changed our views over the course of the year. Some argued in private for certain courses of action but didn’t challenge them in public. We now believe that it is important to be open about what we think went wrong.

## Why did the Disputes Committee hearing cause such a crisis in the organisation?

The divisions in the party over the dispute have brought a number of other political differences to the surface. It happened at a time when many activists both inside and outside the party were disorientated because the student explosions and pensions strikes did not lead to a breakthrough in the level of class struggle.

This has increased the twin dangers facing the party of accommodating to movementism or falling into sectarianism. Pressures coming from the different movements, combined with a resurgence of academic Marxism can lead to pessimism about the possibilities of socialism and the working class as the subject of historical change. The resulting pressure on the party to maintain its core politics in face of these

pressures can lead to the opposite danger of sectarianism.

However we do not believe that the crisis over the dispute can just be explained by political differences between the leadership and those who felt that the dispute had been handled incorrectly.

It was inevitable that serious allegations against a leading member of the Central Committee would not be easy to deal with for the CC or the party as a whole.

The issue had already been raised in a different form at the 2011 conference and there was a widespread feeling, acknowledged by the CC at the time that it was not handled well at that conference. With hindsight, if the informal resolution to the issue had been dealt with differently in 2010 then things might now be different.

The outcome of the DC hearing in autumn 2012 was disputed by the woman who had brought the complaint and others who knew her. Confidentiality in DC cases is essential if members are to have confidence to come forward in the future. However it is also right that a DC outcome should be contested if members believe it to be wrong.

Trying to maintain a balance between confidentiality and democracy is never going to be easy in this situation. It was right that the party conference should be the place to have this debate, but that meant over a number of months many members learnt about the case through rumour and innuendo rather than through party channels.

Most comrades felt that the debate at the January conference was as fair as possible. The vote adopting the DC report formally concluded the matter. However we believe that the closeness of the vote should not have been ignored.

Members concerns were exacerbated further when the conference transcript was leaked and the issue became one that forces hostile to the party could intervene in. This led to a hardening of positions on both sides.

## Were members concerns related to?

Votes at party conference need to be conclusive decisions for the party. However this does not mean the end of political discussion. After the January conference it was a major mistake by the CC not to relate to the concerns of the substantial minority in the party over the disputes case.

The nub of these concerns was that complaints of sexual harassment or rape may not have been taken seriously because they were against a leading member of the party.

It is true that the majority of members felt there was no reason or no alternative but to adopt the elected DC's report. But those who were not convinced of this had a right to their views. They should not have

been characterised as only being factionally driven or motivated by "feminist" or other incorrect politics. Whatever the political views of those who were expressing concerns over the case, it was not helpful to reduce real concerns over the DC to other causes.

This defensiveness led the CC to argue against a full review of the Disputes Committee at the February National Committee which a number of comrades were proposing as a way forward to help rebuild unity and win back confidence in the way the party dealt with complaints.

The CC ended up only proposing the review after a faction had declared itself following the National Committee. We cannot be sure, but if the review had been proposed then and the leadership had reached out to the opposition, it is possible that fewer members might have left and the faction might never have been set up in February.

## Factional divisions

The experience of the last year shows why the party has always argued against permanent factions which merely entrench political divisions in a way that is unhelpful and damaging.

The behaviour of the faction has at times been outrageous and a clear breach of all party practices and traditions including leaking internal and sometimes confidential issues; attacking the party in public; offensive language used against comrades; secretive and underhand ways of organising. This has rightly angered and frustrated many party members.

These methods of permanent factional organising have to end after this year's conference.

However the CC and the wider leadership have not always succeeded in the past year of steering a course away from entrenching factional divisions further.

## Sticking to principles

It is wrong there had to be an argument to ensure that a Disputes hearing should be held for a woman who had given additional evidence after the original DC case and who subsequently wanted to make a formal complaint against the same leading member.

Whatever the background or the history of how this particular complaint had come forward, a revolutionary party has to demonstrate in practice that we take allegations of sexual harassment seriously.

Unfortunately this was not automatic. It was only when comrades (not involved in any faction) threatened to campaign openly in the party that the CC finally intervened to ensure that a hearing took place.

## Moving forward

The review of the Disputes Committee as

well as the recent Disputes panel set up to hear this woman's case can now allow the party to move forward over the concerns about the Disputes Committee.

The pre-conference period will include discussion and amendment of the review of the DC which can allow a full debate about what lessons should be learnt for the future.

Those who have been involved in the faction should now be able to feel that many of their concerns have been taken seriously and that other political debates should be able to take place within the normal structures of the party.

The CC and the wider party leadership have a responsibility to signal that lessons have been learnt on all sides and previous divisions should be put in the past.

Moving out of entrenched factional division is going to take a major political effort on all sides. Factional tensions have been on going in some branches and districts for nearly a year and behaviour on all sides has sometimes been found wanting.

Comrades involved in the faction want to know they will be treated with respect. Other comrades angered by factional behaviour want to know it is going to end. We are going to have to learn how to listen to each other and work together again.

If we do not succeed in doing this and all of our debates are coloured with factional overtones we will not be able to have the kind of real political discussion and argument that we need to work out how to intervene in the coming period.

We need to think through how we fight for our conference discussions to be open to all sides of the argument and at a high political level, not just falling into familiar divisions from the past.

## Learning lessons

It is obvious that there will be lessons we need to learn after such a damaging year for the party. There is no simple blueprint but a number of issues need to be thought through and discussed further and we need to be prepared to experiment with making changes.

There is still further debate to be had about why we have lost a number of our younger members including those who have played a leading role within the party. Why were political differences submerged and why did they only appear after the arguments about the DC?

The CC has moved to address raising the level of debate within the organisation at Marxism, through day schools and educational and within our publications. The idea of a Socialist Review blog to open a further channel for that discussion should be considered.

Closer links between students and branches and their districts is clearly long overdue.

The whole question of how to develop a wider leadership in the party is some-

thing we have attempted to address over recent years. But we now also have the scars of the last year to heal. The CC has been divided and paralysed over a number of issues relating to the disputes cases. The wider leadership in the party has also been put to the test.

We need to develop a National Committee of comrades who can think and lead independently in order to both support the CC and hold it to account. One proposal for strengthening that role is for the NC to meet more frequently. This could be tried as an experiment to help address recent problems and could be reviewed at next year's conference. The CC has to bring major arguments to the NC as part of a process of finding resolution to those debates and developing a new leadership in the party.

**Candy (Camden), Sheila, Paul & Jacky (Tower Hamlets), John (Hackney East), Huw (Bristol Stokes Croft) and Mark (Islington)**

## NO MORE PUTILOVS?

Over the last few months some members of the faction have begun to develop an analysis of the class struggle in Britain, and perhaps more significantly the structure of the British working class, which have substantial implications for our theory and practice.

Neil D in ISJ 139 and Colin B in his meeting at Marxism 2013 offer the clearest expressions of these developments.

Neil D's article on 'the neo liberal era in Britain: Historical developments and current perspectives' offers tantalising glimpses of an agenda which he hints at, but barely explains.

He starts the article by suggesting that the SWP is innately conservative:

*"Capitalism involves underlying continuities, without which it would cease to exist, but also that it undergoes periodic changes in form, which are the expressions of its historical development. Revolutionaries have to recognise and respond to the latter, rather than denying their existence just because they threaten to disrupt venerable organisational forms or established interventionist strategies. They should instead look for what new possibilities these changes offer, however unfamiliar or unsettling they may be."* (my highlights)

And he ends in the same vein:

*"There is always a danger of adapting to the environment in which we have achieved a degree of successful implantation, so that a particular sector is treated as decisively important to the working class simply because it is decisively important to us. The public sector trade unions play this role for the Socialist Workers Party."*

And:

*"However, nostalgia for the pits, shipyards and power stations, and its corollary, despair over the call centres, supermarkets and dispatch centres, are not only useless, but also quite unnecessary."*

The intention appears to be to suggest that the organisation which made such a successful turn to the working class in the late 60s and early 70s, the organisation which most came to terms with the downturn in class struggle in the late 70s and which recognised the significance of the growth of white collar workers, has now lost its way.

Yet it seems to me that under the pretence of challenging conservatism and being prepared to 'think outside the box', there is a dangerous turn away from the centrality of the working class as the agent of socialist revolution being developed by Neil, Colin and their co-thinkers in the faction.

At this year's Marxism this was expressed in a number of meetings I attended.

In his meeting on "what could a socialist revolution look like?" Colin B asks a question about where the future power may lie.

*"We can't be prescriptive about what the social basis around which people will organise will be.... The Putilov works in Russia seems to be a natural organising centre, one of the biggest factories in the world. Obviously it is going to be a centre of organisation..... but then you think today, and you look around Manchester or Leeds or Sheffield or London those big big factories don't have the same centrality as they did. Clearly other forms will emerge. I don't know what they'll be."*

This was an astonishing proposition for a comrade of Colin's standing. As Richard B said in the discussion:

*"Yes there will be unexpected mobilisations from quarters we don't expect and we have to respond to them. But the organised working class is still key.... When we say where are our Putilov factories? They're the hospitals, they're the transport workers, they're the shopping centres where you get thousands of retail workers together."*

Now the valid point in Colin's argument

is that the working class has changed, and many of the massive production units which dominated the economic and political life of the working class in the 1970s are gone. But new ones are being created.

Is it really the case that we have no key workplaces left in Britain? Every city and town has major workplaces, be they airports, hospitals, factories or retail parks.

76,000 people work in Heathrow Airport, dwarfing even the 30,000 employed in Putilov. Another 7,000 local workers are part of Heathrow's supply chain.

In Manchester Trafford Park industrial area has 1,400 companies employing 35,000 people, a massive concentration of workers in close proximity to each other.

Leeds Teaching Hospital Trust employs nearly 15,000 people and there are 10 NHS Trusts which employ over 10,000 workers.

Bluewater shopping centre employs 7,000 people.

Jaguar Landrover employs 25,000 people, distributed across 6 major sites in the West Midlands and Merseyside, and these numbers are growing.

In the Communist Manifesto Marx described the impact of capitalism on society "constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation..." recognition of this, and its impact on a changing working class, is at the heart of SWP analysis.

But while the working class has changed, its role in society has not. We no longer have miners or shipbuilders in any effective numbers. The number of dockers has fallen significantly in London alone down from 20,000 in the 1970s to less than 500 in 1992.

Yet unless I am mistaken the imports and exports to Britain, worth a cool £693 billion last year, are entirely dependent on the docks, airports and now the channel tunnel to function. These are all unionised workforces.

Neil treats this fact with disdain "but this is more to do with their strategic position rather than their numerical strength." But isn't that an important point about the working class? It is our position in capitalist society that gives us the power to overthrow it. The working class in Russia was a small minority, yet they were the key class.

Of course the working class has changed. At Marxism faction members were quoting the low number of private sector workers in unions, 2.5 million, as if it was a new discovery. In fact in ISJ 120 in 2008 Chris Harman charted this decline in his article on 'snapshots of union strengths and weaknesses'.

The implication of quoting these figures appears to be that there has been a massive flight from the unions. This simply hasn't happened. With the decline of the industries that dominated the 70s we have seen the loss of union members.



What does the working class look like today?

For a start manufacturing is not dead. 2.6 million people work in it, 8% of the workforce, and it is the 3rd biggest section of the UK economy.

Of course there have been big changes. In 1979 six million people were employed in manufacturing. The loss of 3.4 million jobs in manufacturing, one of the strongest bases of the unions in the 70s, goes a long way to describe why union membership has fallen.

Under the Thatcher administration, from 1979 to 1990 union membership dropped by around 3.5 million. In the recession of 1989 to 1992 another 1.7 million union members lost their jobs. The current recession and austerity continue to see unionised workers, amongst others, laid off.

Although direct comparisons are of little value due to different national traditions it is worth noting British union density compared with other OECD countries. While in the UK the density was 25.8% in 2011 this was higher than Germany, France and Greece. Notably the OECD countries as a whole have also seen a drop of union density from close to 35% in 1975 to 17% in 2011.

Neil mocks '*nostalgia for .... Power stations.*' Well I don't know what his computer and internet provider run on, but mine are electricity. This is another group of workers who have fallen dramatically in number, yet retain immense power.

Take a look at the retail sector.

Supermarkets dominate food consumption in this country. Yet just in time delivery methods mean they are vulnerable to accidents or stoppages. If you travel on any motorway you can see the huge supermarket distribution hubs. A strike in these would see an immediate impact on the food on the shelves. They are also extremely vulnerable to 70s style mass picketing. They mostly have only one or two entrances and they need to keep these open. Tesco workers are organised and in some areas they are well organised.

The fall in numbers in the unions is undoubtedly a concern for those who see the working class as the centre of their political vision. This is particularly true of the private sector and we should play whatever role we can in helping to unionise new sections of workers.

But the real organising power is the struggle itself. Every major strike has seen significant increases in union membership. In the 70s the struggles of the most powerful sections of workers; miners, dockers, engineers etc, gave confidence to the building workers to fight, and to unionise sites across the country with militant actions. It was also the confidence created by the militancy of the backbone of the labour movement at the time that led to struggles amongst what were then weaker sections – civil servants took their first action, teachers and health workers started acting

like trade unionists.

The membership of the SWP is largely confined to the public sector as a result not of some strategic plan, nor even inertia. It is the product of the defeats of the working class in the 80s and 90s. Do we want to break out into the private sector, manual workers etc? Oh yes. But the extent to which we succeed won't simply be set by our consistency in working around these areas, important as this can be. It will be set by the tide of the struggle. And in this we can have some influence, even from our public sector base. The role played by the SWP in the NUT and UCU, to a lesser but important extent in UNISON, and the hard left's impact in the PCS, has helped raise the prospect of coordinated, and sometimes militant action. Without our continued work in these areas would the movement be stronger or weaker?

Is it all bad news?

Figures for the rise and fall of the unions between 1995 and 2012 show a loss of 650,000 members. While this is not good news it is a far less serious decline than the previous period. If you look closer at the figures you see two contrasting trends – while nearly 1 million union members have been lost in manufacturing and 138,000 in construction; education has increased by 481,000 members, a 45% increase, and health and social work have increased by over 250,000 members.

So, far from the SWP deciding what is '*decisively important to the working class simply because it is decisively important to us*' it turns out that public sector trade unions are a significant growth area for the trade union movement and are currently decisively important to the movement.

The development of the faction has, despite many denials, begun a process for some comrades of developing ideas which are moving away from ideas which are central to the SWP.

The road to revolution is a complex one, and in the world's oldest capitalist democracy it is certainly a slow one. Along the way shiny new movements come along that look like they are a better, quicker and easier route. Yet the left is littered with individuals and organisations whose move away from the working class as the key power for socialist revolution started with small steps.

John Rees, formerly of the SWP and now Counterfire, parted ways with us over differences over Stop the War. Other disagreements were downplayed but are now far clearer. At the launch of the People's Assembly John stated that the working class struggle is just one arm of the movement, of equal importance to the movement on the streets. James Meadway also recently published an article on Counterfire which offered a conservative analysis of the working class and announced that workplaces are the 'most depoliticised spaces in British society'!

I hope that members of the faction, some

with long experience in our organisation, aren't on the same path where a disagreement over one issue becomes a catalyst for breaking with our general politics.

Neil D opened the debate at Marxism with a long list of things he doesn't think – precariat etc. yet by the end I was no clearer about what he does think. Capitalism has changed, yes. The working class has changed, well yes.

Rather than sniping at the party, tell us what you are saying is wrong with our analysis of the working class today, tell us what you think the correct analysis should be, and tell us how it would change our practice. For this is the real test – how would you change our intervention in the class struggle?

We all feel frustration at the low level of struggle. But if we decide that there are no more Putilovs and we need to look outside of the working class for alternative sources of power, this is the end of revolutionary socialism.

**Pete (Birmingham Small Heath)**

## THE WORKING CLASS TODAY: THE NEED FOR ANALYSIS AND AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY

### Introduction

Britain is now suffering the longest fall in living standards since Queen Victoria sat on the throne. According to the Resolution Foundation, one in five workers now toil for below the living wage: since 2009, the numbers have risen from 3.4 million to 4.8 million. On the eve of Cameron's assumption of power, 18 per cent of women worked for less than the living wage; it's now a quarter. Britain has suffered the second biggest fall in wages of any G20 country since the coalition took office.

A combination of high inflation and a clampdown on wages by UK employers has meant that workers in France, Germany and Canada have seen their pay packets relative to inflation recover since 2010 while the average British worker is estimated to be £1,500 worse off.

Nearly four out of five jobs created under this government pay less than £7.95 an hour. These jobs are often more precarious, too: estimates suggest that there is anything between 250,000 and according to Unite, possibly 5.5 million on zero-hour contracts.

Clearly, these figures can't be taken at face value but the employers' offensive has

taken on new dimensions in the workplace. Low pay, less secure work and increased inequality are growing problems for workers in Britain. The bourgeois press have an interest in exaggerating these trends.

The Party is correct to reject the existence of a 'precarariat' and an 'underclass.' However we have had tendency to reject or refuse to properly discuss or acknowledge how real changes have affected our class in recent decades. We have been correct to reject the right wing conclusions drawn by academics discussing these changes; however we do need to develop an analysis of these changes ourselves. This task is long overdue and increasingly necessary to help us develop a strategy that connects with workers undergoing the biggest assault in generations.

The piece concludes with some suggestions on how we develop a more coherent analysis and how we develop a more rounded industrial strategy that starts from the rank and file where it currently is and not where we wish it to be.

## Industrial strategy – rank and file and left bureaucracy

The employers offensive has accelerated after the debacle of the pensions dispute where

Dave Prentis, Brendan Barber, Len McCluskey, Mark Serwotka, Christine Blower et. al. were culpable to varying degrees for a completely unnecessary sell out.

However, their role in this dispute should come as no surprise to Party comrades armed with our understanding of the bureaucracy and rank and file. An important issue at stake is how they found it so easy to call off the action and drive through the sell-out.

Struggle is the key for socialists. We all accept that the rank and file is far weaker today, but putting too much focus on the left bureaucracy to deliver the necessary action can sow illusions in them.

This makes it more difficult to mobilise independently when they sell out or accept the unnecessary compromises they inevitably make. Our strategy should aim to build the confidence of the rank and file to take independent action and also seek to put pressure on the bureaucracy.

Our primary focus should not be on winning positions in the lay bureaucracy and manoeuvring to deliver action. Winning positions in the lay bureaucracy is no substitute for the patient work of developing a rank and file cadre whose primary focus is on fighting to build independent action and build the necessary pressure on the bureaucracy – right and left to call effective action. The two approaches should not be mutually exclusive.

Recently, there have been some welcome developments in our industrial work with a shift in focus towards organising

in the workplace. The UtR conference in October will have a focus on organising. However, our primary focus remains on the left bureaucracy and the union instead of the workplace.

We do need to have a relationship with the left bureaucracy, but our focus on General Secretaries and other leading left bureaucrats alongside our comrades in leading positions in the union skews our perspective to the detriment of a consistent strategy that begins with the rank and file. Our relationship with the bureaucracy should always be defined by our relationship with the rank and file through our industrial fractions and Party branches. Clearly, there was pressure from the rank and file on the bureaucracy in the lead up to J30 and N30. Comrades did well to focus this pressure to shift the bureaucracy in the lead up to these strikes. We need to understand how we were unable to stop the bureaucracy 'turning off the tap' in the unions where we have influence.

This is not to suggest that we abandon attempts to put pressure on the bureaucracy. When they move their little finger it can give confidence to workers to fight and win. The example of the Sparks victory 18 months ago or Crossrail, where Unite have led a top down leverage campaign to blow open Blacklisting, are important examples that could have huge implications for the construction sector. The recent retreat by Hovis over zero-hour contracts is another. However, both these examples began with sustained rank and file pressure that shifted the bureaucracy into calling action.

## The shape of the working class today

This piece seeks to understand what has actually changed in the working class to help explain the changing dynamics in the workplace. It's important to move beyond the headline figures and to find out what has actually changed. We need to begin to explore ideas and techniques to help the Party come to grips with these changes and develop an effective strategy of engagement with the working class as it exists today.

A broad outline of the shape of the working class can be found in the Labour Force Survey which provides statistics for the total number of jobs by industry. By comparing the statistics for 1987 and 2012 it is possible to identify a number of trends.

Workforce Jobs by Industry	1987	2012	Change
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	504,000	428,000	-76,000
Mining & quarrying	201,000	73,000	-128,000
Manufacturing	4,931,000	2,641,000	-2,290,000
Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply	212,000	115,000	-97,000
Water supply, sewerage, waste & remediation activities	142,000	201,000	+59,000
Construction	1,955,000	2,005,000	+50,000
Wholesale & retail trade; repair of motor vehicles & motorcycles	4,193,000	4,898,000	+705,000
Transport & storage	1,274,000	1,559,000	+285,000
Accommodation & food service activities	1,371,000	2,118,000	+747,000
Information & communication	774,000	1,266,000	+492,000
Financial & insurance activities	1,025,000	1,149,000	+124,000
Real estate activities	226,000	485,000	+259,000
Professional scientific & technical activities	1,293,000	2,506,000	+1,213,000
Administrative & support service activities	1,318,000	2,573,000	+1,255,000
Public admin & defence; compulsory social security	1,889,000	1,590,000	-299,000
Education	1,906,000	2,775,000	+869,000
Human health & social work activities	2,522,000	4,028,000	+1,506,000
Arts, entertainment & recreation	598,000	876,000	+278,000
Other service activities	716,000	801,000	+85,000

The first trend that can be identified is the large reduction in employment in Manufacturing of 2,290,000 from 1987 to 2012, a drop of 46%.

This has been accompanied by falls in Agriculture, forestry & fishing (-15%), Mining & quarrying (-64%), and Electricity, gas, steam & air conditioning supply (-46%).

The category of Public admin & defence; compulsory social security also decreased by 15%, however all other categories saw significant increases. In particular the largest numerical increases by 2012 were in

Human health & social work activities (increase of 60%), Administrative & support service activities (93%), Professional scientific & technical activities (94%), and Education (45%). Alongside these notable categories has been a growth of service work in general between 1987 and 2012.

The statistics provide an important starting point for understanding class today: there have been far reaching changes in the last 25 years. This should be no surprise to any Marxist, after all Marx argued that capitalism is characterised by the ‘constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions.’ However care should be taken when reading off changes from statistics. The recent admission of the Office for National Statistics<sup>1</sup> of the failure to properly calculate those working on zero hour contracts is a clear warning.

The usefulness of large scale statistics is that they simplify a vast and complex number of variables into something manageable. Unfortunately, but perhaps unsurprisingly, statistics like the census are not collected based on Marxist categories.

Therefore the process of compiling them necessarily involves missing out information.

One example is that the categories can attribute false homogeneity. Within the individual categories there might be important distinctions which are missed.

Not every person counted in the job by industry will share the same class position, with some who are managers and supervisors.

Additionally manufacturing is much more productive in 2012 than it was in 1987, so although the total number of people employed might have changed, the relative economic importance of the sector may not have changed by as much.

The statistics from 1987 and 2012 capture a period that was marked by the rise of neoliberalism. Its advance has brought attacks on the terms and conditions of workers, the dismantling of the welfare state through the reduction of government spending, and the opening up of public services to market forces. These structural changes have been forced through after a series of defeats for the organised working class. The process has intensified with the current coalition government’s austerity agenda. It has exposed increasing layers of society to the experience of precarious working conditions without the organisation or traditions of trade union membership.

The headline statistics for 2011 show that there were 6.4 million employees who were members of a trade union with a density of 26%.

The figures are based on the Labour Force Survey series that began in 1995 and show a downward trend from 32.4%. The

membership is divided between 3.9 million in the public sector and 2.5 million in the private sector.

Union membership density in the public sector stands at 56.5% whereas in the private sector it is only 14.1%. This division is exacerbated by the fact that ‘the education and health and social work industries each account for over a fifth of union members but only for 7.6 and 11.5 per cent of union members respectively.’ It is therefore possible to say that these areas have a hugely disproportionate representation, or rather that there are other areas that lack any significant union organisation.

## Changes in the world affect workers consciousness

According to the British Social Attitudes survey, 60% of people think they are working class. Our definition of class is objective, nevertheless this figure does tell us something about class consciousness.

Statistical figures reveal important information but they also conceal more than they reveal. Workers attitudes have undergone tremendous changes under the impact of the changes in society and at work. What are these changes and how have they affected class-consciousness?

There is a pressing need to examine the condition of the rank and file and class consciousness. We have to move beyond simply stating that the working class exists in itself, then restating our position that the working class is agency and then focussing on the left bureaucracy to lead action.

We need to begin to develop a strategy that acknowledges the real problems we face in mobilising millions of workers in taking the kind of action that we believe will be necessary to defeat the Tories and turn back the austerity drive. It’s important to understand how workers’ existing consciousness made our struggle tougher than we anticipated when the bureaucracy closed down the pension’s dispute.

Class-consciousness is not a fixed entity that can be mathematically calculated from workers position in relation to the means of production. Class-consciousness is dynamic and we need to look at what influences and shapes it. Only a strategy that focuses on the rank and file can begin to pose the correct questions, develop analysis of the changes that have taken place, develop effective strategies of resistance and then begin to pose the question of how the class in itself can become a class for itself.

## Developing industrial perspectives

At present the Party’s industrial perspec-

tives are impressionistic. On the whole they are developed without the active involvement of the Party’s cadre or a consistent engagement with the class.

In previous periods the Party developed its industrial perspectives in close connection with the industrial cadre, drawing on experiences from comrades in the branches and from the rank and file. This resulted in industrial perspectives that were developed from a close relationship with not only Party members but a broad engagement with militants in the workplaces. This made the task of winning these perspectives much easier with our contacts and a wider audience in the working class.

One example is Tony Cliff’s book *The Employers Offensive*. By investigating over 100 different productivity deals the investigation and resulting pamphlet aimed to:

*“Aid militant workers and socialists in understanding the general nature of productivity deals and their various specific features. The book aims to help to develop a working class strategy which fits the current industrial and political objective situation but at the same time uncompromisingly asserts the primacy of rank and file control, both at the place of work and in the union, and over the state”<sup>3</sup>.*

Although the objective situation is different, a method to develop perspectives in this way is currently missing from the Party’s work. If we are to strengthen our industrial interventions we need to find a way of correcting this.

Although not explicitly labelled as such, some of the methods used by the IS have important similarities with the tradition of workers’ inquiries. It takes inspiration from Marx, in his call for an inquiry published in a newspaper in France in 1880. In the introduction Marx explained the aim of the survey:

*“We hope to meet in this work with the support of all workers in town and country who understand that they alone can describe with full knowledge the misfortunes from which they suffer and that only they, and not saviours sent by providence, can energetically apply the healing remedies for the social ills which they are prey. We also rely upon socialists of all schools who, being wishful for social reform, must wish for an exact and positive knowledge of the conditions in which the working class – the class to whom the future belongs – works and moves.*

*These statements of Labor’s grievances are the first act of which socialist democracy must perform, in order to pre-*

1 See: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mro/news-release/ons-announces-additional-estimate-of-zero-hours-contracts/zhc0813.html>

2 Brownlie, Nikki (2012) *Trade Union Membership 2011*, London: Department for Business Innovation & Skills

3 Cliff, Tony (1970) *The Employer’s Offensive*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1970/offensive/00-preface.htm>

*pare the way for social regeneration.*<sup>4</sup>

Tony Cliff developed this method effectively in a different period. We should investigate how this approach can be best used today.

It is difficult to build any forms of organisation without an adequate knowledge of the conditions of those affected. A return to a focus on the experience and conditions of workers at a rank and file level has the potential to shed new light – not only on what is actually happening in the world around us – but also on the possibilities for resistance, how to build organisation, and to develop strategies that can win.

## Conclusions

These proposals are radical in the sense that they would anticipate a different approach to developing perspectives. Any notion of hatching an industrial strategy from the heads of one or two CC members is clearly at odds with the approach outlined above.

What is being suggested is an approach the Party used successfully in previous periods, where we return to developing perspectives using a method that engages the leadership, the cadre, industrial fractions and party members with the rank and file workers we work with in our day to day struggles. Perspectives developed this way will have more chance of engaging Party comrades and a significant section of workplace militants who have been actively involved in the process.

By beginning with the day to day reality of workers' experience at work - pay, long hours and the intensification of work, we can begin to more effectively construct a socialist minority of workplace militants that can develop effective strategies to challenge and defeat the employers offensive. If we take as our starting point the centrality of the working class this is not an abstract position; it requires a constant and concrete engagement with actual workers.

We therefore argue that the Party needs to:

- Shift its primary focus from the left bureaucracy in trade unions to the workplace.
- Undertake a critical inquiry into the shape of the working class today.
- Assess the combativity and consciousness of workers fighting back against austerity.
- Prepare an analysis of the key issues facing workers in the workplace today.
- Develop an industrial strategy based on the points above that involves not only the leadership, but also the wider party and class.

**Ray (Hackney) Jamie (Goldsmiths SWSS and Tottenham)**

## THE STATE OF TRADE UNIONS IN THE UK: SOME FACTS FOR THE DEBATE

I have been a member of the SWP for over 17 years, a workplace union rep in Royal Mail for 12 years (1997-2009), and a full-time elected area representative with responsibility for 17 workplaces and around 800 members for the last 4 years (2009-2013). I have been involved in national strike action in 1996, 2007 and 2009. I was also on the editorial committee of the Post Worker rank-and-file newspaper from its beginning to its disappearance in 2010.

In my experience, all too often discussions in the SWP of 'the state of working class organisation' or 'the state of the class struggle' in Britain become falsely polarised into a caricature of debate between 'optimists' on one side and 'pessimists' on the other. And of course, no-one ever wants to be labelled a pessimist, do they?

Recently a number of comrades have had the temerity to raise questions about the state of trade union membership, trade union organisation, and working class consciousness and self-activity in Britain. Some have pointed towards initiatives in previously unorganised workplaces as evidence of a real potential for working class organisation to be created from scratch. Others have questioned our approach to working in unions where the bureaucracy has a firm grip on the organisation, with no organised rank-and-file challenge to this from below.

The response from many (including even the current CC) to this questioning about where exactly we are in 'the class struggle', has unfortunately been to accuse comrades who are asking awkward but pertinent questions, of having already ditched, or being about to ditch, 'the Marxist theory of the centrality of the working class'. This is very far from the truth. So let's get real, let's get honest, and stop dealing in false accusations. It is not being polemical, is it plain and simple dishonesty.

Some in the party don't want to openly discuss or examine these questions, seemingly because they are afraid of where it might eventually lead. Others want to just sling mud or false accusations against some members because they happened to be in a particular faction at the time, or had opposed the Central Committee on other issues. Frankly, this is no way to debate such a serious issue as the state of the working class. It needs to stop, and people need to start addressing the real issues, not their own fears and phantoms. There is a crying need for a real and open democratic culture in the SWP, and there is no

better place to start to create this than in the discussion of perspectives for the class struggle in Britain.

So let's start a real debate on the real state of working class organisation in Britain, as it is here and now, and how we have got here over the last four decades. Let us base this discussion on facts: facts about what people are actually saying; and facts about the actual state of trade union organisation. It seems obvious to me, that this is of major importance for any revolutionary socialist party that wishes to relate properly and adequately to where working class people are today, in order to build the class struggles of tomorrow.

Only by doing this, as a fundamental starting point, can we go on to identify what tasks we need to take on, in the short, medium, and longer term, wherever we are within the current trade unions and wherever we are not.

If we want to see the working class of this country lead a revolutionary challenge to the capitalist order, we have to understand where both the opportunities and the obstacles are, so we can tackle them and build working class self-confidence, class consciousness, organisation, and self-activity, wherever we find ourselves.

I'm not interested here in 'bending the stick' in any particular direction. This debate is far too important for 'stick-bending' one way or another. What we need is straight talking, and a determination to stare reality in the face, warts and all. Only then will we be able to properly debate and decide policy on the important issues raised in a way that unifies the SWP, rather than divides it.

## Trade Union membership levels: some basic facts

According to the best statistical information available (Trade Union Membership 2012: Statistical Bulletin, BIS, May 2013), at its historical 'high point', on the eve of the election of Thatcher's Government in 1979, trade union membership in the UK stood at 13.2 million. But after the impact of the early 1980s recession, repression and restructuring, by 1985 this had fallen to 10.8 million. By the time that Blair's New Labour Government was elected in 1997, membership was just 7.8 million. Now the figure stands at 7.2 million as of 2011.

A slightly different set of figures are those for union members *who are also employees*, which for the UK in 2011 was 6.4 million, and in 2012 was 6.5 million. (These figures are not available for before 1995) This latest figure is actually an increase of 59,000 from 2011 (a growth of about 1%), which has come after four consecutive years of decline in membership of more than 100,000 each year. In fact, trade union membership levels have "kept pace" with an increase in the number of employees between 2011 and 2012. Put simply,

<sup>4</sup> Marx, Karl () Workers' Inquiry. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/04/20.htm>

trade unions have been recruiting.

## Trade Union density: some fundamental facts

This has meant that Trade Union density, or in other words the proportion of employees in a trade union, has remained stable at 26% from 2011 to 2012. However over the years 1995 to 2012, this proportion of employees that are trade union members decreased from 32% in 1995 to 26% in 2012. (1995 was the first year these statistics were collected).

In 1995 overall Trade Union density was 32% (35% for men, 30% for women), whereas today it stands at 26% overall (23% for men, 29% for women). So, even after the recession of the 1980s, and during the years of Blair's New Labour Government, union density continued to decline. Between 1995 and 2007, union density declined, even though actual membership figures remained more or less stable, quite simply because unions did not recruit members as fast as the number of employees grew. This trend stopped in 2011-2012. This could be a sign of active trade union recruitment reversing the trend, or a sign that the growth in the number of employees has stopped or slowed.

## Public and private sector Trade Union membership: some little known facts

But this overall picture masks an important distinction that we need to make, between the state of trade union membership in the public sector, and that in the private sector. In 1995, public sector employees numbered 3.7m, and those in the private sector 3.4m. The number of public sector union members reached a peak of 4.1m in 2009, but has since reduced to 3.9m in 2012. By comparison, the number of private sector union members was stable at around 3.4m till 1998, but has since reduced and now stands at 2.6m as of 2012.

Recently, union membership in the private sector has actually risen for two consecutive years, by 42,000 from 2010 to 2011, and by 63,000 from 2011 to 2012. However, this comes after a cumulative fall of 447,000 between 2007 and 2010, which clearly shows the impact of the recession since 2008.

By comparison, public sector membership has reduced from its peak of 4.1m by a total of 217,000 between 2009 and 2012. This breaks down to a loss of 37,000 members between 2009 and 2010, then 177,000 between 2010 and 2011, followed by just 3,000 between 2011 and 2012. Here is evidence of two things: the impact of Government policy in terms of public sector job cuts and privatisation; but also the successful recruitment drives of public sector unions in 2010-2011, around the time of

the public sector pensions dispute.

There are also significant gender differences in the levels of union membership, in both the private and public sectors. In 2012 in the private sector 1.6m men were union members, compared with only 900,000 women. In the public sector, it is the other way round, with 1.3m men, outnumbered by 2.6m women.

## Public and private sector Trade Union density: some important facts

Overall figure of 26% for Trade Union density in 2012 also masks important differences between the public and private sectors. Trade union density in the public sector currently stands higher at 56%, whereas in the private sector it is just 14%. The recent reduction in public sector membership has brought with it a slight reduction in public sector density from 56.6% in 2009 to 56.3% in 2012; whereas the recent increase in private sector membership has increased private sector union density slightly from the all-time low of 14.2% in 2011 to just 14.4% in 2012. This increase could actually be evidence of the recent privatisation of previously public sector unionised employees.

Taking a slightly longer view, from 1995 when private sector union density was 21.4%, it has now fallen by a total of 7% to 14.4% in 2012. This is evidence of the ongoing weakening of trade union organisation in the private sector since the Thatcher years.

By comparison, union density in the public sector has reduced by 5% from 61.3% to 56.3% over the same period, 1995 to 2012. This is also evidence of the relative weakening of trade union organisation in the public sector. But it also shows that over the longer term this weakening has been less significant than in the private sector.

The decline of overall trade union density to 26% is in fact fully accounted for by the fall in private sector trade union membership of 24% between 1995 and 2012, which has outweighed an increase in public sector membership of 4% over the same period.

## Trade Union density in different industries: some detailed facts

When we come to trying to understand the relative strengths of trade union organisation in the UK, whether in the public or private sectors, it will be helpful to have some facts about trade union density in the different industries.

It should be no surprise to anyone by now that trade union membership and density varies widely by industry. In industries with higher proportions of public sector

workers, we find higher union membership and density. In industries with higher proportions of private sector workers, we find lower union membership and density. But this is a bit simplistic, and not the whole story. So let us get a bit more specific.

In 2012, the highest levels of union density were in 'public administration and defence / compulsory social security' and in 'education', with 52% each. These were closely followed by 'electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply' [sic] at 44%, and 'human health and social work' with 41%. However, these were followed by 'transportation and storage' at 40%, and 'water supply, sewerage, waste management' at 35% union density. The latter are both now in the private sector, but historically were previously in the public sector.

By way of contrast, in 2012 lower levels of union density were to be found in 'manufacturing' and in 'mining and quarrying' at 19% each, closely followed by both 'finance and insurance' and 'construction' with 16%, and the likes of 'wholesale and retail trade / repair of motor vehicles' alongside 'information and communication' both at just 13%. No prizes for anyone guessing the lowest density industry: 'accommodation and food service' with a mere 3.5% union density.

In the years between 1995 and 2012, all industries saw a decline in union density, with the sole exception of 'wholesale / retail trade and motor repair'. The latter saw its density grow by 2% from 11% in 1995 to 13% in 2012. The sharpest decline has been in 'electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply' which has fallen by 28% from 72% density in 1995 to 44% in 2012.

Hear we can clearly see the impact of privatisation and competition in the utilities between 1995 and 2012. Whilst British Gas was privatised in 1986, it remained a private monopoly, and was only restructured in 1995. The gas supply market was not opened up to competitors until 1996, and the British Gas company was finally broken into three in 1997. In electricity, whilst privatisation legislation was passed in 1989, the CEBG was only restructured in 1990. The industry was only partially privatised by selling off 60% in 1991 when National Power and Powergen were created. It was then fully privatised in 1995 when the Government sold its final 40% share holdings in both National Power and Powergen.

## In the workplace

In 2012, workers in workplaces with 50 or more employees were more likely to be a trade union member, at 35% density overall, compared to just 17% in workplaces with fewer than 50 employees. The overall percentage of workers with a union presence in their workplace was 44.6%, with this breaking down into 86.4% of workers in the public sector, but only 28.5% in the

private sector. Again, size matters, as 61% of workplaces with 50 or more workers had a trade union presence, compared with just 27% of workplaces with fewer than 50 workers.

The proportion of workers whose pay was covered by a collective agreement was 29% overall (declined from 36% in 1996), but this was 64% in the public sector (declined from 74% in 1996), and just 16% in the private sector (declined from 23.2% in 1996). Once more, size counts, as 42% of workers in workplaces with 50 or more were covered in 2012 by collective bargaining, compared with just 16% of workplaces with fewer than 50.

## Different industries: different facts

In 2012, the highest percentages of employees in workplaces with a union presence were as follows: both 'public administration and defence / compulsory social security' industry and 'education' industries were the highest with 82%. These were followed by 'electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply' with 70%. The 'human health and social work' industry was 63%, and the 'water supply, sewerage, waste management' industry was 62%. Here we can see two things: the continuing relative strength of public sector organisation, and the historic inheritance of union organisation in the privatised utilities. The 'transportation and storage' industry also seems to be a post-privatisation private sector union survival story, with 59%.

In contrast, in 2012 lower percentages of employees in workplaces with a union presence were found in 'finance and insurance' at 38%, alongside 'manufacturing' at 37%. The 'mining and quarrying' industry had 31%, and was closely followed by both 'construction' and 'wholesale and retail trade / repair of motor vehicles' with 28%, and 'information and communication' at 26%.

Historically, the manufacturing industry as it was in the 1970s was both privatised and effectively destroyed in the 1980s, then replaced with a new one, where unions were either absent or signed sweetheart no-strike deals. Again, no prizes for guessing the industry reporting the fewest employees with a trade union presence in the workplace: 'accommodation and food service' with a poor 8%. All of these industries are predominantly in the private sector.

## The benefits of Trade Union membership: positive facts

Things, of course, are not all doom and gloom, and I would not want to give anyone that impression. A standard measure of the benefit of union membership over non-membership is the 'union wage premium'. This is the higher rate of pay that being

a member of a trade union brings with it. In 2012, the union wage premium stood at 14.5% overall. This means on average, across the whole of the UK, union members get paid 14.5% more than non-union members.

But the 'union wage premium' has shrunk significantly by 44%, or in other words by 11.4 percentage points to 14.5% from the figure of 25.9% for the overall 'union wage premium' in 1995. This shows that while being a union member is still beneficial, it is not quite as beneficial as it once was.

Once more, the figures are different for the public and the private sectors. The 'union wage premium' for the public sector in 2012 was 16.9%, which is significantly lower than the 30.4% it was in 1995 (a 44% reduction). In 1995 the private sector 'union wage premium' was a meagre 4.3%, rather than the sizeable 15.3% it was in 1995 (a whopping 72% reduction). These figures show how the benefits of being a union member have shrunk more in the private than in the public sector. It is not unreasonable to infer from this that the power and influence of unions in the private sector is much weaker in general.

And again, the overall figure of 14.5% for the 2012 'union wage premium' masks some other important differences. There is also major gender gap: it is just 4.9% for men, but it is a whopping 30% for women. Perhaps this represents the fact that more women work in the public sector, and more women are union members than men, proportionally.

There is also a sizeable age differentiation in the 'union wage premium': it is 33% for workers aged 16-24; 12% for those aged 25 to 34; but only 3.5% for those aged 35 to 49. It rises slightly again for workers over 50, to 5.1%.

Other interesting points to note about the 'union wage premium' are:

It is only 0.4% in the manufacturing industry. This would suggest that in manufacturing, although it only has 18% of workers in trade unions, just 37% of workplaces have a union presence, and only 22% of the employees are covered by collective pay agreements, one or two conditions apply. Firstly, there is competition for skilled labour that keeps wages relatively similar in unionised and non-unionised workplaces, and secondly, the relative decline of manufacturing trade unionism from the dizzy heights of the 1970s has left a lasting legacy.

On the other end of the scale, in the 'human health and social work' industry, the 'union wage premium' in 2012 stood at an important 40.5%, and in 'education' it was also serious at 33%. Even in the seriously under-organised 'accommodation and food service' industry, union members benefit from a 12.9% 'union wage premium'.

But if you want a simple overall feel for the benefits that union membership brings

the working class: in 2012 the 'union wage premium' for 'sales and customer service' occupations was 14.6%; for 'caring, leisure and other service' occupations it was 20.2%; for 'skilled trades' it was 24.4%; for 'process, plant and machine operatives' it was 30.4%; and better still for 'elementary occupations' it was 34.5%.

## A personal note and some conclusions

My own union, the CWU, organises across the communications industry: in telecoms, in the privatised BT, and other companies, it organises telecoms engineers, clerical staff, and call centre workers; in the postal industry, it organises workers in both Royal Mail and Post Office Counters Ltd, as well as starting to get a foot-hold in the private postal sector.

A slightly concerning statistic is that the 'union wage premium' for the 'information and communication' industry stands at an average of just 2.8%. (This is obviously something that Billy Hayes was unaware of when he stated on Radio 4's Any Questions recently that the 'union wage premium' was around 18%. I don't think he meant his own £87,000 salary compared with other General Secretaries. To be fair, the 'union wage premium' in 2011 was 18.1% for public sector employees)

In the CWU we have the challenge of maintaining and renewing membership and organisation in traditionally strongly organised companies like BT and Royal Mail with long-established bargaining structures and powerful union machines; plus we also have the job of recruiting, organising and gaining recognition in previously non-unionised companies that resist unionisation, such as Virgin Media (which derecognised the CWU in late 2012). These, I submit, are at two ends of the spectrum of challenges facing the SWP members in British unions and workplaces today, on the broader canvas.

Today the organised working class in the UK is concentrated overwhelmingly in the public sector, and post-privatisation private sector, where trade unionism has survived and in places even grown over recent decades. In the private sector and more widely, however, with the loss of old industries and the growth of new industries and sectors, union membership and union density has fallen to historically low levels.

We need to develop a strategy for how revolutionary socialists relate to both. The first step on developing a strategy for relating to unorganised industries or workplaces in the private sector must be to recognise it is significantly different from the historically highly organised public sector. Debates on rank-and-file strategies and pop-up unions alike, all need to bear this in mind.

Sources:

Labour Research, June 2013, ‘Declining trend continues as union membership falls’, p7.

Labour Research, July 2013, ‘Union membership grows following years of decline’, p7.

Trade Union Membership 2012: Statistical Bulletin, Office for National Statistics (ONS) / Department of Business Innovation & Skills (BIS), May 2013.

**Simon (Huddersfield)**

## IS THE DOWNTURN REALLY OVER – IS THE ‘ONE FINAL PUSH STRATEGY’ REALLY WORKING?

In 1995 Alex Callinicos claimed that:

*“The British working class movement in the mid-1990s is in transition situation. All the signs are that the great downturn in the class struggle of the late 1970s and the 1980s is over”* (Socialists in the Trade Unions, page 54).

Since then the general strategy of SWP could be characterized as claiming that every strike and demonstration is the most important event and requires our complete support and attention. We must be optimistic about the possibilities, but being over optimistic has brought enormous problems. It could be argued that this is the core of the problem of the in-fighting in the Central Committee over the last five years and the current crisis we find ourselves in.

If the objective situation, in terms of the confidence of the working class, is good and raising then why are we not recruiting to the party in any significant numbers?

Why for example, has the Leicester branch (that was eulogized at conference in January and the Pre-Conference Bulletin in March) not actually grown significantly over the last five years (or indeed 30 years)?

If it is not the objective situation that explains the low level of recruitment, then it must be the subjective situation, so nationally the CC have turned in on each other and locally we have seen the opposition ostracized and so we have lost perhaps half the active members of the branch.

The worst example recently of this over-optimism was Charlie Kimber in ISJ 133 on the 30 November public sector strike. This article entitled “Rebirth of our Power?” started with: *“The mass strike of 30 November 2011 has opened a new chapter in British working class history.”*

However, with the trade union leadership giving up on the pension fight, even the CC has recognised that Charlie’s prospects of further strikes and rebuilding of a rank & file movement was in retrospect grossly unrealistic.

It was not that Charlie was ignorant of the facts as he noted:

*“One of the contradictions of the present situation is that we have just seen the biggest strike since 1926, and yet earlier this year the Office for National Statistics reported:*

*“In the twelve months to March 2011 there were 145,000 working days lost from labour disputes, the joint lowest cumulative twelve month total since comparable records began in the twelve months to December 1931”* (page 36).

A much more balanced view of the state of working class organisation was given by Chris Harman in ISJ 120 when he started by saying:

*“Workers in Britain face the twin crises of recession and inflation with union organisation that has, in general, been on the retreat for nearly 30 years.”* Page 77.

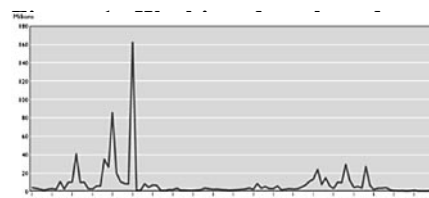
He then went on to say:

*“No one can say with certainty how various sections of the working class in Britain will react to the combination of recession and inflation, which is cutting real living standards of those with jobs for the first time for a generation, alongside deep disillusion with the Labour government.”* Page 88/89.

This contribution to the IB aims to suggest that in terms of actual days on strike, trade union membership, number of shop stewards and general level of working class organisation in most work places we are still in a very difficult objective situation. Or, to put it another way, the downturn continues. Our perspectives need to reflect this. We need to retain and build our network of members and readers of SW so that we can benefit from the up-turn when it eventually arrives. This will not be achieved through repeated calls for frenetic activity and blind obedience to a leadership which is not clearly and democratically held to account.

### Number of strike days

The long-term view:



The peaks in this graph are the:

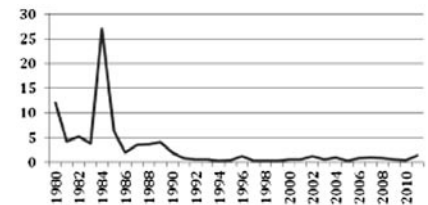
- Great Unrest - 1911–1914
- Miners Strike of 1921
- General Strike of 1926
- Upturn of the early 1970s
- Winter of Discontent - 1978/79
- Great Miners Strike - 1984/85

The average working days lost over the last four decades have been:

- 1970s: 13 million
- 1980s: 7 million
- 1990s: 0.7 million
- 2000s: 0.7 million.

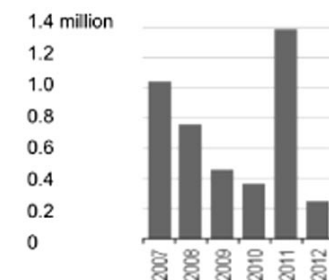
Since the miners’ strike of 1984/85, we have experienced a historically low level of strikes in Britain as the graphs above and below show.

**Figure 2: Millions of strike days per year since 1980:**



The above graph may suggest to optimists that things were picking up in 2011 (the last year on the graph). However, things have not really changed recently as the following more detailed graph clearly shows:

**Figure 3: Strike days over the last six years**



Over the last six years the number of strike days a year have been on a downward trend. Clearly 2011 bucked the trend, but only to 1.4 million and over 90% of these were for the two one-day public sector strikes. We can try and argue that many more people voted for strikes, but the key effect is the experience of taking part in (preferably successful) strike action.

So, we are suffering a historically low level of strikes on a downward trend, but what about the level of trade union membership?

### Trade union membership

Trade union membership peaked in 1979 at over 13 million. It then declined sharply through the 1980s and early 1990s before

stabilising from the mid-1990s onward at around 6.5 million.

Despite the broad stability in membership levels between 1995 and 2007, the proportion of UK employees who were members of trade unions declined because union membership levels did not keep pace with the increase in the total number of workers. As a result, over all TU density fell from 32% to 26% of workers by 2007.

**Figure 4:**  
**Proportion of workers in a union, 1900-2000**

Source: Lindsay, 2003 (in Harman, ISJ 120, 2008)



Overall there was a slight increase in trade union membership from 2011 to 2012 of 59 thousand, but this followed four consecutive annual falls in membership of more than 100 thousand. As a result, trade union density remained stable at 26 per cent to 2012. (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, May 2013).

At best the proportion of workers who are members of trade unions has recently stabilised after a steady decline since 1979. What about the number of shop stewards?

## Work place reps – shop stewards

One estimate is that there were 175,000 stewards in the mid-1960s, another that there were at least 200,000 in the early 1970s and 300,000 by the end of that decade. This growth continued until there were 335,000 stewards by 1984. However, since the Great Miners Strike the number of stewards fell by almost half to 178,000 in 1990 and perhaps 160,000 by 2004 (all figures from Kimber, ISJ122, 2009).

Since 2004 the prevalence of shop stewards has proved relatively robust at just over a quarter of unionised workplaces. After two decades of substantial decline, union presence was relatively stable among all but the smallest private sector workplaces over the period between 1998 and 2011. (2011 WeRS First Findings).

As Charlie Kimber admitted in 2008:

*“Rank and file organisation is far weaker now than in the 1970s. Then networks of stewards had some capacity to organise activity independent of the officials, hold national conferences and coordinate solidarity. But the defeats of the 1980s and 1990s, the wave of closures in the most militant indus-*

*tries, the mass redundancies, the very low level of struggle, and the weakening of a socialist culture took a terrible toll on the militants in the factories and the offices. It is no good appealing to mythical rank and file networks that do not exist, but neither does the temporary weakening of the rank and file mean we should abandon the aim.”* (Kimber, ISJ 122, page 45)

## Attacks on our members

This decline in workplace strength has led to a number of attacks on our member. Yunus Bakhsh in Newcastle and Karen Reissmann in Manchester are only the most well known of a range of SWP and other stewards who have been victimised in recent years. They were both entrenched public sector stewards of many years standing, but eventually both lost their jobs.

## Lack of political support for Marxism

In December 2008, Alex Callinicos recognised the objective problems we face with the following sober assessment:

*“The nine years since Seattle have seen a massive political radicalization directed against neoliberalism and war. At the level of mass mobilization on street demonstrations this radicalization has been unrivalled. But Marxism of any kind has had the smallest influence it has enjoyed since the revolutions of 1848...*

*It isn't hard to explain the relative weakness of Marxism. Two objective factors seem important. The different sectors of the traditional left suffered in the decades before Seattle a prolonged crisis as a result of the defeats of the later 1970s and the 1980s that was reinforced by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the liberal triumphalism that followed it, and the progressive shift of the social-democratic parties in a social-liberal direction. Secondly, while there have been significant victories for workers in different countries, there has been no generalized reversal of the earlier defeats, let alone anything resembling workers' resuming the offensive struggles of the last upturn of 1967-76.*

*So, on the one hand, Marxism has been a weaker ideological reference point, and, on the other, it has been harder to prove in practice the centrality of workers' struggle to any project for social and political emancipation.”*

And an amendment to the Commission on the World in Crisis at the annual conference earlier this year said:

*“We need to recognize the profound ideological crisis on the left – a lack of*

*conviction that a socialist alternative to crisis is possible. This puts exceptional pressure on our tendency, the SWP and the IST internationally to rise to the occasion with our ideological intervention.”*

In this situation, the CC have done incredibly well in holding the SWP together over the last 30 years – much better than almost any other group internationally.

We have also had the huge success of building massive united front organisations (StW, UAF etc). But the CC has also made terrible mistakes - branch splitting in the early 2000s and the deepening crisis of this year, for example. The specific nature of the recent mistakes needs to be recognised and the CC held to account.

## Passive membership

One of the consequences of the on-going down turn in the level of class struggle and union organisation in Britain is the level of passivity in the SWP. From a claimed membership of 7,597 only 1,300 members attended district pre-conference aggregates. According to reports in the IBs last year less than a third of the membership regularly pays subs and the circulation of SW is approximately the same as the claimed membership.

However, if anything the party still generally errs too much on the side of optimism. So, for example, the UtR national conference on 17 November 2013 was described in an IB as, “a significant success, with a 1,000 in attendance”. But significantly less than 10% of the SWP membership attended.

Marxism this year saw a 40% drop in attendance and a 60% drop in recruitment compared to the previous year, but Party Notes (19 July 2013) still claimed that “Marxism 2013 was a real success for the SWP”.

## Consequences:

We need to recognise that the downturn continues and our industrial strategy should be around re-building in our workplaces. As a result we need to argue that all members of the SWP should:

- Be a member of a trade union
- Try to be a steward in their workplace, if there is a union
- If not try to organise for a union
- Find issues to organise around at work
- Push for regular union meetings
- Sell SW at work and union meetings.

We should also recognise that few people will join the SWP from a Saturday sale or on a demonstration and those that do will still need to be won to our politics.

We need to ensure that all members get SW each week and have two or three to try and sell to their contacts. As a result we need to ensure that we visit all members



who do not attend branch meetings on a regular basis.

Finally to overcome the current crisis and re-build confidence in the SWP leadership by a significant proportion of the membership we need a serious examination of the party's internal political culture, including the:

- Democratic procedures of the party
- Relationship of leadership bodies to each other and the wider membership
- Composition of these bodies
- Scope for meaningful and frank debate within the organization.

**Andy (Leicester)**

## LEARNING FROM OUR MISTAKES AROUND N30

A full picture of the struggle in Britain is far beyond the scope of this article. Ideological, political and economic struggles are all important for the working class and for revolutionaries.

However, we see the workplace, the point of production, as the place where workers are strongest and so the question of the relationship of these struggles to the workplace is key for us and that is the focus of this article. In particular, I want to contribute to the process of learning lessons from the period around N30 and working out how we can apply them over the coming months.

I hope this contribution helps initiate a debate across our party. It is not a "factional" document, but the result of discussions over many months with a range of comrades, some of whom disagree strongly with the opposition (for example Richard from Coventry branch).

### A lot to be angry about

The scale of the ruling class assault on us is staggering, for example:

- Unemployment and under-employment is widespread.
- The government attacks on welfare have several goals including cutting costs, ideologically dividing the working class by scapegoating, and driving down wages by forcing more people into the labour market and making them compete desperately for low-paid work.
- Stripping away employment rights (e.g. shorter redundancy consultation, fees for tribunals, TUPE protection on outsourcing).
- Cuts in pension benefits and increases in contributions for many workers.
- Real wages have dropped by about 10.6%

from £416 a week in January 2009 to £376 a week in July 2013 (for full time work, Jan 2009 prices<sup>5</sup>). Of course the "average" includes high earners whose pay has continued to rise and the experience for many working people is far worse.



These are just some of the headline items. The experience of most activists I speak to is also of employers accelerating their piecemeal assault on benefits, policies, agreements, working practices and terms and conditions and ramping up bullying and pressure on workers for unpaid overtime etc.

So workers have plenty to be angry about. But anger on its own is not enough to produce action, let alone successful action. Workers also need hope that things can be better and to be able to see practical things they could do with at least some chance of success. This is where questions of consciousness, confidence and organisation come to the fore.

### Balance of class forces

I and others have written elsewhere<sup>6</sup> some notes on the overall balance of class forces, the union bureaucracy and the rank and file which I encourage comrades to read. Here I want to expand on a few key points.

In 1984, after the Warrington Messenger NGA strike, Chris Harman wrote<sup>7</sup>:

*"When we talk about the downturn we mean a series of defeats, each one sapping the confidence of workers so that it is easier for the employers to inflict a further defeat. Each defeat deepens demoralisation, destroys confidence. Each defeat deepens sectionalism, because if you go on strike other workers don't come out and support you and show solidarity. There is a feeling that you are isolated before you even begin the struggle. You look to the trade union bureaucracy for support, because they seem to be the only force capable of offering support, and then they don't support you, and you are even more*

<sup>5</sup> Average Weekly Earnings seasonally adjusted index of regular earnings (KAB9) and Retail Price Index (CHAW)

<sup>6</sup> <http://revolutionarysocialism.tumblr.com/post/54185691890/notes-on-the-balance-of-class-forces>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/1984/01/nga.htm>

*demoralised than before."*

Clearly we are not in this kind of "downturn" period. The British working class has not been engaged in any industrial battles on a scale which could shift the mood significantly in either direction for many years. We have not been decisively defeated for a long time, but neither have we broken through.

The great defeats inflicted in the 1980s are a receding memory - the miners' strike ended 28 years ago, so even those leaving school at the time are in their 40s now. This is not to say that the defeats of the 1980s have no remaining ideological impact. When the TUC General Council debated a General Strike earlier this year, one delegate argued that this had been tried in 1926 and hadn't worked. The defeats of the 1980s are still remembered by most of those at the top of the unions, but they are rarely advanced as arguments against action at workplace level now.

However, in the same speech, Harman quoted Marx:

*"We face a war of attrition on even more difficult terms. Marx analysed the difficulties: "The enemy are moving forward, forward, forward. You are on the retreat, more and more closed in, more and more defeatism in your own midst. A resistance too prolonged in a besieged camp is demoralising in itself. It implies suffering, fatigue, long periods without rest, illness, and the continual presence, not of that acute danger that tempers, but that chronic danger which destroys." That is going to be the mood inside much of the working class in the period ahead."*

A major challenge in the current period is not the recent memory of terrible defeats, but of decades without serious workplace-based struggle. It is worth quoting again from the same article, when Harman describes how the brief period of the Warrington strike reminded people what an upturn was like:

*"Suddenly, the things we talk about – industrial confrontation, the working class is not finished, the working class has the power to change society – suddenly all that fitted. The things we said made sense. The things the Labour Party said didn't. In terms of Warrington, the Labour Party was a nullity." "Politics was the politics of the working class struggle"*

We got a tiny glimpse of this feeling around 30th November 2011. The question of strikes dominated the news and political debate. Arguments about escalating mass action to defeat the government industrially found a wide audience. But this moment passed all too quickly. So sidelined was the strike movement in the news and general

political discourse that many strikers didn't even realise their leaders had settled and so assumed they would be out again.

The overall decline in union membership and density (the proportion of workers in unions) is well known. The raw figures of the decline in union membership and even the sharper decline in the numbers of shop stewards both understate the decline in workplace collective organisation.

Just 23% of employees had their pay determined by collective bargaining in 2011 (44% in the public sector, 16% in the private sector).<sup>8</sup> In comparison, the figure from the 2001 Labour Force Survey was 35% of employees - a massive fall in just a decade.

A long period of relative industrial peace has meant a whole generation of workplace activists being shaped by casework and compromise, rather than by the experience of leading members in collective action. Consider the profile of arguments about "precarious" workers, meaning (when the term is used usefully) those with employment status that gives little legal job security. Legal protection against Unfair Dismissal was only introduced in 1971, following the Donavan Report - arguably all workers were "precarious" until then. Generally, workers rely on collective action for any job security. The lack of collective action has led to reliance on (pitiful) legal protections instead, shaping the role and culture of more than a generation of shop stewards.

But this isn't to say union organisation is unimportant - far from it. Despite more than 30 years of decline, unions remain a major force in Britain. There are around 6.5 million workers in unions, typically paying well over £100 a year in subs. 2.5 million of these are in the private sector. There are well over 100,000 reps in workplaces.

Just as importantly the experience of these activists is generally not one of futility. When unions take up issues, employers often make concessions. The "union wage premium" (the average of how much higher union members' wages are) remains high - 17% in 2012.<sup>9</sup> When workers do fight, they usually win *something* - outright defeats are rare. But most fights are defensive in nature, defending past gains from attack, rather than seeking improvements.

## Why no big confrontations?

By the late 1970s, sections of the British ruling class had concluded that it needed to inflict decisive defeats on the unions in order to restructure the economy in its own interests. This was the plan that Thatcher put into place through the 1980s.

The bosses' plan reflected *our* strength in two ways:

1) Workplace organisation was strong enough to prevent the restructuring - it simply could not be carried out without defeating the unions

2) The bosses were nervous about losing major confrontations, so sought to take on the unions a section at a time, isolating and defeating one group to undermine the confidence of others

The period since the current economic crisis began has been very different. While we tend to focus on the lack of working class resistance, the lack of major confrontations tells us something about the bosses' position too.

The ruling class has managed to push through a massive rise in unemployment, huge cuts in the social wage and a decline in real wages, all without a major industrial fight.

Unlike the 1980s, the ruling class hasn't needed to stage confrontations and inflict big defeats in order to push through restructuring. The impact of decades of industrial passivity has meant such confrontations were unnecessary for the bosses. But I would also suggest that they haven't *wanted* such confrontations either. The fact that resistance often wins concessions suggests that the bosses see major battles as expensive, risky and unnecessary.

The experience of many workplace activists is of attacks coming thick and fast. When we manage to focus on one enough to organise resistance, we often have some success. But this is not generally succeeding in changing the overall direction of erosion of real wages and terms and conditions or the intensification of work.

Back in 1984, Harman wrote:

*"I'll use an analogy, a military one, first used by Gramsci. At the beginning of the first world war, all the powers thought it was going to be a three month operation, a blitzkrieg with the armies marching on each other's capitals. Instead, what happened was that when the armies broke through the front line of the enemy, they found a network of trenches. It took days to fight ten yards. That went on for four years, and the end came not because one side finally broke through, but because the effort of continuing the war finally caused the German military machine to collapse.*

*Now from the point of view of the British ruling class, when they look at the working class movement they see something like a network of trenches. They smash the steel workers, but there are still 80,000 or 100,000 shop stewards in engineering. They smash the railway strikes, but they still have to negotiate over the one-man operation of the St Pancras-Bedford line trains. They get it, but they have to negotiate. It still takes a year to get that in operation, even after they have smashed ASLEF. They smash the hospital workers, but they still face a series of small disputes*

*in the hospitals over conditions, health and safety and so on. Every time the ruling class break through they face a 'network of trenches'.*

*It is true that each breakthrough makes the next one easier but nevertheless they feel bogged down in this long drawn out war of attrition. Faced with a world capitalist crisis, they are some help in dealing with the profitability problems. But despite all these victories of British capitalism, they feel themselves no nearer to solving these problems."*

If we were to extend Harman's analogy to the present period, many of the trenches are now undefended, or are defended by troops with little training or experience in battle. It is still taking the bosses time to navigate their way through the trenches, but they are advancing with little resistance. Where they stumble upon a trench where people put up a fight, they often retreat and skirt around it. These skirmishes are worthwhile and important, but are doing little to slow the bosses' *overall* advance.

In contrast to the 1980s, it's not the bosses who need to inflict big defeats on us to turn the tide, it's our side that needs some decisive victories. The bosses have no need to take the risk of big confrontations to push through their agenda, but we need big confrontations if we're to stop them.

There have been opportunities for our side to confront the bosses - most notably the public sector pensions dispute. It is hard to imagine a better opportunity in the current period - an official dispute across nearly the entire public sector, where around half of all union members are concentrated. The issue itself strongly motivated the workers, as huge sums were at stake. The action taken was very well supported and the scale of the dispute was big enough that hostile media coverage had limited purchase as most private sector workers had family members or friends who were affected.

As we know, the opportunity represented by the public sector pensions dispute to inflict a decisive defeat on the government was thrown away by union leaders who signed a shoddy deal and were given left cover by other union leaders who didn't sign up to the deal but sat on the fence rather than calling effective action against it.

The rank and file wasn't strong enough to prevent or overcome these betrayals. The situation is illustrated very well by the magnificent 36% vote for Jerry Hicks in the UNITE General Secretary election - standing against Len McCluskey who (despite red-baiting to appeal to the right) was generally seen as a left candidate himself. Jerry's vote reflected the large numbers of members who wanted more of a fight-back, liked Jerry's "rank and file" approach (election of officers, worker's wage), and

<sup>8</sup> WERS 2011: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-2011-workplace-employment-relations-study-wers>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/204169/bis-13-p77-trade-union-membership-2012.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/204169/bis-13-p77-trade-union-membership-2012.pdf)

didn't want UNITE sucking up to Labour. But the campaign meetings for Jerry were generally small, as were the numbers of workplace activists involved in the campaign. The vote represented a lot of people wanting someone at the top of the union who would lead a fight, rather than a lot of people at the base of union determined to lead one themselves. It reflected an appetite for a fight, but also the lack of confidence and organisation to deliver one.

## The role of the bureaucracy in avoiding decisive battles

In the interests of space I will not rehearse our basic politics on the contradictory role of the union bureaucracy and how we should relate to them. Comrades can read Cliff & Gluckstein's excellent book<sup>10</sup> or the piece I and others wrote for an IB in 2010.<sup>11</sup>

Leon Trotsky summarised the attitude revolutionaries should take towards union officials as *with the bosses never, with the trade union leaders sometimes, with the workers always*. Probably the greatest summary of the rank and file approach came from the Clyde Workers' Committee in 1915:

*"We will support the officials just 'so long as they rightly represent the workers, but we will act independently immediately they misrepresent them. Being composed of Delegates from every shop, and untrammelled by obsolete rule or law, we claim to represent the true feeling of the workers. We can act immediately according to the merits of the case and the desire of the rank and file".*

For the bureaucracy, defending the union means ensuring continuity of the organisation, protecting the bank accounts and offices. They would rather see the members face a steady onslaught on their jobs, terms and conditions than gamble on a fight that might jeopardise their own position. All the (genuine) weaknesses on our side weigh heavily on their minds. Far better to make a compromise, see the members take some pain and wait for Labour in the hope that something will change than to risk all by leading a real fight.

The betrayal after the magnificent strike of 30th November 2011 proved that the union bureaucracy as a social layer preferred compromise and concessions to a serious fight-back. The right were desperate for a deal, while the "left" valued their links with the right above the needs of the class.

10 "Marxism and Trade Union Struggle: General Strike of 1926" by Tony Cliff & Donny Gluckstein. This is available second hand. The first section is available at <http://www.swp.org.uk/theory/main/#Trade%20Unions%20and%20Strikes> and we hope to have the rest online soon

11 <http://www.ianallinson.co.uk/The%20power%20%282010%29.pdf>

## General strikes and general strikes

When we talk about General Strikes, we often think of the kind of action Rosa Luxemburg described in *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*<sup>12</sup>. This was a mass strike "from below", in a period of "upturn". But in our tradition we also recognise that there can be "bureaucratic mass strikes" too<sup>13</sup>. As Chris Harman put it:

*"When we talk about the mass strike, we must not confuse two distinct kinds of mass strike action. When Rosa Luxemburg wrote her marvellous book *The Mass Strike, the Party and the Trade Unions* she was talking about a mass strike in the period of the upturn.*

*That is when workers start fighting, usually over some quite small economic issue, the fight gives the confidence and they move to the political. There is generalisation and one struggle leads on to another. It is a brilliant description of how you can get this elemental upsurge of workers' struggles – like Poland in 1980, or France in 1968.*

*In these upsurges of struggle the impetus comes from below. Almost invariably the organisation comes from the bottom. The mass strike of the upturn is organised and carried through from below upwards.*

*But there is another kind of mass strike that we have seen lately. I would call that the 'bureaucratic' mass strike. It is not that there is never an element of pressure from below in it, but what happens is that the offensive of the ruling class touches a chord of resistance in the working class and the trade union leaderships move very very rapidly to generalise it in order to control it."*

The most famous example of this in Britain was the General Strike of 1926, but the strikes of June 30th and November 30th 2011 also fit this pattern. Harman explains:

*"On the one hand the fantastic solidarity of the strike, the fantastic power of the strike, the fact that many more workers took action than anyone expected. On the other hand the bureaucracy could turn the strike on and off just like turning a switch at a power station. The complete control over the strike which existed from above is one of its most remarkable features."*

*"The years of defeat have sapped the confidence of workers in their own forms of rank and file organisation. They lose confidence to rely on themselves when it comes to struggle. They are forced into struggle. The bureaucracy takes con-*

*trol in order to ditch the struggle, and is able to do so because of the absence of the traditions of organisation from below."*

Some comrades have been arguing that J30 and N30 were not bureaucratic mass strikes. They argue that rank and file pressure and the actions of socialists helped bring about the strikes. Of course! This is normally the case with bureaucratic mass strikes – the bureaucracy doesn't call them on a whim.

The party is absolutely correct to argue with those on the left (including some members and ex-members who downplay the efforts and success of SWP members and other rank and file militants in pushing for N30.

Some comrades argue that J30 and N30 couldn't have been a bureaucratic mass strikes because there were high levels of rank and file participation on and around the strike days. Yes! This is common in such strikes, as the Harman quote above illustrates. What these comrades are losing sight of is who *controlled* the strikes.

They are making the mistake treating the description of the strikes as "bureaucratic" as a slur on the magnificent action of millions of workers, rather than an attempt to understand and describe the dynamics – just as many full time officials (and lay officials who spend too much time with them) tend to see the term "bureaucrat" as an insult rather than an attempt to understand and describe their function and social position.

It is possible for a bureaucratic general strike to boost the confidence of workers and grow over into a mass strike. Harman explains:

*"One historical example of this is May 1968. That began with the student protests. That was an initiative from below, but not from workers. Then the union bureaucracy, in order to salve their consciences and show that they were prepared to do something about the students' struggle, called an archetypal bureaucratic mass strike.*

*The two union federations, the CGT and CFDT, called a one day general strike. The workers were to be marched through the centre of Paris and then put back on the coaches and sent home. The bureaucracy would have then done its bit for the students. The problem was that the workers began to feel their power and instead of going back and sitting at home they occupied factories, spread the action and generalised it.*

*There can be a move from the bureaucratic mass strike to the real mass strike. Our activity in any such situation must be to try to achieve this and to break down the barriers between the two and create the new elements of organisation from below."*

12 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/index.htm>

13 <http://www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1985/patterns/>

But the very fear of this happening makes the bureaucracy even more nervous and increases their desire to settle at any price. The development of the rank and file threatens their social position - if workers aren't listening to them, the bosses won't either. Harman explains why the bureaucracy settled the NGA strike so quickly:

*"The answer is only partly fear of the law. The other reason is fear that the confidence generated by mass strike action will throw up forces of rank and file organisation which will take control of the strike away from the bureaucracy"*

This is also a reason why the union leaders called off the 1926 General Strike - local councils of action were springing up and threatened to form an alternative leadership to take control of the struggle. Likewise the very energy and success of N30 acted as both pressure for more action and scared the bureaucracy into wanting to end the action before it got out of control. Not for nothing did one prominent union leader talk of his pride in having his hands "firmly on the tap" to turn action on and off. He had no desire to let members loosen his grip!

## How do revolutionaries relate to bureaucratic mass strikes?

In an upturn, a layer of activists exists who are confident that they can win an argument with the workers in their workplace and lead them in struggle. These activists can rapidly develop into an alternative rank and file leadership in a dispute. While we are not in a downturn, it is clear that such individuals are few and far between today. By 1984 Harman was already arguing:

*"You didn't have the rank and file organisation which can blossom into an alternative leadership during a mass struggle"*

*"You don't have the individual militants who are confident because they know they can carry the shop floor with them, who have been putting over clear political arguments and who come together in some kind of spontaneous organisation to take control of the strike"*

The intervening decades have weakened organisation rather than strengthening it.

A good way to think about how revolutionaries should relate to a bureaucratic mass strike is to look at a spectacular example of how not to relate to it. I hope we never get a better example than the one we have from 1926.

The Communist Party sowed illusions in the union leaders. One of its main slogans was All Power To The TUC General Council, and it failed to build rank and file organisation or to politically prepare peo-

ple for the betrayal of the strike.

It's possible to have a debate about whether the CP was big enough and rooted enough to have made a decisive difference in 1926. What's certain is that had they intervened correctly, they could have increased the influence of revolutionary politics and strengthened the rank and file to be in a far better position for the years that followed.

Harman argues that politics are far more important in preparing for a bureaucratic mass strike outside an upturn than in one. There are not enough existing confident workplace industrial militants who are used to self-activity being the way to win for them to quickly form an alternative leadership. Political clarity about the bureaucracy and the rank and file is therefore essential to rapidly develop an alternative leadership and push past the officials as they try to close down the action.

## Our own record

Formally, our politics on the rank and file and the bureaucracy are second to none. But we've been struggling to overcome the legacy of a long period when the workplace wasn't our primary focus, when comrades weren't trained to operate as revolutionaries in their own workplaces, and when branches rarely discussed what people were doing in their own workplaces.

From around ten years ago, in anticipation of a rise in struggle, we stood candidates for lots of senior elected union positions, including union national executives. The weakness of the activist layer in the unions and of the rest of the left meant we faced weak competition and were very successful. Our representation at higher levels in the unions far exceeded our implantation at the base.

Many comrades in senior positions have often made a real contribution in fighting for action and solidarity, in key political arguments within the movement, and in strengthening the rank and file. Pressures come with such roles, and it is no good just relying on the personal strength and commitment of individuals to counter these.

Without both strong fraction organisation and an active rank and file holding us to account, comrades will struggle to consistently maintain a firm rank and file orientation under the pressures from the bureaucracy, as a few of the higher profile examples have illustrated in recent years.

The party developed the strategy of Unite the Resistance in an attempt to overcome the contradiction that you can't build a strong rank and file without action, but the rank and file isn't currently strong enough to take significant action without the bureaucracy. We fought to get official action, hoping that this would raise confidence to the point where workers would go beyond what the bureaucracy planned for, as was reflected in our "All out! Stay out!" slogan.

Before N30, we knew that at least sections of the bureaucracy would attempt to sell-out after the strike, though we were wrong not to anticipate the speed and breadth of the attempt. The lead article in the N30 edition of Socialist Worker<sup>14</sup> said

*"It is clear some in the TUC don't want to continue the fight either. Some union officials say they don't want to call any further action. They just want to use the N30 strikes as a bargaining chip to gain a few minor concessions from the government"*

In hindsight, it is clear that our approach around N30 was wrong. Quite rightly, we put huge efforts into securing and building the action. But we failed to adequately prepare our members and those around us, politically and organisationally, for the attempted sell-out. As a result many were disorientated and demoralised, making it harder for us to organise against the sell-out and build a side for the next fight. Just look at the pitiful votes we mobilised against the deal, for example less than 10% (on a low turnout) in UNISON Local Government.

We published theoretical articles about the nature of the union bureaucracy. We published articles highlighting the unreliability of various union leaders in the fight. But our slogans were wrong.

If we had been serious about "All out! Stay out!" comrades would have tried to win votes in their workplaces to make that happen. Comrades didn't, because they knew that while the *idea* was popular, this was not where the argument was at in their own workplaces. It was a slogan about what people wished would happen, not a slogan to mobilise people to *actually do* anything.

By demanding escalation without explaining what workers actually needed to do to achieve it in the teeth of opposition from the bureaucracy, we missed an opportunity to build a side and left workers looking to their leaders to deliver. When, predictably, the leaders didn't deliver, we had little response.

The strikes did lead to some examples of strengthening the rank and file, for example with the election of new stewards, the establishment of joint organisation between unions in the same workplace, or links between nearby workplaces.

But we gave these inadequate focus, priority or follow-through. We should have spelled out to rank and file activists the detailed organisational steps for them to make in order to take advantage of the bureaucracy's strike ballot and strike call to strengthen workplace organisation, and the politics of why they needed to do this. We should have made this a central part of our agitation around the N30 strike and we did not.

This is just an extreme example of a

<sup>14</sup> <http://socialistworker.co.uk/art/26369/All+out+to+win!>

widespread problem with our industrial work. We are right to place demands on union officials, but if we do this without giving rank and file activists a strategy to deliver – with or without the officials – we leave them looking to the officials.

The impact on the party in early 2012 was severe. At NC we discussed the danger of demoralisation in the party. We fought hard against the idea that resistance to austerity was over. But because we didn't look at the lessons from 2011, this all too often turned into comrades kidding themselves and others that the pensions fight might reignite and so failing to build a side amongst those angry at the sell out.

The mistakes around N30 are closely linked to the political confusion and general failure to build Unite The Resistance in 2012. I and others wrote about the relative success we had had building UTR in Manchester in IB1 last year, based on some sharp local debates about the politics of it. Nationally, clarity on UTR began to emerge at the NC in November 2012, but sadly has been lost since due to both the party crisis and changes in the objective situation.

There has been a lack of clarity on the politics of what we were trying to build with UTR and what role revolutionaries should play within it.

While the party warned of the dangers of the CP's mistakes with the Minority Movement and in 1926, there has been little discussion about how we avoid repeating them.

## Re-orientating ourselves for the next wave

The failure of the 2011 strike movement has led the focus of resistance to move away from the workplaces and into social movements such as the People's Assemblies and Anti-Bedroom Tax campaigns in recent months.

We now have the possibility of significant industrial action in the coming months, for example thanks to the FBU strike vote, Royal Mail privatisation, the planned teachers' action, and possible action in UCU. Important disputes occasionally flare up in the private sector too, such as the strikes at Hovis against zero-hours contracts and agency labour. And of course we have the national demonstration at the Tory conference in Manchester on 29th September.

Because the confidence of the rank and file in relation to the bureaucracy is an echo of the confidence of the rank and file in relation to the employers, and that confidence is not high, it will not be easy to drive action beyond what the bureaucracy can stomach, and what the bureaucracy can stomach will decline as the general election approaches.

However, the clash between the onslaught from the bosses on the one hand, working class anger on the other, while Labour and the union leaders fail to offer

an adequate response, should open up a space in which revolutionaries can grow and deepen our roots - if we get it right and don't fall for the illusion that there are shortcuts (whether via the bureaucracy or the movements) that bypass building in the workplaces.

The small group of socialists in and around the SWP should be:

1. Initiating, providing solidarity and widening the industrial struggles that emerge.
2. Building around us activists with a political understanding of the need to organise independently of the union bureaucracy as well as working with them where appropriate.
3. Encouraging solidarity and political cross-fertilisation between the movements and the workplaces.
4. Winning an argument (in the party and the movements) about the centrality of the working class and the workplace and supporting as many people as possible to organise as socialists in their workplace.

The national industrial meeting on 22 September, UTR conference on 19 October and the dayschool in Manchester on 17 November all offer opportunities to sharpen up – if we get the politics right and get people to them.

We have to remember that it is possible to build out of setbacks as well as victories, but you need sharper politics to do so. Crucially, it means the focus of our work needs to be on what rank and file activists should do to shift the situation, which may include demands on the bureaucracy but certainly isn't limited to that.

The long period with low industrial struggle and the failure of the unions to extend unionisation into many new workplaces have left an aging trade union movement. Movements outside the workplace are therefore generating far more young, political activists than the workplace struggle at the moment. Operating in both, socialists are ideally placed to show movement activists the relevance and power of workplace organisation and to help equip them to organise in their own workplaces<sup>15</sup>. Many of these activists are often suspicious of Labour and union leaders, making a militant rank and file orientation more natural for them than acting as a ginger group relating to the bureaucracy. But it will take work to win them over and equip them.

The sparks dispute represented the closest thing in recent years to a rank and file movement.

It's worth remembering that much of the impetus for this came from socialists who were not currently employed on the sites (many of them were blacklisted) and

who had rank and file politics of one kind or another.

They were able to organise activity without waiting for the union machine, putting pressure on the bureaucracy to back them and call official action which opened the way for more unofficial action. It came from a highly political network of activists with an orientation on the rank and file, not primarily from winning positions or passing motions.

During this preconference period, we need a real debate about the lessons of our work around N30 and how we rebalance our industrial work in line with our politics, putting the workplace front and centre and building politically from the inside and out. I hope this article helps kick off that debate.

Ian (Bury & Prestwich)

## FIFTY YEARS OF THE RETREAT FROM CLASS

### The latest episode, the multitude versus the working class and the revolutionary party

I have no wish to teach 'grandmothers to suck eggs' but it is nevertheless worth recalling why the working class is central to Marxism.

It is quite simply, that it is this group of people, collectivised by capitalism itself, have an interest in the socialist transformation of society because of their own exploitation under capitalism, and who, crucially, also have the power to bring about that transformation.

None of this means that the working class is 'homogeneous', it is far from that – there are of course significant differences within it, and yet this doesn't mean that there is not the same ultimate long term interest, an interest that once seen and recognised, can become, at crucial historical periods, essentially singular – look at Egypt, look at the unity in the diversity, and look at the power of mass strikes. If the bosses stop work, then everything carries on as normal, when workers stop work, nothing carries on as normal.

Over the whole of my politically active life of approaching fifty years the question of the centrality of the working class has consistently been the subject of critical and often heated discussion - it is far from new and certainly not novel.

I first encountered it in sixties sociology, in what was then called the 'embourgeoisement theory'. The argument was that the

<sup>15</sup> I wrote on this for Socialist Review in 2010, but it was not published: <http://www.ianallinson.co.uk/Socialist%20Review%20article%20on%20workers%20and%20anti-capitalism%20%282010%29.doc>

material interest in change of the working class had disappeared with increasing prosperity – this is very old chestnut — on one side were people who counted clogs, cloth caps, whippets and greyhounds, and other side were people who counted holidays in Spain, washing machines and fridges!

A more sophisticated version, which echoes the above, was borne of frustration that the working class had stubbornly failed to ‘fulfil its historic mission’ of transforming society. This led serious theorists like Herbert Marcuse (USA) to argue that working class was too integrated, too bought into the ‘American dream’, to fulfil this task. The search for an alternative ‘agent of history’ became a growth industry. The (then named) ‘third world’, the oppressed minorities, ‘rainbow coalitions of the oppressed’, ‘the student movement’ were all drafted in. I am not disrespectful of any of these movements, far from it I consider myself a long standing member of all of the ones that I qualify to be included in.

However, it is important to recognise that the power of these movements, even if they act together, is not of the same order of that of the working class, though it is undeniably true that if the movements and the working class act in concert, the power of whole is greater, always providing that the membership and the leadership of the social movements involved had similar or the same class conscious goals.

In and of itself this work was not uninteresting, far from it. However the down side of it represented a retreat from class, and that still remains a legacy on the left, and in the social movements within it, that remain allies in the fight for change.

In the seventies and eighties there were people, understandably, wanting to put their own specific oppressions on the agenda. In doing so, sometimes, often even, the left was accused of being ‘myopic’ about class, and ‘blind’ to other issues.

The lie is given to this by simply looking at the proud historical record of the left in championing equal opportunities in the workplace, through their unions. Current equal opportunity policies in fact would not have happened without that record. We are not myopic about class. It is rather that we simply recognise its importance when it comes to being the (potentially) most powerful agent of transformative change in capitalist society.

In my own view this ‘retreat from class’ reaches its apex in post-modernism, which is fearful of anything being either quite as ‘real’ or even as ‘singular’ as class. I do not propose to dwell upon this, except to say that it offers us little or no assistance.

A current version of the retreat from class comes from John Holloway, and theorists often associated with ‘Autonomism’. It is worth considering some of his conclusion in: ‘Change the World Without Taking Power (2010)’ He argues that the “left” has pursued unattainable and undesirable goals for over a century, because “these move-

ments often had an instrumental view of the state, believing that state power was something which could be wielded in the interests of the oppressed’.

He also tells us that: ‘The orthodox Marxist tradition, most clearly the Leninist tradition, conceives of revolution instrumentally, as a means to an end. The problem with this approach is that it subordinates the infinite richness of struggle, which is important precisely because it is a struggle for infinite richness, to the single aim of taking power. . . . . To struggle through the state is to become involved in the active process of defeating yourself’.

He concludes: ‘How then do we change the world without taking power? At the end of the book, as at the beginning, we do not know. The Leninists know, or used to know. We do not. Revolutionary change is more desperately urgent than ever, but we do not know any more what revolution means’.

As far back as 1980 Holloway suggested that: ‘Socialism is about transforming power relationships, not about capturing power’ (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, ‘In and Against the State’). His position has in fact remained unchanged in 33 years.

The problem is that in order to transform power relationships we will need to capture power. The fact that, (for instance), a soldier may refuse an order is a transformation in a power relationship.

However, in the real and brutal world of political violence, as Egypt, as just one example, teaches us, the question of who gives the orders is at the very least just as important, and is a question concerning the possession of power. It is a matter, literally, of life and death.

I personally cannot be content with a theory that states that it simply does not know how we achieve change from capitalism to socialism. Leninism offers us a theory of transition based on the power of the working class and the importance of a revolutionary party. Until the theorists who contest it so vigorously offer something better, I will stay with Leninism, which is not to say that we shouldn’t scrutinise our own theoretical practice, it is simply to say that it is better to have a theory of transition rather than no theory of transition at all.

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**Dave (Bristol South)**

## **MANCHESTER EXPERIENCE OF PAPER SALES**

The establishment of a city centre sale was something that had to be won. There were those that argued against the establishment of such a sale.

The first thing that had to be done was the establishment of a regular sale in the city centre. This was done by showing that the audience for socialist worker existed and was growing.

At first a small group of comrades that were convinced that the shopping working class and workers on their way home were open and accessible to revolutionary ideas established two city centre paper sales. One on Saturday, the other on Wednesday at 5pm.

It was soon established that these two sales would go ahead no matter what. We were never rained off. This was an important element to establishing a regular and consistent sale. Comrades knew the sale would go ahead. This meant that if they were available they would turn up at the sale and it would be happening.

We then had to widen the layer of comrades that attended the sale. We, a small group of comrades that developed into a leading group within the district, argued that local sales should continue alongside the city centre sale. To achieve this goal we asked leading comrades in each branch to ring round their branch and ask people to sell. We wanted to motivate less active comrades into activity and at the same time recruit new comrades.

We knew that the only way to do this was to show that selling the paper was achievable and fun. That selling socialist worker was a positive and exciting experience. We were convinced that a small but radical minority of militant workers already existed within the class and that our presence on the street, in the work place, out side of the office and working inside the various campaigns would draw that radical minority into the party.

The experience of contacting the less active comrades had a positive impact on those comrades, even those that didn’t turn out appreciated a political chat. Some were moved into activity.

When comrades sold in the city centre, saw how the paper could be sold, saw that people were willing to join the SWP, came away from the sale invigorated and excited about building a revolutionary party. We encouraged comrades to report back to their branch their positive experience and encourage other comrades to come to the city centre sale.

We regularly sold between 20 to 40 paper on our city centre sales. We regularly recruited 2 to 5 people every time we

sold in the city centre. These new recruits didn't always turn into solid SWP members but they were willing to fill in a form that said I want to join the Socialist Workers Party. They were and are willing to talk to us about revolutionary politics. A minority of those that signed up to the SWP became hard core comrades and these new young revolutionary workers invigorated longer standing comrades into activity and political debate.

Within the working class there already exists a radicalised militant minority that want to join a revolutionary organisation. The only block to these workers joining the SWP was the failure of comrades to ask them. I didn't join the SWP until I was asked, why would they be any different?

The positive experience of the city centre sales smashed the idea that the party was 'tarnished', was 'untouchable'. The radicalised militant minority want answers, they want a working class solution to capitalism. Hence the rise of the right that seem to offer this.

We encourage different comrades to sell in town, to experience the positive response to Socialist Worker. We wanted the city centre sales to become a training ground. We always had a caucus before the sale and went through basic things to do on the sale. Don't assume that comrades know what to do and why we do it. Ask every person to sign the petition, ask everyone to buy the paper, ask everyone to join. While building for the 29th ask people to take leaflets to give to work mates, friends, family and neighbours. Why? We want a big demo, we want people to have ownership of the demo, we show that we are a party of activists. We want the working class to become active, to change the world.

We encouraged all comrades to go on the mega-phone. We want all comrades to be leaders within the class. After each sale we went for coffee and discussed the experience of the sale. What was good about it? What was shite? Had the mood changed within the class? What issues were cutting?

Selling the paper sharpens your politics, you have to try and answer the questions the class are interested in, from Egypt to bedroom tax, from what is a union to reformism. We learned what the working class were relating to, and that it wasn't always what the party thought. So we adapted, but we didn't compromise or pander to popular ideas. We always kept in mind that we are relating to that militant minority. So when 'save the NHS' didn't cut we shifted to 'Tories out, immigrants welcome.'

We always kept in mind our goal to build the party and to that end we never asked comrades to give up local sales, but argued to build local sales. Where those of us that were part of moving the district forward were doing meetings, we would sum up with, 'do your local sale, meet every week.' No matter what the subject of the meet-

ing. Where the local branch had become moribund we set a small team to build that branch by phoning round the branch and doing the meeting and insisting that a local sale go ahead. We proved it was possible by getting comrades to the meeting and out on the local sale.

We never left politics behind us. We always made sure we stayed political. If one of us read an article that was good in the paper or ISJ we would text each other to read the article. Political understanding was crucial to our activity. Our activity was informed by political debate in the branch meeting. The branch meeting led on to the street sale, the work place sale and the personal sale.

The enthusiasm generated by the success of city centre sales flowed into local sales. More papers were sold and people were recruited to the party on local sales. This new found enthusiasm for the paper led to renewed industrial sales. One sale outside a local hospital sold 18 papers. New street sales were started. Personal sales were re-opened. One comrade that had been leaving the paper for a worker in an Asian food restaurant spoke to him, he gave £10 for a donation towards the paper and said he couldn't come to meetings because he worked late every night but asked if we could hold a meeting at the restaurant when it closed on Sundays.

We identified a comrade in each branch to be paper organisers. We held paper organiser meetings. We got the paper organisers to experience the positive response to Socialist Worker by selling on Market Street. Then they could relate that experience back to their local sale. They could relate their positive experience to all the branch, even those comrades who had become less active. Their renewed enthusiasm permeated the malaise of some comrades.

When we recruited members we did two things, one we sent the details to the centre and cc'd our Recruitment and Retention comrade. Two, we made sure every new member that was in our area got a phone call within a few days of joining.

New members were encouraged to become active members of the party from day one. New members were expected to sell the paper and contribute politically to branch discussions. The new members and the active established members drove the district forward, pushing for new sales, being active within the working class movements but always relating to the class as a revolutionary. We always tried not to be sectarian, for example when we had a mass mobilisation of the left in Manchester, we had leaflets and petitions, with us, that were not SWP material, so that these comrades could build for the 29th alongside us. You would think they would have their own stuff but they didn't. Socialist Worker comrades didn't substitute we still used SWP literature and sold Socialist Worker and built the party.

The lesson from this Manchester experience is that there are workers old and young who are looking for a radical revolutionary alternative to reformism. They see the power of the working class in other countries, they see the injustice and exploitation around them. They can relate to a democratic future based on need, a society run by the working class in the interest of all. The Socialist Workers Party has become the living organic expression of the most militant revolutionary workers in Manchester.

**Chris (Rusholme)**

## IS THE REVOLUTIONARY PAPER REDUNDANT?

Is the revolutionary paper past its sell-by date, given that activists get their news, debate and organize on line? Laura Penny, for example, argued two years ago that Lenin's ideas about the function of a party paper belonged to the golden age of newspapers, whereas Twitter and text messaging entail radically new forms of organizing. This shift in technology, she concluded, means 'it's no longer about edicts delivered by an elite cadre and distributed to the masses, or policy voted on at national meetings and handed down by delegates. It's not the technology itself so much as the mentality fostered by that technology that is opening up new possibilities for resistance.'

Hostility to the revolutionary paper (as outdated) goes with hostility to the party (as elitist). Hence, arguments about new forms of communication also go with arguments about new forms of organizing. This argument is now widespread on the left and finds an echo in our party.

It's an argument that tends to privilege technology as the driving force in society: with a smart phone in our pocket what can't we, networked to one another, do to change the world? The idea that only the working class has the power to change the world is not one that comes naturally to those who hold this argument – and the idea of 'organising' to make that power effective even less so (indeed, 'organisation' is seen as imposing on and taking over movements).

Our starting point is not how people get their news, or where they find it. The revolutionary paper cannot compete in this respect. But what it can and has to do is act as an organizer – something by definition the bourgeois press, however critical and

progressive bits of it may be, cannot do. 'News' in the bourgeois press comes across as simply 'out there', as lots of bits of relatively unconnected information.

This way of presenting it reinforces the dominant, commonsense view that you cannot change the world. This is hardly surprising, as papers are run to make a profit, like anything else under capitalism – though the fact is partially disguised by the 'ideal' of journalistic independence and commitment to the truth, no matter where it leads (an ideal not to be sniffed at).

The new social media are not so different in this respect. Their nature as businesses (and complicity with state surveillance) is masked by the illusion of 'ownerlessness' and so of democratic openness. Thus, the Egyptian revolution can be seen as the product of millions tweeting one another rather than of class struggle and organization, one element of which included twitter use.

It is this view of the 'news' that the revolutionary paper has to challenge. The paper cannot be passive and consumerist (like the rest of the media); it has to be activist and interventionist. If the working class is to realize its potential to transform society, it requires political organization. For that to be more than a pious wish, some way has to be found of engaging with the concrete realities of working class life. The revolutionary paper is the means by which the revolutionary party reaches out, in a systematic and sustained way, to the broader mass of workers and tries to pull a majority towards revolutionary politics.

As Alex Callinicos put it in his reply to Penny: 'Socialist Worker allows us to have an organised weekly dialogue with thousands of other activists. One of its advantages is precisely that it doesn't just exist in cyberspace but is a physical product that has to be sold in a specific time and space – this particular neighbourhood or workplace or picket-line or demonstration – and that involves face-to-face interaction.'

We also have to understand how the revolutionary paper works.

Winning the majority can't be done simply with propaganda. You have to relate the big ideas to the experience of the majority – to the particular strikes, campaigns and protests people are involved in. That experience is shaped by elements of acceptance of and resistance to the system, which combine unevenly across the class and shift in response to the way events develop.

It is not enough to report concretely what people feel (though giving them a voice is essential). Just relating to people's experience is not enough – the danger can be either simply cheering them on or ignoring difficult arguments (nationalist or racist ones, for example, or about the nature of the state). The paper also has to try to show how a revolutionary understanding of society makes better sense of their experience. But finally, it seeks to get them to act on the

basis of revolutionary ideas.

The paper is structured to bring all these elements together, issue by issue. It will emphasise different aspects and put forward new arguments in response to shifts in the pace of struggle or attacks from the ruling class. But everything must relate back to the need to press the case for revolution.

Chris Harman made these points about the role of the revolutionary paper way back in 1984. The arrival of the new media does not change his argument.

He summed up the relationship between party and class like this: 'Success is only possible for a revolutionary current at any stage in its development if it can find some means of making the connections between principles, experience and the tasks of the moment. The revolutionary paper is absolutely indispensable because it is the mechanism for making these connections, to bridging the gap between theory and practice.'

Selling the paper is vital for another reason. It makes each member answer for and be accountable to the party. When we sell the paper we *are* the totality of the party's politics (not just individuals supporting this or that fight). At the same time, the buyer has to feel that it's *her* paper (because it identifies with her struggle), even if she doesn't agree with everything in it. The hope is that over time the buyer can be won to identify entirely with the paper, become a member and strengthen the party's position in the class.

The other side of this is we can only see whether the party's perspectives fit or need changing if there is a close and continuous relationship between buyers and sellers – the relationship is not one way. Learning from the class is what enables us to intervene more effectively.

Social media cannot replace the role of the paper. Its much vaunted 'virtuality' knows no 'real' relationships. It is tied not to the concrete realities of class but to the escape from class that has characterized the post-Thatcherite politics of individualism over the last twenty-five years.

This individualism has deeply penetrated the movements that have grown in opposition to free market capitalism. The movements' chosen methods of operating, networks, horizontalism and the like, are not inherently oppositional to capitalism – they reflect many aspects of the way in which capitalism has come to organize labour amongst 'professionals', the group most attracted to the new social media and least likely to think in class terms.

Moving away from seeing the centrality of the paper as an organizer around the totality of the party's politics is a recipe for disengagement and retreat. Recent demonstrations have seen some members quite deliberately not selling the paper. This take it or leave it attitude to the paper goes with a refusal to be accountable for what you do (my campaign before my party, so to speak). As a method this turns the party

into a loose collection of movements. Having a revolutionary paper, which every member should try to sell, is a priority if the party is to remain an effective, interventionist party.

**Gareth (Hackney East)**

## WHITHER SOCIALIST WORKER?

For the last two years there have been countless internal discussions on the role Socialist Worker and on the wider questions of analogue and digital media. Over the course of the three internal bulletins, we will reflect on questions related to the role of the revolutionary press. In this piece we offer some thoughts on the role of Socialist Worker. Our starting point is that revolutionaries' day-to-day work consists of agitation and propaganda. These aim to maximize revolutionaries' influence inside movements, and to maximize working class participation inside the movements that revolutionaries organise within.

In his essay *Agitation and Propaganda* (1984), Duncan Hallas laid out the difference between agitation, and concrete and abstract propaganda. He writes:

"For the most part socialists in Britain are not talking to thousands or tens of thousands. We are talking to small numbers of people, usually trying to win them through general socialist politics, rather than on the basis of mass agitation. So what we are arguing is basically propaganda. But it is here that the confusion arises. Because there is more than one sort of propaganda. There is a distinction between abstract propaganda, and that propaganda which can hopefully lead to activity, concrete or realistic propaganda."

Socialist Worker, our main tool of agitation and propaganda, has been labelled "the scaffolding of the party" or "the collective organiser". At present, it does not act as either of these. Distribution and selling of the paper don't hold the party together like in Lenin's time. Most of our party cadre receive the paper through the post and Parcelforce sends bags of papers to dispersed locations across Britain.

The label of the "collective organiser" equally falls short of what comrades actually do with the paper. Unfortunately, we are not at the point where the front cover of the paper is acted on by hundred thousands of activists like it was the case with the KPD's Rote Fahne, or Gramsci's L'Ordine Nuovo. Instead we organise paper sales on high streets and workplaces which are akin to what Hallas describes in the quote above.

This is a very different assessment from the underlying theoretical found-



dation which the party's agitation and propaganda is currently based on. Shouty headlines, over-used slogans, and the panacea of the general strike liken it to a paper of abstract propagandists. This stands diametrically opposed to the reality of what comrades do with the paper: using it to keep up regular activity in localities, an opportunity to speak to people about politics and maintaining political relationships with key activists in the area.

Socialist Worker no longer has a unique position in reporting on events that don't get reported elsewhere. Thus, it has to rise to the challenge of sharpening its analysis, politics and strategic proposals to the movement. Doing this would strengthen the party as a whole. However this requires that we break with some of its current 'form' as a newspaper.

With the rise of the 24/7 news-cycle, citizen (and anti-capitalist) journalism, radical blogs, a large number different publications or even Guardian live blogs which report large demonstrations by the minute, Socialist Worker doesn't have a monopoly on radical news. The rapid pace that news is reported today, means it is doubtful that a small group of revolutionaries should use its time and workers' individual contributions to act like the Independent, Guardian en rouge or "The Sun of the advanced section of the working class".

We suggest that Socialist Worker concentrates on sharp analysis which can play the role of concrete propaganda. This is particularly important at a time when the situation is in flux and the balance of forces are being re-negotiated. The revolutionary press is far more flexible than just issuing a paper. Given the unevenness in class consciousness the requirements of the struggle are varied. Our party activists and close political contacts deserve and require so much more than just news reporting. They write and read every day, whether it's different papers, blogs or on Facebook. It's the party's task to create leaders who can inspire and teach the rest of the class. But who teaches the teacher? Unfortunately, Socialist Worker doesn't.

**Mark (Tower Hamlets) and Amy (Cambridge SWSS)**

## REPORT OF THE DISPUTES COMMITTEE REVIEW BODY SEPTEMBER 2013

The following document, a review of the Disputes Committee, was produced by a body that was set up as the result of a vote at the SWP special conference in March this year.

It was presented to the National Committee in September, and the NC voted to place it in IB1 as a basis for discussion. It has not been adopted by the party and does not represent our agreed procedures. Branches, fractions and districts may move changes to the document by means of the motions procedures set out in the introductory notes to the IB.

At the end of the document there are a number of proposed amendments that were presented at the NC meeting but which were not voted on. They are printed for wider consideration here.

The document – and any amendments that are put forward by branches, districts, fractions, the NC or the CC – will be discussed at the December conference and the result will then become our agreed Disputes Committee procedures

### Introduction

At the special conference of the SWP that met in March 2013, a body was elected to examine the procedures of the party's Disputes Committee (DC) and recommend any changes it felt were needed. This body included four members from the National Committee (NC) that had been elected at the January 2013 conference, four members elected from delegates to the March special conference, two representatives of the existing DC and one member from the Central Committee (CC).

This body has formally met on three occasions. We asked members of the SWP to submit their own suggestions to the body, and we are grateful to all those comrades who sent in contributions, many of which have helped to shape our recommendations. We have also taken into account submissions made to the SWP's pre-conference internal bulletins, both from 2012 and 2013, as well as submissions to the party's 2009 Democracy Commission.

In addition, we have taken on board a report from the existing Disputes Committee about the substantial changes to procedures they have already made this year. We also looked carefully at a number of disciplinary processes in place in trade unions and other organisations.<sup>16</sup>

In our report we include sections on:

1. Discipline in a revolutionary socialist party
2. Role of the DC
3. Confidentiality
4. Suspensions
5. Police and legal bodies
6. CC involvement
7. Co-option
8. A recommended DC process
9. Guidelines to be followed in cases of sexual misconduct complaints
10. Appeals process

### Discipline in a revolutionary socialist party

Our report is informed throughout by a particular view of the nature of discipline in a revolutionary party. We feel it is important to begin by outlining what that view is.

Discipline in a revolutionary socialist party is necessary, and its nature flows from our politics. The party is a voluntary organisation of individuals who understand the need to organise collectively to fight for the socialist transformation of society. Such a transformation is only possible on the basis of the self activity and self emancipation of the working class.

Historical experience, and the unevenness of working class consciousness, leads to the conclusion that the organisation of the minority who agree on the need for revolution is necessary. Historical experience also teaches that such a party needs to combine the fullest discussion and democracy with unified action in practice if we are to be effective – what we have called democratic centralism.

We expect all comrades to play a full role in the internal debate and democratic decision making of the party. When we decide to take a particular course of action, we also expect all comrades to abide by the majority decision. We expect comrades to draw on the experience of seeking to implement decisions and feed that experience back into discussions within the party so we can constantly review, and if necessary change, decisions.

Such discussions should take place primarily through the democratic structures and publications of the party. It is not acceptable for comrades to raise important discussions which involve changing democratically agreed positions outside the party without having done so through appropriate party bodies and processes. Almost always discipline simply means comrades discussing and then agreeing - if necessary through voting- to act together. In this sense, discipline is largely a political and voluntary act based on conviction.

[www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/employer/sexual\\_harassment\\_managers\\_questions.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/employer/sexual_harassment_managers_questions.pdf) and the PCS Disciplinary Procedures, Section 10 of the rulebook here [http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/about\\_pcs/about\\_us/pcs-rules/index.cfm](http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/about_pcs/about_us/pcs-rules/index.cfm)

<sup>16</sup> For instance, we looked at the Equality & Human Rights Commission guidance on sexual harassment

From our politics also flow some broad standards we expect of all comrades – and especially of comrades in leading positions in the movement or the party.

We expect all comrades to do their best to support, defend and implement the democratically agreed decisions of the party. Failure to do this – for example by voting against party decisions in a union conference or executive, or openly arguing against the party position in a meeting – are serious matters of political discipline which undermine our basic approach.

We also expect comrades to uphold the broad lines of our politics in their personal relations with, and behaviour towards, others. This matters for the reputation of the party in the working class movement and for the health of our own internal life and democracy. We cannot have comrades behaving towards others in an oppressive way that contradicts our basic politics.

Disagreeing and arguing with each other are not oppressive. Disagreement, sharp debate and polemic are the lifeblood of genuinely democratic discussion. We also recognise that there will be arguments, often sharp – over both political and personal matters, and at times we all behave in ways less than we would wish to. But behaviour which crosses the line – in which comrades use bullying, violence or oppressive behaviour linked to racism, sexism or homophobia – is not acceptable.

Of course there are gradations – there can be no formula or simple checklist. A new comrade who joins the party and uses inappropriate language in an argument at a social event, for example, needs to be talked to in order to win them to an understanding of why we think this is inappropriate – it would be ridiculous to immediately turn to harsh disciplinary action.

But a comrade who, for example, uses violence towards someone, or behaves in an oppressive personal way, is obviously a matter for more serious concern and possible action. This applies to all members of the SWP, but obviously and especially to those in leading positions in the movement or party.

Where disputes and disagreements arise the key question is how should the party's internal cohesion, unity and discipline based around our shared politics and tradition be maintained?

In most cases disputes or disagreements should be resolved by the appropriate local or fractional unit of the party. Where the complaint against a member or unit of the party is serious and cannot be dealt with locally, or is a matter for the whole party and its reputation, the Central Committee has the prime responsibility to act. All CC actions and decisions in such matters are of course subject to endorsement or otherwise by party conference.

We also have a separately elected body – the Disputes Committee. One reason for having such a body is because the Central Committee is not infallible. Comrades

who believe the CC has got it wrong on a disciplinary matter should have the right to appeal to the DC. Cases involving any CC member, or full time party worker appointed by the CC, clearly must go directly to the DC. And the CC may itself refer cases which cannot be dealt with locally to the DC to undertake the necessary detailed work to resolve the issue.

This is why we have a Disputes Committee. The purpose of our following report is to consider how it should operate.

### Our remit

Our remit was not to reopen or review previous cases. We have viewed our job as attempting to propose, notwithstanding previous decisions, a process for future cases that, as well as being fair, can be *seen to be fair*, both by SWP members and by those we work with in our trade unions, workplaces and campaigns.

We hope that the level of detail and transparency contained in our guidelines will help to restore wider confidence in the party's disciplinary procedures.

### Role of the Disputes Committee

The Disputes Committee is a political body, one which is elected as a collective and should operate as a collective. According to the SWP constitution, the DC exists to “to maintain and strengthen party unity and principle and to investigate complaints relating to disciplinary matters by its members or units”.

The DC is not a body that can solve crimes or make legal decisions. It can only make a political judgement on cases. It cannot rule on the “guilt” or “innocence” of comrades, but can only examine whether they have broken party discipline or behaved in a way that is out of line with our politics. As such it can only recommend sanctions that relate to a comrade's party role or membership.

The majority of cases of breaches of party discipline can and should be dealt with by an appropriate local or fractional body. The vast majority of such issues should be solved on an informal basis. The DC should only be involved if it proves impossible to solve disciplinary questions through normal channels – it is a body of last resort. It is composed of lay members (not full time workers) of the SWP, elected by and accountable to annual conference.

While the DC primarily looks at cases of political breaches of party discipline, it may, on occasion, have to deal with personal disputes or questions of sexual misconduct.

Because of its political role, the DC may decide that cases which have been brought to its attention would be better handled by a different body. As such the DC should, where appropriate, refer disputes back to a

local body. In this event, the DC can offer advice to comrades on how to proceed.

The existing constitution also gives the DC the right to refuse to pursue complaints if it finds any of the following to be the case:

1. The complaint is frivolous;
2. Based on the evidence presented, there is no case to answer;
3. The comrade concerned is trying to use the DC to win battles already lost in the democratic processes of the party.

We think this should remain the case – and that, as at present, the DC should account for any such decision in its reports.

It is, of course, impossible to foresee everything that may come before the DC and the comrades elected to the DC must be able to make decisions about the best way to conduct their work and about how to apply our politics to specific cases.

### Confidentiality

Confidentiality during and before any DC investigation is paramount, both to avoid prejudicing the investigation and also to give comrades the confidence that they can bring forward complaints. All members of the SWP are bound by this.

Information given to those other than the main parties should be strictly limited to an explanation of the arrangements for investigating the allegations or complaint. It may be necessary to make exceptions to the blanket duty to maintain confidentiality. For example, either party may wish to confide in a friend or family member, or seek support in principle from someone they may wish to be a witness at any DC hearing.

When interviewing or contacting any such person, or any other parties, the DC will inform them of the need for ongoing confidentiality. In the case of a breach of confidentiality at any stage of the process, the DC should have the right to suggest to the CC that sanctions should be applied. The DC should always seek to avoid using full names in any correspondence, and will include on all emails and letters a short statement as a footnote emphasising that the email should not be forwarded / shared and that the contents are confidential.

### Suspension

The DC can, at any stage after an allegation or complaint has been brought to its attention, recommend the suspension of a comrade in order to safeguard the integrity of the party and/or to minimise risk to other party members. Any such suspensions must be made on a case by case basis, and should not be seen as a presumption that the suspended comrade has done something wrong.

Should suspensions be made in advance of a hearing, the DC must then endeavor

our to hold a hearing promptly, normally within six weeks.

## Police and legal bodies

The DC should explain to someone making a complaint that if they wish to seek legal redress they are, of course, free to go to the police or take legal advice. The DC may not then be able to deal with a case during an ongoing police investigation. But once any legal investigation is concluded the DC could consider revisiting the case and decide on action.

The DC would itself only approach the police or authorities in exceptional circumstances, such as if there was a threat to someone's safety.

## Central Committee involvement in disputes cases

Because the DC is a political body, it is right that as now the CC - the party's elected political leadership - should be involved in the majority of cases that come to the DC. CC members may also be called as witnesses at a DC hearing by either side in a dispute, or by the DC itself.

However, in cases when CC members themselves are directly the subject of a complaint, we think that CC members should not sit on the DC panel at any hearing, and nor should comrades who have served on the same CC as the individual concerned. However, CC members, like any other comrades, may still be called as witnesses by the DC or individuals involved in the hearing.

## Co-option

The existing SWP constitution says that "the Disputes Committee may co-opt members to serve for particular investigations". We feel that co-option of other SWP members should be considered more frequently by the DC, particularly when a comrade who is the subject of a complaint or allegation is well known in the organisation. Co-option should also be considered as a means to ensure geographical/gender balances and to draw on wider experience in the party where this is important in ensuring that any process is seen to be fair.

Several submissions to our review body suggested that in the future the DC should consider co-opting individuals who are not part of the SWP, but are members of wider affiliates to the International Socialist Tendency (IST), particularly in the case of serious allegations against leading members of the SWP. This review body felt that we should not do this for several reasons.

Firstly, we did not think it would help guard against allegations of bias. One accusation made against the DC process in the recent past is that it could not fairly decide against a leading member because the member was well known. We feel that

in the case of the IST it is actually more likely that they will know a leading SWP member.

Secondly, the DC is primarily a political body, and it makes judgements based on a political situation here in Britain that members of the IST may not be fully aware of. Finally, we feel that in cases of sexual misconduct, the procedures outlined within this document strengthen the ability of our own organisation to deal with such matters internally.

The DC should, of course, be able to seek legal or other advice from comrades with particular experience, and it should also be able to consult with the NC as needed.

## Disputes Committee process

Several comrades who wrote to us felt that it would be helpful if there was greater clarity about how the DC approached its task when an issue or complaint is raised. We agree. A number of comrades had specific suggestions about how processes might be improved. After careful discussion of all such suggestions we are now proposing that the following procedures should be adopted.

## Recommended process

1. The DC must have an initial discussion of the nature of any complaint referred to it. This should decide whether the nature of the complaint falls within the DC remit, and whether it requires further discussion or investigation, or should be referred back to a more appropriate body (such as a local branch). At this stage the DC may consider the nature of the allegation or complaint to be serious enough that a formal hearing will be necessary.

2. If the DC decides to proceed with a case, initial fact finding meetings with all parties involved must take place. These meetings should be to determine information about the case, but also to communicate and clarify to all parties what process will be followed.

The interviews should therefore also:

- Clarify the disputes committee process and timescale.
- Clarify who might be called to speak or answer questions at any hearing.
- Explain what outcomes can be reasonably expected or may be possible.

A minimum of two members of the DC should be involved in these meetings. Individual members of the DC should not meet with comrades involved in a disputes case alone, or make contact with individuals without prior agreement of those comrades chosen by the DC to investigate an allegation.

Where possible, the comrades chosen from the DC to carry out initial fact finding should be completely unconnected with the events and comrades concerned, e.g. from

a different branch, region and union, and should not be involved in any campaign activities in which the parties are involved. It may not be possible to achieve this (for instance in the case of a well known member) in which case the DC should consider its powers of co-option.

3. Following the initial meetings, those comrades who have met with the parties involved should report to the wider DC whether any allegations or complaints, if substantiated, would constitute a breach of political discipline or expected standards of behaviour. The DC must then decide whether to move to a formal hearing, seek further guidance, or propose a more appropriate method to resolve the dispute.

If the DC decides a formal hearing is needed it should then convene a *panel* – usually drawn from within its own membership, but bearing in mind the points about composition in point 2 above and also the restrictions proposed earlier for any case involving complaints against a CC member. This panel should then conduct any further investigation, hold a hearing and reach a conclusion on the complaint.

The DC panel should decide on a likely timescale, and communicate this to the comrades involved. This should set out potential timings – such as for the likely length of any investigation and a likely time limit after the initial investigation for when a hearing is to be held. This ensures transparency and fairness to all comrades, and also helps to prevent additional stress caused by avoidable delays. The timeline should also set out the minimum time in advance of the hearing for the comrade against whom the complaint has been made to receive full details of it.

4. In advance of any hearing, the DC panel must write both to comrades making a complaint and those against whom a complaint has been made outlining exactly what the DC process will be, how the complaint will be dealt with, and what outcomes are possible or could be expected. This letter should also set out advice about approaches to the police and other legal bodies.

It should also make clear how important the DC considers confidentiality and outline how the panel will try to ensure that this is maintained. It will also set out a likely timescale, emphasising that the DC will endeavour to hear the case as soon as practicable. Both parties should then confirm in writing that they understand and agree to the outlined procedures, including the need for confidentiality.

5. The constitution currently states that, "Unless the DC rules that exceptional circumstances prevail, comrades receive in advance a written statement of the case against them and are present when evidence is given to the DC."

In addition, the comrade against whom a complaint has been made should be invited

to reply to the statement against them in writing. The comrade complained against may, for example, wish to indicate whether they dispute the facts, interpretation or politics of the case against them. The comrade may want to wait until the hearing to respond. A copy of any written reply should be sent to the person making the complaint. Written statements should normally be exchanged no later than 4 weeks before the hearing.

All parties should normally inform the DC panel of any witnesses they intend to call no later than 2 weeks before the hearing. The DC panel itself may also want to call comrades to speak at a hearing or to answer questions. The details of all those to be called should be passed to all parties no later than one week before a hearing.

The DC panel should meet prior to any hearing and draw up a realistic timeframe for the hearing itself – one which allows time to hear from all parties and also to factor in time for discussion among the panel itself. This is to avoid the unnecessary stress of long delays waiting to speak or answer questions at a hearing, and also to give the DC time to fully reflect on what it has heard.

We support the Democracy Commission recommendations that while direct confrontation should be avoided, the comrade against whom a complaint has been made should normally be in the room during the hearing and can ask the DC panel for the right to ask a question of any witnesses at the hearing.

Any comrade should also, however, have the right to ask the panel to speak to it or answer questions in private. The DC panel itself must rule on such requests on a case by case basis.

However, there are some cases, such as allegations of sexual misconduct (see additional guidelines below), where the DC panel should rule in advance that it is not appropriate for the person complained against to be in the room during parts of the hearing.

6. The DC panel should communicate its decisions to the comrades concerned as soon as possible. Where possible this should be done verbally immediately or soon after the hearing. There should also be a timely written response to both parties, which outlines at least:

- A summary of the approach taken by the DC panel
- A summary of the political decisions, and an explanation of why they were taken.
- A summary of the outcome – e.g. censure, suspension from the party or from a position within the party, expulsion, no further action.
- An explanation of what happens next – report to conference / appeals procedure if appropriate.

The DC panel must also communicate its decision to the appropriate member of the Central Committee, usually the national

secretary. If the DC panel has decided that disciplinary measures are needed, the CC is responsible for implementing them. Where necessary the CC must inform appropriate party bodies (such as branches), taking into account questions of confidentiality.

7. The SWP constitution says that “The Disputes Committee reports to Conference, where its activities are subject to endorse-ment or otherwise.”

The DC, however, should be sensitive to aspects of particular situations or cases when making reports. For instance, it may not always be appropriate to use names when reporting to conference.

The DC is elected directly by SWP conference and is rightly, therefore, directly accountable to the conference. Thus, ideally, the DC should report to conference on all cases heard. However, in cases of sexual allegations or other sensitive issues, this might not be appropriate. In any such cases the DC should have the right to consult with the SWP’s National Committee about the approach to take and how to report back.

In particular, because the SWP conference is annual, the DC may, in special circumstances, feel it appropriate to report earlier. In this context the DC may consult the NC for advice or report to an SWP Party Council. Should a DC report be made to a Party Council and be accepted, the report will be considered endorsed as if the report had been made to a full Conference.

A DC report to Conference, Party Council or an interim discussion at NC is not a re-running of the dispute, nor is it an appeal. However Conference or Party Council has the right to question the DC’s report and vote on whether to endorse it. A final vote by Conference on the DC report may have to be taken case by case.

Should the DC report or a section of it *not* be endorsed by Conference or Party Council, then an ad hoc committee should be elected by conference to re-hear the specific case. The Conference Arrangements Committee should facilitate this election. This body should not include existing members of the DC and should report to the next appropriate meeting of the Party Council or Conference. Any such committee elected to hear such an appeal would be obliged to work under the same framework as the existing DC and the procedures outlined in this document.

### **Additional guidelines for cases of sexual misconduct**

The SWP is opposed to all forms of oppression. Any allegation of sexual misconduct should be handled with the seriousness and sensitivity that reflects our politics. Our starting point should be to be supportive to anyone who raises a complaint of sexual misconduct, to treat them with respect and to take their complaint extremely seriously,

even if it is not ultimately upheld.

Disputes involving allegations of sexual misconduct are generally very distressing for all those involved, touching on intimate details of people’s lives. For this reason, as well as to ensure that our politics are fully applied to any allegation of this nature, we suggest the following guidelines should be followed in regard to complaints of sexual misconduct, in addition to the general procedures outlined above. In some other cases involving allegations of oppressive behaviour, such as racism or homophobia, some of these guidelines may also apply.

1. When a complaint is first made, the DC should discuss with both the comrade making the complaint and the comrade against whom a complaint has been brought whether they feel they have sufficient personal support for what is likely to be a distressing process. The DC may offer to suggest suitable comrades, not involved in the dispute, to offer support. The DC should also suggest support and counselling organisations where relevant.

2. The DC must take special care to ensure that the person bringing any complaint understands the remit, powers and procedures of the DC, what reasonable outcomes can be expected or are possible, and to discuss any areas of concern at an early stage.

3. In cases that potentially involve criminal actions such as sexual violence, the DC should explain both verbally and in writing that the complainant can of course approach the police if they wish, but that the DC may not be able to proceed while there was any ongoing police investigation.

4. In cases where there are allegations of sexual violence, there should be a presumption that the comrade complained against should be suspended from the party without prejudice or any presumption of wrongdoing pending an investigation. The DC must explain any instances where they believe this is not appropriate.

5. Any complaint of sexual misconduct should be heard as promptly as is practically possible, in a timeframe agreed by all parties, and normally within 6 weeks of the allegation being made.

6. Comrades making or responding to an allegation of sexual misconduct should be able to take another comrade into any DC hearing for support.

7. The question of confidentiality must be stressed with all parties. This is important to protect comrades from gossip, speculation and slander.

8. Any hearing must proceed in line with our politics on oppression. The DC should agree procedures with both parties prior to

the hearing. The comrade against whom a complaint has been made should not be present when the panel hears from the comrade bringing the complaint or from anyone else asked to speak to the hearing or to answer questions - as they would have the right to in other hearings.

9. Initial interviews, the hearing, and the evaluation of what has been said or heard at any hearing should be mindful of the guidelines drawn up by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

10. Where possible any decision or conclusion the DC panel reaches should be given to all parties within two weeks of the hearing, and names of the parties should not be included in any written documents.

11. The DC should offer to meet separately with all parties to discuss what happens next. It may still be appropriate to offer to direct the comrade who brought a complaint towards further support organisations. The DC may also want to speak to branches or other party units, within the confines of confidentiality, to ensure that comrades involved in the dispute are not subject to gossip, speculation and slander, whatever the outcome of the case.

## Appeals

In most instances comrades currently accept the decisions of the DC. We hope this will continue to be the case. However, situations may exceptionally arise where comrades feel they cannot accept an outcome. Therefore we propose the following appeals procedure:

1. Currently the constitution says, "Anyone who is disciplined [by the CC or local structures] and is unhappy about their treatment may appeal to the Disputes Committee, who will review the decision and can change or reverse it if they agree." We think this should remain the case.
2. If a decision of the DC is rejected at Conference or Party Council, then as stated earlier an ad-hoc body should be elected to re-hear the case.
3. In exceptional circumstances, the DC itself, or either party to a complaint may ask for an appeal by contacting the chairs of the NC within a month of the DC panel decision. The chairs will then take the request for an appeal to the next NC meeting which will decide whether to appoint a group of comrades to review the decision. These should be comrades who had no previous involvement in the case.

The decision of any appeal body shall override an earlier decision and this appeal body should report to the Conference or Party Council in addition to the DC report. The decision of Conference or Party Council on this appeal body decision shall be final and binding.

Final and binding.

## Disputes Committee Review Body

# AMENDMENT TO DC REVIEW ON EQUAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The original DC rules were set up to ensure that if the CC was bringing a complaint, the person against whom a complaint has been made would have an opportunity to see the evidence against them and respond properly. As the cases heard by the DC were mostly brought by the CC the rules were formulated to ensure transparency and to prevent the CC using its position to remove political opponents without proper explanation.

This has particular implications in cases involving rape and/or abuse. Activists have fought for the right of women to have proper access to evidence in courts in rape cases to ensure that women in an already potentially emotional and vulnerable state are not cross examined, are not put on the spot with evidence that they might not have proper chance to process, that can cause the individual to feel that they are being disbelieved, and that can have a triggering effect (can cause people to traumatically recall negative experiences or events) and that can add enormously to what is often already a traumatic experience.

It is therefore important both to be consistent with our politics on women's oppression, and to achieve the basic standard expected in a trade union process, that we include provision in the DC rules to allow equal access to information for all parties.

The current proposals in the DC review do not allow for equal access to information to both parties. Only *if* the accused provides a written statement does it guarantee equal access. In normal cases this is less of a problem as the comrades will be present in the same room when evidence is being given. In more serious cases where the comrades will not be in the same room, the proposed changes do not ensure equal access.

## Equal access to information

Two amendments:

In point 5 of the section on 'Recommended Process', insert the text italicised below:

The constitution currently states that,

"Unless the DC rules that exceptional circumstances prevail, comrades receive in advance a written statement of the case against them and are present when evidence is given to the DC."

In addition, the comrade against whom a complaint has been made should be invited to reply to the statement against them in writing. The comrade complained against may, for example, wish to indicate whether they dispute the facts, interpretation or politics of the case against them. The comrade may want to wait until the hearing to respond. A copy of any written reply should be sent to the person making the complaint. Written statements should normally be exchanged no later than 4 weeks before the hearing.

*If the comrade waits until the hearing to respond, if necessary the comrade who has made the complaint should be given reasonable time to adjourn to reflect on this information before being questioned. This time should be agreed by the DC and the complainant. In exceptional circumstances- if new evidence is presented which would require time to refute- the DC should consider whether the hearing must be postponed. These rules would apply vice versa.*

In the section on 'Additional guidelines for cases of sexual misconduct', insert a point 8:

8. It is especially important that comrades have equal access to information. In less serious cases if the comrade against whom a complaint has been made does not provide written evidence in advance, the person making the complaint should have the right to have one of their support people present while this person gives evidence.

This information should then be relayed to the person who has made a complaint in an oral or written form. The content of this must accurately reflect what the person against whom a complaint has been made says and must be agreed with them.

In this case the person should then have adequate time to reflect on this information before being questioned, the length of time to be agreed between the DC and the complainant on the day, and potentially this might involve having to reschedule the hearing to a later date.

In cases involving rape and more serious abuse it should be insisted upon that the person against whom a complaint has been made must present their evidence in advance of the hearing to allow the person making the complaint the opportunity to process the information and prepare a response. It is important that this happens to be consistent with our politics on women's oppression and to prevent a comrade being cross examined or put in a situation that might have a triggering effect.

These rules could also apply where the comrade who has made the complaint might be experiencing mental health prob-

lems exacerbated by waiting to hear the response.

**Jen (Tower Hamlets)**

## AMENDMENTS TO DC REVIEW REPORT

### 1. In the section Discipline in a revolutionary socialist party

1a. Second paragraph, at end of sentence: Such a transformation is only possible on the basis of the self activity and self emancipation of the working class,

Add in: ‘from the standpoint of the proletariat.’

1b. Third paragraph, final sentence: Historical experience also teaches that such a party needs to combine the fullest discussion and democracy with unified action in practice if we are to be effective – *what we have called democratic centralism.*

Change to: ‘what we call democratic centralism.’

1c. 9th paragraph, second sentence: A new comrade who joins the party and uses inappropriate language in an argument at a social event, for example, needs to be talked to in order to win them to an understanding of why we think this is inappropriate – it would be ridiculous to immediately turn to harsh disciplinary action

Change to: ‘A new comrade who joins the party and uses inappropriate language in an argument at a social event, for example, needs to be talked *with* in order to win them to an understanding of why we think this is inappropriate – it would be ridiculous to immediately turn to harsh disciplinary action’

1d. Tenth paragraph, second sentence: This applies to all members of the SWP, *but obviously and especially those in leading positions in the movement or party.*

Delete: ‘but obviously and especially those in leading positions in the movement or party.’

Reason: Any comrade behaving in such a way is a matter for concern and possible action.

### 2. In the section Role of the Disputes Committee

2a. Paragraph 5, third sentence

In this event, the DC can offer advice to comrades on how to proceed.

Add in: ‘In this event, the DC can offer advice *and support* to comrades on how to proceed.’

### 3. In the section on Suspension

3a. Paragraph 1, first sentence

Delete: The DC can, at any stage after an allegation or complaint has been brought to its attention, recommend the suspension of a comrade in order to safeguard the integrity of the party and/or to minimise risk to *other* party members.

### 4. In the section police and legal bodies

4a. Delete second and third sentences: The DC may not then be able to deal with a case during an ongoing police investigation. But once any legal investigation is concluded the DC could consider revisiting the case and decide on action.

Reason: Police investigations can take years. This document should not recommend deferral to the police

### 5. In the section Central Committee involvement in disputes cases

Delete the entire section and insert: ‘In cases where a CC member is directly the subject of a complaint, other CC members will not automatically be included, nor will they be automatically excluded, from being on the DC panel at the hearing.’

Reason: We are Marxists whose politics develop out of our conscious standpoint: the proletariat. To suggest that this political clarity and/or the ability to apply this political method disappears if you share or have shared membership of the Central Committee is nonsense.

### 6. In the section Co-option

6a. First paragraph, delete second sentence: We feel that co-option of other SWP members should be considered more frequently by the DC, particularly when a comrade who is the subject of a complaint or allegation is well known in the organisation.

6b. Third paragraph, Delete sentences 2 and 3: One accusation made against the DC process in the recent past is that it could not fairly decide against a leading member because the member was well known. We

feel that in the case of the IST it is actually more likely that they will know a leading SWP member.

### 7. In the section on Recommended process

Point 3, paragraph 2, first sentence delete after point 2 above:

If the DC decides a formal hearing is needed it should then convene a panel – usually drawn from within its own membership, but bearing in mind the points about composition in point 2 above *and also the restrictions proposed earlier for any case involving complaints against a CC member.*

Point 5, delete second paragraph, 1st, 2nd, 3rd and part of 4th sentences:

In addition, the comrade against whom a complaint has been made should be invited to reply to the statement against them in writing. The comrade complained about may, for example, wish to indicate whether they dispute the facts, interpretation or politics of the case against them. The comrade may want to wait until the hearing to respond. A copy of any written reply...

Replace with: ‘If the complained about wants to respond in writing before a hearing that should be sent to the person...’

Reason: Matters of disputed fact, interpretation or politics of the case will have been established during the 2 member DC investigative teamwork whether a hearing goes on to take place or not.

**Rhetta and Mark (Manchester)**

## AMENDMENT TO DC REVIEW

Section on Co-option:

Para 1 delete sentence: “We feel that co-option..... is well known in the organisation”.

3rd sentence delete: “also”.

Add at end new sentence – “We believe it is essential for the integrity of the process that in the main disputes cases are dealt with by members elected to deal with the whole range of cases that might arise rather than be selected to deal with particular cases and in all cases that elected members should form the majority of any panel.”

Page 9, Section 7 Para 6 (second Para of page 9)

Delete: “then an ad hoc committee should be elected..... document”.

Insert “Then the appeal should be referred to the incoming Disputes Committee. Members of the DC hearing the original complaint should not sit on the appeal. If necessary the DC should be expanded to 8 members to facilitate this whilst remaining small enough to be a properly working body.”

**John (East London)**

## SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DISPUTES COMMITTEE

These are my suggestions:-

1) The SWP should get an entirely independent professional, for instance from Women’s Aid, to review how the Comrade Delta cases were handled/are being handled.

All organisations in this society risk having some institutionalised misogyny which needs to be consciously counteracted with professional advice, and regardless of their professional role all members of an organization or friends of members will have bias and inability to be entirely independent. I will pay for this myself if I have to! It’s that important.

Confidentiality could be maintained by letting the professional review only how the case was handled (honestly) rather than the details, or by trusting the professional to follow the Data Protection Act and not share details with anyone else (after all they are independent so names etc wouldn’t identify anyone to them anyway as they don’t know the people’s life circumstance) and/or simply anonymising names. Honesty would of course be paramount.

2) If it does not exist there could be a Code of Conduct for members of SWP or at least full time workers or members of important committees. It could include conduct which might bring the SWP into disrepute. A COC including this would help with disputes as it could be seen at a glance if someone had breached it. Again, this code should have independent input.

3) There should be an official protocol as to when people have to recuse from a disputes committee or other committee case. In this case a person from the woman’s branch felt they should recuse, but people who knew the man involved did not recuse. When to recuse should have some guidelines/rules to prevent possible bias, for instance due

to knowing one person well personally and not another, and ensure people who recuse do so under the same circumstances.

4) The SWP could find out how for instance the Labour party handle similar disputes or women’s issues and use this to inform their process to some extent.

5) Members could receive guidelines that counteract rape myths. This is important for everyone in society, as these myths are so widely believed.

This could be prefaced by a comment that it does not imply an opinion about any individual case. A good summary is this by the Director of Public Prosecutions himself <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/mar/13/false-allegations-rape-domestic-violence-rare> and this by the CPS [http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p\\_to\\_r/rape\\_and\\_sexual\\_offences/societal\\_myths/](http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p_to_r/rape_and_sexual_offences/societal_myths/)

6) Suggestions that an organisation handled something less than perfectly should not be as frequently met by a flat denial, but there should be a genuine attempt to incorporate how people feel it could have been handled better.

There should be an awareness of possible bias in disputes/opinions based on member seniority. This would help keep newer members who might be coming from a slightly different political background or a generational change in culture around feminism in the left. The new popularity of opinions which are aware of misogyny should be incorporated into policy to get and keep members, who generally may be recruited from the more mainstream left.

I hope some of these opinions will be taken on board. In general, there seems to be a lack of openness to alternative opinions being taken on board or considered.

**Kathryn (Birmingham)**

## HOW CAN THE SWP RECOVER FROM THE RECENT INTERNAL DISPUTES?

The world situation cries out for revolutionary organisation. Our tradition needs to spread and to strengthen.

The SWP continues to be the leading representative of the classical Marxist tradition of revolutionary socialism, with a very effective cadre of a few thousand comrades in the UK; whilst the ideas of that tradition are spreading internationally – notably in Egypt but also in dozens of

other countries.

However, during the last year our work and our influence in the working class movement has been severely weakened by the effects of the dispute arising from allegations of rape and other oppressive behaviour against a leading member. The continuing disagreements about this within the Party have led to much anger and internal conflict, diluting our work against our real enemies. There have been some organised splits. Many previously new members and supporters have turned away from us. The effect on the student membership and organisation seems to have been disastrous.

Up to now the strategy of the Party as a whole, led by the Central Committee, for dealing with this can roughly be summed up as follows:

1. An insistence that the Party should accept the decisions of the Disputes Committee (composed of highly and widely trusted comrades elected for the task) in 2012 which cleared Comrade Delta of any sexism or politically inappropriate behaviour in relation to the rape and harassment accusations against him;

2. That any democratic challenge to that decision by Party members opposed to it was inappropriate and an unjustified distraction from our main tasks; especially once the report was accepted (albeit narrowly) by the January national conference;

3. To express and encourage collective anger as widely as possible in the Party as a whole against those who continued to criticise or work to overturn the DC and Conference decisions;

4. To debate extensively the wider political and theoretical questions, of women’s oppression, party democracy, autonomism, social media and student politics, arguing in the process against the political errors being committed by the members of the different factions;

5. To condemn strongly breaches of “security” and intemperate conversations on social media about the issues in dispute and/or individual comrades involved in them;

6. To treat the original Dispute as confidential in all aspects (i.e. not just the identities of the accused and accuser), not to be discussed with non-Party members, who had no legitimate interest;

7. To retreat where necessary, with the minimum explanation to the whole Party and no admission of fault;

This strategy has failed. Though we have continued our political work energetically during the year, there has been no success in clearing away the discontents relating to

this case, either inside or outside the Party, and the damage has been unmistakable and continuing.

Comrade Delta, having stood down as National Secretary in 2011 and from the CC at the end of 2012, has now resigned

from the Party. In the absence of any explanation having yet been given for this, I assume that this amounts to an admission that Comrade Delta himself, the CC and the Party majority have for the last year been attempting (no doubt unwittingly in most cases) to defend the indefensible, and that this is no longer possible.

If this is so, it is embarrassing but no disgrace. Many of those who took this line were at the core of building the Party and organising its successful initiatives over years, and have a firmer understanding of the need for Party unity and how to achieve it than many in the opposition. No doubt there has been a huge well of trust amongst dedicated Party members who have worked together for years. All that has been threatened by this case and its sequel. It would not be amazing or disgraceful if many comrades were affected unwittingly but decisively by bias in favour of the comrade who had such a fine record of leadership in the Party as Comrade Delta.

However, the leadership of the Party at every level now need to show humility. When I called for humility in my Branch's pre-Special Conference meeting earlier this year, the idea was derided. But what it means is honesty about our own individual and collective fallibility and our willingness in specific cases to recognise our mistakes and change course. This is a moment of truth for us.

The Party collectively and members individually have to be ruthlessly honest. We are rich in able comrades, both on the leading bodies and outside them. But no one should remain on the Central Committee or the NC who is not willing to face up honestly to the mistakes which the CC and NC made again and again over the last year in relation to this dispute and its consequences. When our delegates vote at the next Conference it should be clear where individual comrades stand on this before they are elected on to the CC or NC.

We need a leadership which combines the strategic determination and tactical flair and energy which it has had over the decades with a completely restored reputation both inside and outside the Party for absolute intolerance of sexism or any other oppressive behaviour.

If we can renew our leadership in a reconciled Party, we can take full advantage of our brilliant tradition and strengths, at a time which may well become very favourable for the growth of revolutionary ideas and organisation. If we fail, we will probably drift slowly towards demoralisation or irrelevance.

**Roger (Huddersfield)**

## ROOTS OF A CRISIS

The labour movement in Britain does not have many useful tools. The SWP may be small, but has proven its usefulness over many decades and continues to do so. The party is a fixture of the left and is likely to remain one. However, the coming months will determine the extent to which the damage incurred by this year's crisis is permanent or can be overcome.

For a significant number of comrades the path to rebuilding confidence in the party is a relatively straightforward one: an apology to the two women who brought complaints; an acknowledgement of the mistakes that have created the biggest crisis in the party's history and damaged the party's reputation in the wider movement; changes to the structures and culture of the party that produced the mess and to the leadership that oversaw and exacerbated it.

The experience of this past year, however, should indicate that taking even such basic and necessary measures is unlikely to be unproblematic. Many of the concerns identified by the In Defence of Our Party (IDOO) faction in February, for example, have now been addressed.

A commission was set up to review the party's disputes procedures and has proposed welcome and constructive changes to them. The individual at the heart of the dispute has resigned from the party. The complaint of the second woman (herself subject to a disgraceful campaign of vilification by a number of longstanding comrades) was finally heard. At Marxism it was publicly acknowledged that the party had made mistakes in its handling of the disputes.

Had these concerns been addressed in January there would have been no need to form a faction. Why did it take so long to take them into account? The party's inhibitions when it comes to facing up to mistakes forms part of a set of long-term problems. This document attempts to outline some of them as a contribution to a much wider discussion about where the party is heading.

Overcoming the factional entrenchment of the past year is essential if the comrades are to be able to agree on the changes required to unite the party and prevent further crises emerging. Across the party there is broad acceptance that change is necessary. Comrades who were part of the IDOO faction have issued a call to all those seeking to address questions of internal political culture to find a broader collective means of doing so during the pre-conference period.

### The undeclared faction

Entrenchment is not a unilateral process, however. A small but influential group of

party members, bound together by a collective sense of denial that the party faces any problems arising from the dispute, is seeking to make IDOO the central feature of the pre-conference period, attributing all kinds of ulterior political motives to it as evidence of its deviation from Leninism.

The influence of this Undeclared faction has been responsible for much of the destruction of the past few months. This grouping has been meeting on a regular basis since the end of last year. It has been able to exert an influence over the strategy of the central committee and the functioning of many branches and districts. This faction even tried to subvert the will of the CC majority and prevent the second complaint from being heard, having successfully delayed it for four months.

The Undeclared faction is acting in conjunction with a minority on the CC. The CC majority, while recognising the wider need to take political responsibility for the crisis around the dispute, is unwilling to draw out and resolve its political differences with this minority, and has turned a blind eye to the factional operation being pursued by the minority: in some districts branches have been closed down or 'merged' and comrades associated with 'the opposition' have been systematically removed from local positions. This is the opposite of decisive, centralist leadership. Once again the party finds itself in a position where there is a division on the CC but no acknowledgement to the wider membership of its existence or what lies behind it – 'not in front of the children'. Instead of openly acknowledging political differences, a façade of unity is being presented while difficult questions are quietly administered behind the scenes.

This opens up the prospect that any serious attempt to come to terms with recent mistakes, and their roots, will not take place. What unites the minority and majority CC elements is ritual condemnation of the opposition as a negative and disruptive influence. This approach is likely to be carried into the pre-conference period. It has the advantage of preserving the myth of a united CC and of shoring up the majority constituted for the special conference, at least for a few more months. It may also enable the CC majority to exert a measure of control over the cruder forms of sectarianism that the Undeclared faction tends to fall back on. Such calculations - effectively managerial solutions to a political crisis - are based on an underestimation of three elements. Firstly, the fundamentally destructive role that the CC majority is allowing the Undeclared faction to play. Secondly, the resilience and seriousness of the opposition and the way its role is acknowledged as significant within the party. Thirdly, the extent to which the party has suffered serious damage in the wider movement.

The long-term political price of preserving an internal party culture based on



the mystification of political differences is outlined below. Whatever position comrades took in January or March, there is an immediate question to be faced: are there enough members willing to assert a different approach to this crisis in order to find a way out of it?

The CC's priority in March was to win votes, not arguments. All kinds of threadbare and sometimes backward ideas were deployed to this end. In the aftermath of the special conference around 400 comrades resigned, largely because they believed the party was becoming moribund. Several hundred opposition comrades who experienced the ham-fisted operation to defeat them in March have nevertheless remained in the organisation, despite the hostility meted out to them since. If this December's conference simply repeats the March spectacle, with all the accompanying vitriol, the danger is that a significant number of these comrades will conclude that the party has lost the capacity to regenerate itself, and leave.

This will be a major blow to the party - and not just in cumulative numerical terms. It will threaten the SWP's long-term ability to renew itself and recover politically. This will not be the first time the party has undergone a serious crisis. It is now common currency among comrades to accept that following the Respect crisis a serious assessment of how we got there was averted. We have paid a price for this. The nature of the issues at stake this time round threaten much more serious long-term problems for the party. Unless we face up to them, they are likely to provoke more splits and crises further down the line.

The SWP's recent history should have taught us that a narrow, defensive focus on shoring up the authority of a beleaguered leadership tends only to inhibit the organisation's capacity to learn from experience and thus develop as a dynamic and independent revolutionary current at the heart of the movement. For all the debate about Leninism over recent months, the simple fact is that the party has neglected the principle that makes democratic centralism effective and relevant: organisation must be subordinated to politics. Over the past two decades the SWP has suffered from a tendency to do precisely the opposite. The dispute and its aftermath have dramatically brought into focus this reality. How has it come to this?

## Party and class

A revolutionary party is a response to uneven class consciousness, an attempt to overcome it by offering leadership. But this leadership cannot be effective if the party acts in isolation, just making propaganda at people.

The party must also listen and learn if its outlook and activity are to remain relevant. Internal democracy is therefore an essential aspect of the relationship between party and

class: without it the party can neither fully comprehend nor relate to developments in the wider movement. Since a viable party cannot develop separate interests from the class, discussion of its policies must be conducted in the open, in full view of the wider movement. An important part of this process therefore is self-criticism, which has to be put before the personal pride of individuals. This was underlined by Tony Cliff to industrial militants and key party activists in the 1970s:

*'The one thing that simply cannot be afforded is a situation in which for fear of "losing face" comrades will not be prepared to reverse a decision made at a previous meeting'* (Birchall, p.341).

Responsiveness requires flexibility and accountability and a dynamic relationship between different sections of the membership. This presents the party with challenges if it is to remain relevant. It must guard against inertia and introspection.

One of the constant refrains of the struggle to establish the organisation was the need to ward off conservatism. Cliff's barbed response to calls in the 1970s to introduce probationary membership for new recruits was to warn that those who needed to be put on probation were comrades who had been in the party for more than three years, to check that they were still revolutionaries.

At times there would be a need for sharp shifts of emphasis - 'bending the stick' - as a necessary means of overcoming unevenness and conservatism in the organisation. This method did not function without flaws (or splits), but it could not function at all without a preparedness to listen to and engage with dissenting voices.

The internal life of a revolutionary party is therefore a long way from the culture of deference, the turgid reliance on constitutional mechanisms and formal adherence to 'majority rule' that characterise social democratic parties. As Ian Birchall puts it in his biography of Tony Cliff:

*'Cliff believed that when members had been in the organisation for a few years they tended to become more conservative. Therefore whenever there was a new turn it had to be led from behind, with the most active part of the membership going over the heads of the existing leadership. Cliff's strategy was for the minority to lead the majority'* (Birchall, p.346)

Through the 1970s and 1980s, the CC as a whole was able to draw on the experience of an active membership of several thousands, generalising from what worked best and arriving at a perspective that located the party's role in a broader context through a process of mutual engagement and attention to detail, and then driving this through the branches with the help of a full-time apparatus and a network of established,

rooted cadre. Of course, the process was uneven, mistakes were made and damaging but often necessary splits occurred. But the organisation survived, and grew. The party stressed the need for revolutionaries to be in constant dialogue with workers' struggles rather than act as a self-appointed vanguard handing down lessons:

*'In short they have to learn from their fellow workers as much as - or more than - they have to teach. To repeat, the job is to lead, and to lead you have to thoroughly understand those you are leading. Leadership is a two-way process.'* (Birchall, p. 384).

## Emerging from the downturn

For the SWP, the downturn in class struggle inevitably shifted the balance of this relationship. The party, for much of the 1980s, often found itself politically isolated. It would 'intervene' in the movement but its activity was primarily shaped by its own routine of branch meetings, paper sales, branch committees and contact visiting.

By the end of the 1980s a number of developments, some quite complex and contradictory, eventually necessitated radical changes to the way the party functioned. The end of the Cold War dissolved many of the divisions that had structured relations between different left groups, opening up new possibilities.

It also meant that state capitalism, the theoretical basis for the SWP's heterodox form of Trotskyism, was no longer the party's automatic reference point, crystallising its commitment to socialism from below and distinguishing it from other forces. The political backlash against Thatcherism and Reaganism, expressed in the Clinton election victory and the travails of the hapless Major administration, did not lead to a sustained upsurge in industrial struggle or stem the assertion of neo-liberal hegemony. Movements against the Poll Tax and the Criminal Justice Bill nevertheless offered reminders of the potential for revolt, as did the fight over pit closures in the early 1990s.

Social democracy became increasingly discredited as a progressive force offering genuine hope of social transformation for the left as 'new realism' became increasingly hard to distinguish from neo-liberal managerialism. Yet Labour remained the party most workers looked to as an alternative to the Tories.

Underpinning the party's orientation in changing circumstances was a long-term preoccupation: how to explain the continuing hold of reformist ideas at a time when support was draining away from its institutions? Some important analyses of key questions were developed - the new imperialism, the world economy, the changing working class, etc.

Sometimes, however, intuitive slogans - 'the new mood', 'reformism without

reforms' - became a substitute for the more precise analytical tools required to shape political intervention. 'The 1930s in slow motion' was an arresting image, but was insufficient as the basis for a convincing theoretical understanding of the period. Woolly stopgaps like the characterisation of Respect as 'a united front of a special type' tended to mask, rather than provide, understanding - if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it must be a dog of a special type.

We have yet to come to terms with the tensions inherent in the role the SWP has found itself playing since the late 1990s. How to respond to the wider imperatives of the movement and play a key federating role which maintaining and asserting our own independent political identity? How to sustain necessary political tension with our political allies without threatening the viability of joint projects or simply liquidating into them?

## The degeneration of internal political culture

As the organisation emerged from the relative isolation of the downturn years and responded to new challenges, a contradictory process developed.

Despite many significant achievements, which established the party as an incontrovertible fixture of the left, over time its internal culture began to deteriorate, making it harder to interrogate or develop perspectives or hold those responsible for their elaboration or implementation to account. Difficulties therefore got resolved by default - imperatives were responded to but lessons were only partially or belatedly learned from the experience. The wider problems of the period were therefore exacerbated by the accumulation of internal shortcomings.

In the early 2000s branches were dissolved. Breaking the established practices of party work was a response to the need to engage more effectively with new movements and developments: the Livingstone election campaign in 2000 (when he stood as an independent candidate for London mayor, defeating Labour's Frank Dobson), the emerging anti-capitalist and stop the war movements, and the possibilities for recomposition on the radical left.

The party was bending the stick in order to break from the routinised structures that had insulated it from the 'downturn' years of defeat and the pessimism and passivity they frequently generated. Some comrades initially experienced this as a liberating development, others considered it reckless and destructive. Its effects were uneven - the party 'punched above its weight' in the wider labour movement, but its internal organisation suffered serious consequences.

## Substitutionism

Overcoming this kind of unevenness in a revolutionary party requires effective organisation. Without the framework of the branches to generalise the best experience and learn from the worst, the party's transmission belts inevitably became less effective. The unevenness then became more accentuated and harder to overcome. The leadership as a whole grew increasingly reliant on its full-time apparatus to gear the party into action. The reciprocal relationship between the party leadership and the wider membership became skewed, out of kilter.

Problems such as substitutionism developed from the need to keep the ship afloat in order to make the most of the opportunities offered by the emerging movements and by the wider context - the aftermath of the Cold War, the new imperialism, the neoliberal offensive and the mutation of social democracy.

But the short cuts produced more than one problem. The CC became more compartmentalised and less accountable. Its members understandably became preoccupied with their particular responsibilities as the party took on an increasingly influential share of work in the various united fronts thrown up by - or occasionally formed in response to - the movement.

The party became a lynchpin of the radical left, at the heart of virtually everything that moved from the summer of 2000 to the Respect crisis of 2008. The SWP's role in the movement produced genuine achievements. We only have to compare the party's belated grasp of the significance of the anti-Poll Tax movement to its pivotal role in the Stop the War Coalition to grasp this. But it came at a price. One of them was the way in which one or two key individuals became seen as 'indispensable', to be defended as if they were synonymous with the party itself: the highest stage of substitutionism.

## The disengagement of cadre

Further problems arose. These included the disengagement of a large section of cadre from the party's theoretical and practical activity, an increasingly unaccountable leadership and a tendency to avoid frank internal debate for fear of jeopardising our federating role at the heart of a number of united fronts.

The CC contributed to the party's theoretical development less frequently and in fewer numbers than before. This was partly because of the additional burden of responsibility posed on its members, but partly also because there was less scope for thrashing out within the organisation the concrete political implications of changing political realities.

The party's attitude to the new period prior to 2000 had been underpinned by an understanding that, like anyone recovering from a long period of sickness and inactiv-

ity, the labour movement in Britain would not awaken into struggle without problems. It was not a straightforward situation. There was a need for a full and frank assessment of it, in order both to understand the period and to clarify the party's role within it. The party was to prove incapable of providing an adequate framework for this debate.

Many questions were not sufficiently addressed. Why was there such a chronic gap between levels of political anger and of industrial struggle? How could even relatively small minorities among the millions who were losing their natural political home, be won (and retained) to radical left alternatives? What pitfalls lay before a revolutionary party that found itself in a position of strength by default - fronting up a wide range of operations because there were no other, bigger forces able or willing to take on that role? How should the SWP retain the cutting edge of its distinctive independent politics when it bore the principal responsibility for keeping elements to its right on board in united front activity?

Something broke down in the workings of democratic centralism in the SWP. The shrinking of internal party political culture, at a time when the SWP was 'punching above its weight' in unprecedented measure, had significant consequences. One was that debate was increasingly perceived as an obstacle to engagement in the movement by some CC members who bore responsibility for the success of our united front work - a responsibility that they were reminded of both by the party and, often in more than equal measure, by its partners in the wider movement. These tensions needed acknowledging and facing up to. They were generally overridden by the imperatives generated by the movement, and the party's disproportionate role within it.

Other problems arose from the way federation with wider forces was, in practice, prioritised over the independence of the party. This had a serious impact on the organisation's internal functioning. It produced a kind of quietism in the political culture of the party. Comrades were actively engaged and leading in the movement but internal dissent was interpreted as conservatism. It became stifled, generally via an implicit and unspoken consensus.

Without access to satisfactory internal debate, simmering dissent often resulted in disengagement or silence, rather than open argument. The responsibility of the party within wider movements was real and comrades understood the significance of this. Few did not, at some point, have doubts. Most understood, however, that airing them would be awkward or unproductive, not least because it might detract from the wider imperative that brought hope of a regeneration of the entire radical left in Britain.

In the absence of internal mechanisms that could produce adequate means of ensuring discussion and accountability

in a new period, the need to defend the party's role within the wider movement further multiplied the organisation's internal problems.

These two tendencies reinforced each other: with increasingly limited internal means of developing, fine-tuning and reassessing its political perspectives, the party rarely accounted for its own mistakes.

This did damage to what had always been one of the party's strengths: the ability to look reality in the face and acknowledge hard political truths. Difficult situations were ridden out with bombast or denial. Debate became awkward, with the result that it has become common practice for CC members to harbour 'hidden' differences in order to present a façade of unity before the membership. When questions are not taken up directly and politically, the door is opened to manoeuvring, whispering campaigns and other substitutes for open debate.

The democracy commission, set up to address the problems of political culture that exploded over Respect, merely underlined what they were. Whatever its merits, it was an example of the dislocation between members and leadership, which substituted a parliamentary-style commission for an open-eyed accounting of mistakes involving as many members as possible. The real political issues at stake were effectively kicked into the long grass. As for its actual recommendations, many have simply been ignored.

## Branch organisation and revolutionary independence

The compartmentalisation of the CC, fragmentation of branch organisation and growing reliance on the party apparatus to push through and develop perspectives made regeneration of the branches a slow and difficult process, further hampered by the frequent absence of many comrades through their involvement in united front or fraction work.

Internal fragmentation undermined the party's ability to assert its independence within broader movements. The mechanisms that informed, shaped and tested political perspectives narrowed.

The party's focus was primarily on responding to the next imperatives thrown up by the new period – building demonstrations and rallies, engaging in local committees and campaigns, standing for election, defending the resulting electoral 'bridgeheads', fostering its relations with other forces and the leading figures it was trying to federate.

The considerations that had dominated party practice for decades – selling the paper, developing a strategy for recruiting contacts as part of a wider understanding of the party's changing relationship to its periphery, maximising attendance at branch meetings, establishing and consolidating a

branch leadership – were overshadowed by these imperatives. This hampered our ability to assert the party's independent political perspective, to make sense of compromises and mistakes and defeats: to subordinate organisation to politics in order to make it relevant as a separate entity.

The impoverishment of the party's internal political culture and its increasing inability to assert a consistently clear independent political perspective went hand in hand. Difficulties emerging from the magnification of the party's role as a consequence of the disappearance or erosion of competing forces were rarely discussed internally. Success – our role in building the 15 February StWC demonstration, the huge rallies, the electoral advances – simply masked these problems.

'Punching above your weight' is a boxing term. It means that a fighter is confronted by opponents who are bigger, and generally stronger. Success in such circumstances is no mean feat. But, over time, boxers who do this on a regular basis suffer terrible consequences. Some experience brain damage, others just lose their effectiveness, most die prematurely. The ones who thrive tend to move up a weight in order to compete on more equal terms. The way they do this is very simple – they gain weight.

Over the past decade, the SWP has lost weight. Aside from those recruited in 2011, after Millbank, it has not won new members in any significant way for a decade. New circumstances have also made retention more difficult. In the 1980s the party was not without problems, but the focus on building a revolutionary organisation as the absolute priority of every comrade greatly facilitated the recruitment and retention of members.

Emerging from the downturn, many longstanding comrades had come to the view that the branches were not necessarily the most important aspect of the party's operation. The focus of their activity was often their trade union fraction, or the local campaigns they were central to, or their united front work. The argument that more attention needed to be paid to the branches had limited traction.

Very few Socialist Worker reading groups were organised in the workplace, despite the party's relatively significant influence on the national executive committees of a number of unions.

Local mechanisms for finding out who sold the paper, and how many, and in what workplaces, were rare. Trade union fractions did not report to branches or the NC. With attendance at branches uneven, the quality of meetings suffered, further affecting attendance.

This is not to say that solutions lie with returning to the 1980s. The party has attempted to relate to new conditions, but such shifts are rarely unproblematic. Negative consequences can be overcome if an organisation is equipped to do so. In order

to remain relevant the party must learn from the movement if it is to help shape it. To do so the party must have an internal culture that allows for genuine engagement with ideas and arguments. Endlessly reciting dogmatic assertions about 'our tradition' will not do. The tradition has to develop. If we aspire to possess 'ideas to change the world' we cannot allow them to be reduced to some kind of ossified liturgy handed down from generation to generation.

## The danger of sectarianism

Unless this awareness is fully reintegrated into the practice of the party, we are not going to find a way out of this crisis. Debate is not an end in itself, it can only be meaningful if we have a means to act upon it.

An organisation can be preserved by closing in on itself, repudiating dissent and refusing to engage with the messy reality of a changing world. Lutte Ouvriere won 1.5 million votes in the 1995 French presidential election. It was never able to relate to those people because it prioritised internal solidity and rigidity over opening up to the movement. It is now largely irrelevant.

Three decades after Militant led the Poll Tax movement and spearheaded resistance to the Tories at local government level, its successor organization, the Socialist Party, exerts much less influence. Its tradition suffers from a lack of theoretical clarity, a blurring of the lines between reform and revolution and an inability to digest the political implications of the actual reality of today's working class, giving rise to a messianic tendency to view struggle through the prism of its own voluntarism.

Lutte Ouvriere and the Militant were the dominant organisations of the French and British left in the 1980s. Their fate is the consequence of subjective failings that were exposed and intensified by their relative success. The SWP has proven more resilient than many of the organisations that have experienced difficulties in adjusting to the opportunities offered by new movements and the prospect of left realignment across Europe over the past two decades. But unless we develop an internal life that is able to rise to this complex political situation, the kind of internal crises we have encountered since 2008 will recur, and the party will find it increasingly difficult to withstand and absorb them.

We are in danger of breaking the thread that links today's party with its proven capacity for renewal. There is a direct relationship between complacency or conservatism in a revolutionary organisation and elitism. 'You are not the salt of the earth,' Cliff warned comrades in the 1970s, attacking the tendency to see trade unionists, especially those with important positions, as more important or valuable to the organisation than women or black comrades, for example, or young members.

The party's consistent emphasis on the great significance of new members, of

every member as 'gold dust', of the need to be attuned to developments and to be prepared to adapt and change position when necessary – it was well into the 1970s that the party began organising around LGBT issues, for example – all these things are part of the struggle to ensure the party regenerates itself and resists inertia.

The dismissal of concerns at the special conference about the lack of representation from some districts of black, Asian, women, LGBT and disabled comrades as 'pandering to special interest groups' was shocking to many delegates. That it was backed up by the CC, which referred to such concerns as 'sociological' rather than political, was the last straw for many who resigned their party membership immediately after the conference.

The CC's recent announcement that it will not allow any new members to take part in votes for conference delegations or to be delegated themselves is an alarming development, particularly since so many 'lapsed' members, some of whom had neither paid subs or attended meetings for up to a decade, were delegated to the special conference. For the first time ever, no student who joins the party in the coming term will be allowed access to party conference. A leadership that has just managed to lose almost its entire student membership really can't afford to start putting new members on probation like this. Pandering to a small, sectarian minority in the organisation is not simply a cost-free tactical manoeuvre: it has serious political consequences and it is impoverishing our party.

## There must be some kind of way out of here

Our difficulties cannot be reduced to the dispute, or to the scope for 'debate' within the party. Neither can they simply be dismissed with references to the danger of 'movementism'. We need to address the nuts and bolts of how the SWP functions.

In particular, how do our branches regain their role as the core of the party, providing ideas and cutting edge arguments and acting as an organizational hub for local activists?

We need to find the means to regenerate branches, leadership bodies, internal political culture and our relationship to the wider movement. Unless we do so, the pull away from the party will continue. This may gratify the undeclared faction that has worked so successfully to eliminate dissent from the organisation. Thankfully, nobody in the party has yet adopted Gerry Healy's maxim that 'every defection makes us stronger.' However, those who see opposition as a 'cancerous growth', and seek to 'cut the thread' still binding former IDOOP members to the organisation, as some NC members have put it, are nevertheless breaking from a commitment to build a serious revolutionary socialist party.

This is not empty polemicising. Most comrades across the organisation are eager for the party to redress the very real problem identified above: our role within the movement has changed, we take a greater lead in shaping resistance to crisis and war but have not found fully effective ways to reassert our distinctive independent political profile within the movement.

However, the failure of the party's internal mechanisms to grapple with this dilemma has understandably left some looking for shortcuts. The tendency, among a small minority of comrades, to adopt sectarian attitudes to fellow SWP members is one consequence of this. With prospects looking complicated for building a mass organisation, or even one of comparable size to the SWP of fifteen years ago, there is an obvious appeal in settling instead for a 'better fewer, but better' approach. It will not work.

## Beyond factionalism

Factions have been viewed pretty dimly by most comrades in the recent history of the party and with good reason – their formation has generally resulted in resignations from the organisation.

In recent years, the leadership's fear of bringing difficult questions to the party allowed two successive factions to be incubated on the CC itself by figures who had already developed at least the hubristic outline of a basis for leaving, forming first Counterfire and then the International Socialist Group.

The present opposition, by contrast, has been oriented on effecting change within the organisation. After the wave of departures that followed the CC's clumsy handling of the special conference in March, most former IDOOP members have remained in the party. It is true that some are very pessimistic about their future in it. Political life outside the SWP, however, would require a sharply defined and theorised political outlook to avoid becoming simply another loose formation negatively defined by the party. Anger, disappointment, disillusion, disgust, exasperation, despondency, rage – the motivations for leaving are many, understandable and legitimate. As a basis for a collective alternative political project, however, they are limited.

This does not mean that comrades associated with the opposition intend to 'stay at all costs'. Our collective task as a party over the coming months is to demonstrate to all comrades that the SWP retains the capacity to be a relevant and viable long-term force at the heart of the movement. A great deal will depend on the tangible signs that lessons have been learned from the debacle of the past year, not just with regard to the dispute but in terms of political culture and internal democracy and structures as well.

It is unlikely that the CC is going to advocate changes on the scale required

and become a force for genuine renewal within the organisation. The opposition, moreover, however sizeable, represents a minority of comrades. But it does share common ground with a wide spectrum of the party in seeking change.

The extent to which comrades can overcome the entrenchment that has shaped the party over the past year and isolate the sectarian undercurrent at play within it will go a long way to determining the future of the SWP. The overwhelming majority of SWP members are not sectarian and will be concerned at the prospect of isolation. The future of the organisation is now at stake and will largely be determined by the number of comrades prepared to stand together around common aims, whatever their differences in the past.

Struggle is not an abstract thing, blown in from outside. It forms part of the fabric of any organisation willing and able to influence events. Any worthwhile party itself becomes a contested arena, an organisational form that bears the imprint of the decades of struggle that have given rise to it and shaped it. Our party is marked by years of defeat. It needs to renew the way it functions and to engage in a more concerted and serious way with a whole series of issues and developments – the impact of neo-liberalism, the transformation of social democracy, patterns of oppression, new left regroupments, the balance of class forces, the world of work, contemporary trade unionism – if it is to develop as a meaningful tool for new generations coming into struggle.

Narrow, closed, sectarian introspection will close off that possibility – but so will giving up now on the fight to achieve it.

**Jim (Euston)**

## WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO US?

When the SWP is good, we are very good. I am reminded of this not only by the part we play in large national mobilisations like in UAF, but also in the small, day-to-day branch actions that are the backbone of our organisation, rooting us in communities and workplaces across the country.

The days after the Commons vote on Syria were like that. In Swansea on Thursday we called up some Stop the War activists and proposed a 'Don't Bomb Syria' rally for the Saturday.

On Friday we leafleted the mosque, where the Imam already knew us from previous Stop the War and UAF events. On Saturday the Stop the War rally drew over 50 people, not just the usual suspects but others, and two families from the mosque as

well. A public meeting on Syria is planned. We hope some of the people – at least one a student – will continue to be active. We sold 25 papers in and around the rally.

The point is, nobody else could have done this. The Stop the War people, dedicated as they are, didn't have, as individuals, the full spread of contacts and it's unlikely they could have acted so quickly. The Socialist Party, the only other visible left group in town, aren't really hugely comfortable with the anti-war stuff. They drifted over from their paper sale to the rally and then drifted off again. We invited Swansea Labour leader of the council David Phillips to attend, but he was busy, possibly with cutting the pay of Unison members.

We are good because of the quality of our politics. We are internationalist and anti-fascist and manage to be tribunes of the oppressed in a way that is our own. We are not RoboTrots, we identify completely with struggle from below, whether on the streets or in the trade unions.

My first introduction, as a young teacher, into organised politics was via the Anti Nazi League, and I joined the SWP as a response to Thatcher's election victory. The industrial struggles of the 1980s, the miners' strike, the fight against apartheid and the anti-poll tax and Criminal Justice Bill battles formed me politically, and I experienced them through and with the SWP. More recently Stop the War and Respect have shown, whatever criticisms we may have of them, what can be done. As well as our activity, it was our political grasp, our ability to explain what was happening, that drew people to us.

Explain? So how the hell do we explain a situation where we lose 400 members, and most of our student cadre? I joined the party in 1979, around the time when Cliff was trying to persuade us of the downturn. There were serious arguments over Women's Voice and the Rank & File groups: Cliff came to our branch and argued his case. People disagreed and some good militants left. But we never lost members on this scale. We must begin to explain what has happened to us, and how to stop it ever happening again. The leadership must be accountable to the members. We are, after all, a revolutionary party.

**Tim (Swansea)**

## THE FACTION FIGHT IS JUST A SYMPTOM

Ask yourself the simple question. "How is it possible for a party like ours to fare

worse in a political upturn than in a downturn?" There is little dispute that since the political turn-around after Seattle, our party perversely is weaker than in the dreadful downturn years of the 80s and 90s, with the level of income and the number of members, active branches, and papers sold all significantly reduced.

This decline long pre-dates the party's current faction fight, but in fact, widespread gathering unease with such a lack of progress will inevitably explode and has done so. Members seldom squabble when things are going well.

So how is it that we could have managed better under worse conditions, but worse under better conditions? It can only be that we understood then how to organise to fit the times. We knew those times were hard, steeled ourselves and structured ourselves accordingly. We haven't understood the present times nearly as well, that they may be much more conducive, but are also much more complex. Although there is anger and outrage within the working class and a questioning of the status quo, there is little confidence to change it. Although working people are under unprecedented attack, there is an historically low level of workplace resistance. And although there is a heightened level of politics, it is still difficult to win people to the revolutionary tradition.

Crucially, none of this was understood by the old, departed party leadership. They believed that progress was served simply by the party heading up national movements and politically dissolving itself into them. And to further this project, they dismantled the branches, dumbed down the politics and consciously reduced our paper to the "paper of the movement". This was disastrous and we are still suffering the consequences. In such times we needed a hard revolutionary newspaper, alongside a national network of active branches, to distribute it, to carry the politics and to intervene in struggle on the ground. Because we neglected to do that the party was left resembling a fading, exotic plant, with a little impressive foliage at national level but with a deeply damaged, feeble and neglected root system.

This complete misunderstanding of the complexity of the times had led them to opt for a simple short cut into the movement. And in trying to reverse the damage, the party was steered into another short cut, this time into the unions. Predictably this 'corrective' failed to deliver any significant growth either. For that to have succeeded there needed to have been sustained rank and file trade union activity. Unfortunately the times are characterised by wholly inadequate token gestures by the trade union bureaucracy in the face of a massive ruling class offensive.

Our current weakness cannot be addressed exclusively through movement work or union work or party work. The solution requires all three in a dialectical

whole. The key element missing, deliberately eradicated by the previous leadership, is still the complete lack of a local SWP network. And this absence utterly undermines everything we attempt to do.

We have no alternative then but for all of us to embark on the hard work of rebuilding our root system, in other words, our districts and our branches. Comrades have to come together in their localities, not just in order to intervene in united front work and union work but to rebuild the revolutionary party itself. This has been a political necessity for at least the last decade and cannot be postponed any longer.

**Martin and Anne (Brent & Harrow)**

## SURVIVING THE FACTION? MERSEYSIDE BRANCH'S EXPERIENCE

This is written by members of our branch who were never part of any of the various platforms or factions [we will refer to them by the collective term 'The Opposition' for the sake of convenience] which have dominated party discussion for the past 8 months.

The background to how the events following annual conference affected Merseyside branch must include the fact that it was already weak certainly compared with its big neighbour Manchester.

The reasons for this require much greater analysis than is possible in this contribution but would include the economic devastation of the Thatcher years leaving fewer workplaces to focus on and the attraction to left-looking people of 'Militant' whose stronghold was here and the aftermath of the short-lived Council stand during the Miner's strike.

Merseyside District had been large and active but by the late 80s was struggling. In recent years the smaller membership has been supported by younger, less experienced full time organisers and with the departure of the hard-working Emma has not had this important support for over a year.

A full timer is never going to be the answer to an ailing branch's problems but the basic support the role provides can sustain beleaguered members trying to keep things going.

A number of members supported the Left Platform 3 years ago, appearing at meetings in the run up to Conference to argue their faction's case. When their position failed they left soon after. Those members

still active in the branch had been trying to hold things together when the events of January and since began to occur.

And so we approach December's conference with, on the face of it, our branch having suffered catastrophic damage as a result of the Opposition's actions.

We lost a large percentage of our membership and most who resigned chose to send emails and posts on public websites as they did so denouncing the party in vitriolic terms and those of us who didn't support their views as 'hacks', 'ultra-loyalists' etc. no doubt aimed at demoralising us still further as we faced life in an even smaller branch of a party they hoped would dwindle away to be replaced by... well that was less clear.

Those of the Opposition who remained after the special conference undertook to abide by party discipline and end the faction but, as we have recently discovered, did not and continued to organise as a party within the party.

To hear one of these saying he accepts permanent factions should not be allowed but that it was necessary to keep this one going for a year is either totally naive or totally cynical. You either accept the party's rules and structures or you don't. The actions of these members has been another blow leaving us mistrustful of them and wondering how we can work alongside them in the future.

The reality was that many if not most of those who resigned had been at best 'paper members' not attending branch meetings for years or taking part in any activity.

They seem to have become involved with more active members who had joined the Opposition on the basis of a belief that the allegation and DC enquiry result showed the party was corrupt and being misled by an out of touch leadership.

There was no attempt to bring their position to branch to allow discussion- some of us were clearly beyond the pale and not worth the effort, much easier to go online and discuss with those they knew would be sympathetic to their views about the leadership.

They engaged in the online feeding frenzy demanding a recall of conference but did not involve themselves in any other activity apart from attending branch meetings to vote on the issue.

One individual had resigned 6 months before only to submit an application to rejoin, attend a meeting where a CC rep was present then went on Facebook blatantly lying about her intervention in the meeting. He was outraged shortly afterwards when the news was broken that his application to rejoin had not been accepted. We feel sure this individual simply wanted to join so he could be part of the mass resignation!

One of those who left had sent a long winded diatribe calling us names but explaining why SWP had failed and calling for a new party based on the principles SWP had forgotten.

He even turned up on a recent Teachers' march in Liverpool where we sold a large number of papers and had a good intervention where he and his 2 small children handed out a leaflet he'd run off on his printer praising the teachers and giving his views on the Cuts etc, a rather a pathetic sight.

So while the numbers we lost would seem to be high the proportion of these who could be described as active members even in the broadest sense was in fact small. We strongly suspect that being part of giving the SWP and its leadership a good kicking on the internet was a lot of fun for many of these people and much more exciting than selling papers, attending meetings and demos etc, the activities expected of our members. Such people were clearly not the loss they at first might seem.

But undoubtedly some who left were active and a loss to the branch and party and those who were in the Opposition but agreed to stay and abide by conference decision are in many ways good activists and committed revolutionaries.

It has never been clear to us exactly why previously excellent comrades up and down the country have chosen to ignore our Democratic Centralist procedures.

We suspect that an important factor in attracting good comrades to the Opposition then keeping them involved in activities like setting up bank accounts, barracking speakers at Marxism etc has been a number of 'big names' in the party throwing their weight behind the Opposition.

Seeing leading comrades, people you have learned from and respected for many years, now claiming the party is on the wrong road etc must focus the minds of every member.

But when we finally got the chance to listen to their arguments at Marxism we were surprised at how little substance their opposition really had. How could this be?

The excellent Paul Blackledge piece in ISJ 139 on Left Reformism describes some leading activists in various left groups and parties past and present attempting to show how Lenin got it wrong and it is possible to bridge the gap between reform and revolution. Paul shows how wrong these people were and are. Even a titan like Rosa Luxemburg got it wrong before realising her mistake shortly before her murder.

So ability and past record may be no protection against the desire for some shortcut to socialism. We are not saying here that the comrades listed are all now left reformists.

There does seem the possibility however that their continuing opposition is based on fatigue and frustration at the failure of our party to grow and lead bigger struggles against austerity. We believe the actions of those in our branch who became 'active' just so they could dramatically leave can be explained in this way.

We share the frustration but don't choose to express it by joining a permanent faction/

opposition and refusing to accept majority votes by party members. As described earlier doing 'routine' branch and party work [even if we avoid routinism ] is always likely to be less exciting than discovering 'new ways of working', debunking 'tired old ideas' and denouncing leaders you see as out of touch and corrupt.

But if we and the majority of the party are able to overcome feelings of frustration that we are not much bigger and respect conference decisions and party democracy, how come the minority choose not to?

On the recent marches and demonstrations Opposition members have been reluctant to sell the paper implying it's hopeless to try as no one on the left will buy it because of the DC case etc. We have demonstrated on these same events that we can sell very decent numbers with no hostile reaction.

So is SWP 'toxic'? The same Opposition people in our branch have told us they meet hostility when they try to sell the paper at union meetings. Yet we are able to sell it to their union members on demonstrations. We encounter little if any reluctance to listen to us and work alongside us in the People's Assembly etc.

The reason for this has to be if you have been joining in blogs saying how awful SWP is, how its leadership have colluded in rape denial etc it would be strange if people who know your views then bought the paper you've denounced and make no comment about SWP. So it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. We don't say these things to score points over these members. We do it to try to show them in practice that if they return to seeing SWP as their party rather than the part of it which is the Opposition they can be part of rebuilding it rather than part of attempts to destroy it. We hope they do rejoin us and we are of course willing to work with them if they do.

But those who continue to have more in common with ex members and sectarians than they do with party members and so easily ignore our Democratic Centralist structure can't be allowed to remain in the party.

Hard as it will be to see more members go, anyone who does not genuinely accept the decisions taken at conference in December should leave the party or be expelled. Better a smaller group of people we can trust and work with than a slightly bigger group of people whom you're not sure about and who are reluctant to sell the paper.

If the Opposition win over Conference we assume it will be because their ideas have finally been made clear and a majority of the party go along with them. We would respect Conference decisions and do our best to make them work in the coming period. If they don't work there will be the chance at next year's conference to review them. What a shame the Opposition couldn't do this.

When IS began you could fit the entire

membership in the back of a car. Even after the events of recent months and years SWP is still the largest revolutionary Marxist party in Britain.

We have achieved this through the development and refinement of our politics and our Democratic Centralist structure which is not separate from but integral to our political position today.

Without it SWP might not even exist today. Other groups which rivalled us are now gone and forgotten. We in Liverpool carry on despite our problems trying to relate to the outside world and demonstrate to those wanting to fight that our politics and tactics are the right ones.

We don't waste our energy in long debates online or pandering to people who will not be won back this side of the revolution. We think the party nationally should do the same. It will be damaging at a time of mass upheaval in the world that our organisation's voice will be diminished. But responsibility for this will lay with those who refuse to accept our democracy. Let's see how many we are and just get on with rebuilding and put this terrible period behind us.

**Ray, Dave and Alex (Liverpool)**

## DIGGING OUR WAY OUT

I am well aware that I am not alone in believing something has gone seriously wrong in the SWP. This unease spreads way beyond comrades who were involved in the opposition. We all are still trying to grapple with the causes and consequences of this and find a route out of the hole we have dug ourselves into.

This piece attempts to trace my own political journey, not because it is unique, but as a way of addressing the problems we collectively face.

I joined IS as an 18 year old. In all the years since I have felt nothing but pride in the organisation and identified with it utterly. Of course I have had worries at certain points, e.g. the split that led to the IS opposition leaving in 1975. But in the end I was convinced by a leadership that argued and listened and proved in practice that its line was right.

Clearly there have been major problems this century: the dissolving of the branches, the Respect debacle and the break with the comrades who formed Counterfire.

At the time I accepted the CC's overall analysis of the situation but in retrospect I shared the collective failure to challenge policies that were deeply damaging to the party specifically the dissolution of our branch organisation. The consequences

were obvious even at the time: large numbers of comrades dropping out, the disappearance of public paper sales etc.

The past errors fade away in comparison to the party leadership's failure this year to draw back from disaster.

The first time I heard of the impending crisis was in mid-autumn last year from a comrade in Dalston: I pooh-poohed its significance. However it was at the West/North West London pre-conference aggregate which I chaired that I first realised something serious was happening. A number of comrades attempted to discuss the Disputes Committee hearing and report. They were met with hostility by a prominent NC member who attempted to stop the discussion. As chair I ruled that no one should be prevented from airing their views and that we all had a responsibility to listen to each other. In the end we had a good discussion mainly about perspectives.

I was surprised at the end of the aggregate when the CC member present did not seem happy with the way the aggregate had gone. In reality I still had no real awareness of the conflict to come.

When Candy gave the Dispute's Committee report at the January conference I was both horrified and relieved.

Horrified because the suggestion that a leading member could have behaved so inappropriately was dreadful.

Relieved because the subsequent debate was done without rancour and in a comradely fashion. In fact whilst I wasn't totally convinced by the DC majority position and was worried by some of the points made by the 'rejectionists' I abstained. I certainly couldn't imagine that the SWP Disputes Committee could behave in anything but the most principled way.

However it was now clear that conference and therefore the party was split down the middle. The following day I wasn't sure which CC slate to vote for. What pushed me into voting for Joseph's list was a long standing North London comrade pressurising me to vote for the CC majority's slate in an aggressive fashion. I did vote to confirm the expulsion of the 'Facebook 4'. At the time I had no understanding whatsoever of what the issue was about. I had no idea that the Facebook transcript circulated by the CC was edited from a much longer discussion involving many more comrades on the Facebook thread. I left conference nervous about the future.

### Between the conferences

Our district aggregate the following Thursday was self-congratulatory and poorly attended: however it was clear that 'there was an elephant in the room'.

It was the next day that all hell began to break loose. Tom Walker's public resignation from the party and the paper was followed by the posting of the DC report online. Then came China's interview with Laurie Penny and the various pieces posted

on Lenin's Tomb.

At first I was appalled by the breaching of party discipline and the vituperative language used. The attacks on the DC members left me full of rage. At the same time I began to have a niggling feeling that all wasn't hunky dory and points were being raised that needed answering properly.

This concern grew following the national secretary's letter to members which rather than deal with the issues raised essentially said 'conference has voted, now shut-up'. I was demoralised – this was not what was needed. At the minimum the party needed to make a clear public statement. Eventually one was made by Julie in the Guardian but by then it was too little and too late.

With no effective response from the CC, and my worries growing as stories spread on the internet I began discussing the situation with other members of Kingston branch. We called a closed branch meeting where we voted for a resolution which called for 'Delta's' removal from all public posts and for a commission to look into the workings of the DC. The only comrade to speak against this was our District Organiser. I received an email asking me to sign a statement opposing the CC position. I declined as I thought its criticisms were far too harsh.

At a birthday drink for a branch member a little later I was argued with by 2 comrades. They told me what was happening in SWSS, gave me further details concerning the background to the 2 complaints and some frightening news of developments across the country.

I didn't accept everything I heard but I began asking questions of all comrades I met and not liking many of the answers I heard. When the IDOOP faction was formed I joined it fairly promptly as did 7 other members of Kingston.

But I was still unhappy with some of the issues that faction members were raising, that seemed irrelevant – industrial strategy, student perspectives – and I was annoyed that members of the 'Democratic Renewal platform' had been allowed to join IDOOP.

At the first IDOOP meeting I voted to allow CC members in and opposed a resolution calling for the Facebook 4's reinstatement. I was shocked however by CC supporters blockading the entrance to ULU and attempting to intimidate IDOOP supporters.

I was astounded by a close friend's email arguing that there was some overarching political unity to the opposition that represented a rightward moving liquidationist current: hostility to democratic centralism, adaption to reformism, abandoning the Leninist party and softness on bourgeois feminism. This seemed to me to be the method of the 'amalgam' not understanding that the opposition was divided and diverse and united only by anger at the way claims of sexual harassment and worse had been handled by the party.

I now began to get deeply involved in Facebook debates. I tried to stop comrades 'shouting' at each other and tried to encourage real dialogue but with little success. By the time of our District Aggregate electing delegates for the Special Conference, I had heard dreadful tales of hostility and exclusion in branches and the 'packing' of aggregates with uninformed members who hadn't been seen for years.

But what really upset me was the news that comrades were being elected to conference on the basis of their political loyalty to the CC rather than their activity and involvement in the party. Thankfully this didn't happen in West/NW London where after debate Pat was given an extended introduction and right of reply at the end. The only IDOOP member blocked from attending was China Mieville and we ended up with one of the largest delegations of IDOOP members to the conference.

### Special conference and after

Special conference was awful – much older and whiter than the January one – it was not a forum for debate nor a sharing of experiences. It was simply an attempt to rubber stamp approval for the CC.

After the conference most of our students resigned. This was a double tragedy. Firstly our students had provided much of our cadre in the last 30 years (especially after the loss of our manual working class base with the 'downturn').

Secondly the leadership failed to respond to this dire loss or even to acknowledge it. This was denial. At best there was reference to the Millbank generation of students not understanding our politics. This seemed bizarre, people do not join us fully formed as Marxists: when I joined the IS I still had pictures of Che Guevara on my wall and illusions in 'student power'.

But over time through experience of factory gate sales, educationals and day to day activity I was won to our politics.

After Special Conference I now began to rethink some of the party's practice. This was a response to some of the slurs I was now hearing first-hand such as being soft on 'feminism'. Suddenly we were thrown back into the arguments we had had within IS before we took women's liberation seriously in the mid-70s.

Then there was the unwillingness of CC supporters to comprehend that the issues of alleged sexual violence could not be voted on in the same way as who do we support in a union election.

Thirdly there were rumours, later confirmed, of secret meetings of Martin's supporters who appeared to want to drive all opposition members out of the party. Some comrades were even spreading rumours about police spies within the opposition. It was clear that party membership had shrunk dramatically. If only 1,100 members had attended the most mobilised for district aggregates in party history,

how many 'active' members did we really have.

All these things now began to coalesce in my thinking. Something had gone seriously wrong. I began to consider the lack of accounting in the party: not just accurate membership figures defined by subs paying and paper selling (in the 70s and 80s we had compulsory reregistration every year and our figures were accurate).

It was clear now that there was no attempt to have a balance sheet of recent activity. Why had we not recruited out of Stop the War, why had there been no serious analysis of the Respect debacle and the 'united front of the special kind' nor any attempt to deal with the aging of the party membership?

Nor was there a serious effort to answer the question of why UAF mobilisations were so much smaller than those of the ANL in the 70s, 80s and 90s.

One issue that particularly shocks me (as an ex-FOC of the Daily Mail clerical chapel and a former UCU branch secretary) was the discovery that some comrades were on 100% union facility time or hold jobs which involve hiring and firing.

All of these issues need to be taken up along with questions on how we orient to young workers in unorganised workplaces. We also need to consider how we work alongside women mobilised by the re-emergence of a vile sexist culture particularly in higher education.

I now believe the party is in serious decline. As Pat wrote 'we are in danger of becoming an old folk's home with memories'.

I think the SWP can still recover because we have a body of serious cadre many of whom play vital and valuable roles in the workers' movement.

But to rebuild we need to be honest about our composition and strength. We need to stare reality in the face. We need to be honest about how our reputation has been sullied by the unwillingness of the party leadership to admit they were wrong in the way they have handled our crisis. Sometimes even a revolutionary party has to eat 'humble pie' to move forward.

Neil (Kingston)

## THE YEAR WE FORGOT OUR PRINCIPLES

We have had our successes this year to be sure, such as the votes in the various Unite elections, building credible and rooted local UTR events, and UAF continuing to show it can mobilize serious forces beyond

our ranks. But the fallout from the massive row we have had continues to be an issue that cannot be evaded or ignored. The loss of hundreds of members (including a massive slice of our student members) and the hit we took with Marxism attendance and recruitment – we have to account for this.

I will not insult comrades intelligence by digging out the appropriate quote from Lenin or Trotsky about the need to account for errors. We all should know that looking reality clearly in the face is vital. But in the past we haven't always done this.

The reason I say this is because of a chance conversation I had with a former district organiser. This was about the incident a few years ago, where after a 'Right to Work' conference, a number of comrades went to protest outside negotiations between British Airways management and Unite officials (BA workers were on strike at the time). Our comrades ended up storming the negotiations and breaking them up. At the time I and others I am sure thought that this was a piece of ultra-left substitutionist lunacy, so I phoned up my district organiser to tell him so. He defended the action, saying that people in Unite were still willing to work with us (sounds familiar).

He is no longer a district organiser, and we happened to revisit the conversation. And what do you know, it seems he actually agreed with me all along, as did a layer of other organisers who had been very critical of this action at an organisers meeting, but had been told that 'we have to defend the party at all costs' even though wide layers of comrades recognised that the action had indeed been madness.

This method just won't do. If we take the approach that whatever we do, whatever mistakes we make, we have to 'defend the party' and this is taken to mean never conceding a mistake then frankly there is no point in spending any time evaluating anything that we do. We might as well not bother wasting our time having the conversation. The reality is that we have to be ready to subject both our external initiatives and our internal procedure to searching and honest criticism.

### Current mistakes

At this years Marxism, Alex Callinicos recognised that we had made mistakes in his meeting on Leninism. This is welcome, but we have to spell out what they are. I would suggest:

1) The refusal to allow a group of comrades with criticisms of our dc procedures to form a faction or be allowed to circulate their ideas.

2) The manufacture of an 'autonomist deviation' amongst (former) SWSS members – when the only real issue was their opposition to the dc procedure. We cannot judge this by what these comrades (and I will continue to call them that) are saying



or doing now. Some will undoubtedly lose sight of crucial aspects of the Left's politics, but the main responsibility for that is the SWP's current leadership and its appalling mishandling of last years disagreements.

3) The delays to the hearing of the second case, which we would never accept in any other organisation in society.

4) The fact that the review of the dc was only widened to include the concerns raised after IDOOP broke cover in February. The review of dc procedures should have been launched immediately in January.

We need a recognition of these errors, and the fact that comrades who have at least bent the rules of the party's constitution have done this for the best of reasons.

The eye-watering damage to SWSS is the most important tangible damage to the SWP. Probably 90% of our students have left, with mass resignations in Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, London QM and Sussex. In other areas groups have crumbled in a less public fashion, but an organisation that was already visibly aging has had the dubious record of having recruited the cream of a significant student movement (in 2010) and then lost the entire lot within 36 months.

Other comrades will have put these points, probably better than me, but if we are to become the organisation that we need to be we need to recognise these errors publicly, and those who are responsible for them need to be held to account.

Many comrades will have the instinct that we need to just move on from this and talk about how to fight the Tories. We do, we must talk about that, but we also need to talk about why we seem to find it impossible to have a serious argument without a chunk of the organisation departing, this latest split being the fourth in five years, and one whose size is bigger than all the rest put together.

In addition we need to apologise to the two women whose complaints showed that there was a serious issue that we need to deal with, and we need to acknowledge that the comrades who have raised this issue in spite of encountering considerable animosity were acting in the best traditions of the Left – as tribunes of the oppressed.

**Andy (Birmingham Stinchley)**

## REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION AND THE UNITED FRONT

The most important question for any revolutionary should be that of perspective. Without it we operate blind. One of the reasons the recent crisis in the SWP saw such bitter divisions was an implicit acknowledgement that the organisation was suffering from a wider malaise.

This article tries to answer to some of the questions facing revolutionaries. It is not a purely internal document but by necessity will trace some of the recent history of the SWP. It is also largely focused on the UK, but recognises that the crisis in the UK exists in a global and European context: The crisis has swept the globe, bringing revolution in the Middle East and with it the re-emergence of the powerful Egyptian working class - an inspiration to revolutionaries around the world. We have also seen the crisis and resistance in Europe mediated through different national circumstances, with Southern European countries particularly feeling the brunt as more economically powerful nations try to manage their own crises. Whilst struggle has been lower in the UK, we can expect a continuation of both austerity and resistance.

The key question is what this struggle will look like. In answering this question, I believe there is far more continuity with the "era of mass movements" than we care to acknowledge. We used to talk a lot about the three levels of struggle: the ideological, the political and the industrial. We recognised that these levels could often be uneven and that a high level in one could either pull up the others or be pulled down to the lowest. We emphasised how the radicalisation could manifest itself in movements that could increase self-confidence and advance the overall struggle. As a result of disorientation after the anti-war movement and the Respect crisis we have increasingly defined ourselves against this previous period. There are important lessons we need to re-learn.

This is not to deny the importance of the pensions dispute. We were correct to bend the stick towards escalating industrial action ahead of November 30th. We played an important role in giving political shape to a block of smaller unions that were the driving force behind the pensions strikes. However, we were unwilling to analyse the shape of that struggle or draw conclusions from it. These were strikes largely delivered from above, and particularly in the bigger unions were delivered despite weak or non-existent workplace organisation. It was a dynamic driven forwards by a strong anti-austerity (and anti-Tory) politics rather than industrial confidence. As Joseph Choonara correctly says in his

recent ISJ article, because of the low level of struggle preceding the pensions dispute, there was not a level of union organisation on the ground that could prevent the sell-out of the trade union leadership.

The scale of the TUC demonstrations and the popular mood around NHS privatisation were further evidence of the continuing centrality of politics. After the successful build up to November 30th, we failed to readjust our perspectives in the light of experience, and we increasingly left ourselves bereft of strategy and struggling to engage members beyond mobilising for the next big event or strike.

The political dynamic is changing in ways that reflect changes in government and the development of the crisis. The fact that there is a recovery of the labour left in Britain and left reformism abroad both provides opportunities and dangers for the movement. These forces can give confidence to and mobilise wider forces as well as exerting a pull on them to the right. But the deepening crisis and impact of the Egyptian revolutions, the Indignados movement and occupy also demonstrate the growth of an anti-systemic radical movement which socialist revolutionaries can participate in, learn from and shape.

The SWP has at times grasped towards (particularly with Alex Callinicos and John Rees' "Building the SWP in the age of mass movements") but never really theorised our current role within the radical left or wider movement.

### Trade Unions and the anti-austerity "front"

Since the split with Counterfire we have reacted against the excesses of the previous period and defined ourselves against the conclusions drawn by the Left Platform. We sensed the possibility of escalating public sector strikes and re-emphasised our analysis of the division between the rank and file and the bureaucracy. The best of this turn was a push to rebuild the SWP as a revolutionary organisation – the worst a crude approach to working with others and a refusal to reassess perspectives in the light of experience. We recognised the need to shift our perspective towards industrial activity, but we did so without a sober analysis of the balance of class forces. This led to a disorientation that remains with us today.

The turn was bound up with an increasingly sectarian attitude. Political discussion became more internally referenced and dramatically over emphasised the role our activity and campaigns. As we gradually retreated from the political front, in favour of the industrial, we refused to acknowledge we were doing so. The failure of Right to Work was a result of its flawed inception and a constantly evolving understanding of its role. When combined with comrade's lack of enthusiasm it was destined to be a

vehicle with which the SWP alone badged its anti-austerity activity.

Unite the Resistance (UtR) was a more credible attempt to theorise our turn. A strategy, loosely based on the minority movement, was one that built on the party links to sections of the left bureaucracy. As a result UtR had potential as the struggle rose and was able to debate publicly with left officials as it fell. However as the divide between the revolutionary left and the left officials widened we attempted to substitute heavily to maintain a basic level of UtR activity. This was based on an analysis that a renewed fight over pensions was around the corner and that UtR could provide leverage in making it happen.

This flew in the face of any sober assessment. What ability we had to influence the direction of key Unions lay in our fractions and their networks not an attendant "united front." More importantly forces much larger than the revolutionary left were influencing the direction of travel that we could not counteract without a confident rank and file. The counter pressure of "anger from below" that could spur the left officials forward existed primarily amongst groups of left activists.

The struggle was not throwing up individuals and groups in workplaces that could transform the situation, something we acknowledged without drawing the necessary conclusions. The politics at the centre of our perspective was based on an analysis of the relationship between the rank and file and the bureaucracy.

One of the insights of the IS tradition which drew on our understanding of the roots of reformism and the role of the unions as defensive formations. While it was useful for understanding our role within the industrial struggle it needed to be situated within an accurate assessment of class consciousness and confidence today, as well as the changing shape of the class. Our failure to situate it in this way led us to make mistakes on a variety of fronts.

I'm not going to try and offer an analysis of the shape of the working class today - others are much better placed. But the shape of the workforce has changed from the impact of neoliberalism.

This is not to say it has changed beyond recognition or that traditional forms of trade unionism are finished, but that it is now good sense across most of the movement to acknowledge we need to assess the impact of neoliberalism on the shape of the working class. While this argument is perhaps clearest in the private sector its impact is felt across much of the public. Insecurity, longer hours, harsher micro-management and regimes of self-audit are well established in the privatised sections of health, education, academia and local government.

When combined with decades of low level defensive strikes this has had a significant impact of the level of class consciousness and organisation in the majority

of workplaces. The exceptions tend to be areas where individuals from the revolutionary left have organised against the tide to develop and foster organisation and confidence. The build-up to the mass strike on November 30th, while bringing in new reps, did not alter this trend. Rather, it cultivated a desire that the unions should deliver more from the top as well as increasing the audience for the radical left.

Class consciousness today tends to display a greater continuity with the previous "era of mass movements" then we seem comfortable to admit. While people lack confidence to organise industrially at work there is a desire to organise around broader political questions which continuously manifests itself. This is not a retreat from industrial defeats or a new downturn but a reflection of the lived experience of those coming into struggle.

It is not that the objective power of the working class has changed but that the neoliberal attack on all working class organisations has weakened its subjective power. This is not just demonstrated by changes to TU density in privatised sectors, but by the steady, continuous fall in the number of reps and functioning branches. To acknowledge this is not to write off the unions or their capacity to win. It does though point to the stalling of the strike movement being as much about the lack of workplace organisation as about the bureaucracy selling out.

In this situation, understanding the primacy of politics means using the links made through political campaigning to rebuild organisations of struggle across the class. This holds across the private and public sectors, for workplaces that are unionised or not, and also for organisations based around communities and localities.

This should have serious implications for our strategy. In practice we need to recognise the need to work with the widest forces, including the left officials, in building a broad anti-austerity movement.

The September 29th demonstration in Manchester can be a step forwards where we build it alongside an engaged radical current. It means relating to initiatives like the People's Assembly, not by starting with the failure of the officials to call industrial action, but by looking to strengthen and work with those who see a demonstration or political action as a means to develop confidence from below.

Inside the unions it means maintaining a political relationship with those officials who encourage the political struggle while developing a radical left committed to translating this into increased confidence and organisation at a workplace level. It is only in the context of a wider political challenge to austerity that we can hope to undercut the timidity that exists at the top of the unions, and begin to address the lack of organisation that exists at the bottom.

What of the union leaders, such as Len McCluskey and Mark Serwotka, who have

subtly (or unsubtly) counter-posed political action to industrial action at certain points? Well our job is not just to call them out over this, but to push the contradiction in their own position to the fore by being the ones who take up the political questions the most consistently and forcefully.

## The United Front and the radical left

Because we refuse to acknowledge the political dimension of the crisis, we were slow to recognise the dynamic behind the People's Assembly. For the same reason, we were slow to recognise the scale of the emerging student movement or NHS demonstrations despite warnings from comrades on the ground.

The People's Assembly reflects a coming together of two forces. The first is a left reformism that recognises the broad political mood and wishes to harness the movement to push Labour to the left. The second is a more radical left which recognises that building a broad and political movement can raise confidence to fight on a variety of fronts and give a political framework to local campaigns. We need to unequivocally throw our weight behind the second of these two forces.

The size of its events should demonstrate how this initiative has resonated with a wide audience. It is clear that reformist consciousness exists on a mass scale despite the collapse of reformist organisation - it is the common sense of workers under capitalism.

As a result Owen Jones and his ilk are best able to relate to and articulate the concerns of a very large number of people. This is a movement revolutionaries should be a part of. We should not simply attend them in order to build our own initiatives, or see them as recruiting opportunities because there is a large audience, but because movements like this have an impact on class confidence.

The local events and national rallies may not be perfect, but their scale means we should be somewhat humble about our alternatives. It is not appropriate to approach campaigns with demands not based on the dynamic drawing people into struggle. Abstract propaganda for a general strike (or increased strike action) should not be foregrounded when it does not relate to the where people are.

At their best these events can increase confidence; at their worst they can lead nowhere. In either case revolutionaries need to live these experiences alongside people and attempt to strengthen those elements committed to taking the struggle forwards. Put bluntly, when Len McCluskey or Kevin Courtney call for mass mobilisations it strengthens the radical left's ability to develop mobilisation at a grassroots level.

The term United Front has to be used carefully because it can be applied so

generally as to become meaningless or so specifically that it makes a number of uncritical assumptions.

The most dangerous is misunderstanding the role of the ‘revolutionary party’ and material force it represents. It is very easy for a relatively small revolutionary organisation to alternate between believing it must lead organisationally and, if it can’t, believing it must intervene as an external force.

Both are reflections of a sectarian assessment of our strength, size and role in the movement, which puts immediate organisational priorities before political assessments about what is best for developing class confidence.

During Stop the War we tended to vacillate between liquidationism and viewing ourselves as a smaller version of a mass communist party. John Rees’ “United Front of a Special Kind” was a clumsy attempt to square this circle. But since we rejected it we have ended up drifting towards an increasingly sectarian model of revolutionary practice. We must break with this if we are to prove our politics, and our party, in practice.

## The smallest mass party in the world?

The sectarianism means we increasingly operate on the assumption that the SWP is the revolutionary party – a smaller version of the German Communist Party. This fails to recognise the size of the revolutionary left, our implantation across the working class and the size of the audience looking to our ideas. It also misses the fact that the Leninist concept of a vanguard is not one that is self-proclaimed based on its politics, but one which contains the most advanced sections of the class, who are able to give a lead politically, ideologically and organisationally.

In the absence of one set of counter hegemonic ideas this role is played by an amorphous and often ephemeral array of forces. The best elements are often disorganised and influenced by a range of insights coupled to lose concept of class and an understanding of Marxist ideas filtered through academia and popularised in various forms.

UK Uncut, the occupy movement, student revolt and radicals within the March for an Alternative all enjoyed an audience with the most political people in every workplace and community. This is a grouping any revolutionary socialist organisation should see itself as a part of – one that we can both learn from and have ideological and tactical discussions with.

We have to remember that each new generation learns lessons from their own struggles and the recent past provides revolutionary socialist ideas with no automatic authority. Our main strengths are twofold – an ability to explain the world and relate

general politics to specific circumstances but also alongside this the idea of socialism from below and the possibility of human liberation. We are a small group capable of offering a powerful vision of how we could change the world.

A failure to assess our role has been bolstered by a refusal to have a serious assessment of our strength and resources. We have become accustomed to managing our membership lists to a frightening degree. The party maintains itself through a routine which is increasingly internally referenced and geared at maintaining an ageing membership with a lower level of political activity.

Specifically, we jump from one centrally organised event to another in order to maintain momentum. Our analysis and perspective show a corresponding divorce between ideas and practice. We provide theoretical work which traces the contours of the global crisis while our immediate analysis merely elevates our own initiatives without linking them to a long term strategy or assessing how they relate to a changing world. A warning sign of the growing sectarianism should be the alarming disconnect between internal party discussions and any genuine dialogue with the wider movement. We are increasingly isolated from the broader left and are unwilling to discuss why. This is especially damaging when the forces we are isolating ourselves from are the same ones we who could be won, over time, to fighting for socialism from below and building a revolutionary party. This is justified by building up exaggerated points of differentiation with those around us.

## The centrality of class

The SWP, and our sense of the ideas of those outside, it is heavily shaped by an experience of the 1980s. Nowhere is this clearer than our defensiveness over the centrality of the working class. The logical underpinnings of our fear of “creeping autonomism” are that it reflects the same retreat from the centrality of class that the party experienced during the downturn. That was a retreat based on significant defeats which manifested in a drift towards political campaigns and activity within the labour party.

Today’s radical left has a very different experience shaping their ideas. It is an experience that passes through the early anti-capitalist movement, via movements against imperialism, to the crisis of capitalism. This is an experience which is international, and starts from a global analysis of, and often a rejection of, the capitalist system. It is also a radical left moving towards, rather than away from, an engagement with classical Marxist ideas, including an idea of class.

But it is a generation moving towards a concept of class after 30 years of low level struggle – one with little or no experience of

what a powerful working class movement could look like. The role of revolutionaries has to be to patiently develop and work on understanding the working class today and its role in changing the world. Instead we are drawing up artificial divisions between us and a generation radicalising in response to a systemic crisis.

## Campaigns and United Fronts

It is not always within the grasp of revolutionary groups to launch and run the type of “classic” united fronts which the People’s Assembly represents. Nor should it always be our central strategic focus. What is important is that revolutionaries remain rooted in campaigns and workplaces while aiming to bring a totalised world view to bare on specific issues.

We have to create political discussion where possible, increase self-activity and draw people towards our understanding of the world. Local campaigns must involve others but will not always be “united fronts” in any classical sense; given the high level of politics, small but radical campaigns can have a disproportionate influence and draw wider forces around them. These can then feed into the national picture, which in turn opens up new audiences and new possibilities at a local level. We need to learn to recognise when we can work within a radical milieu to generate a political impact and when it is possible to play a part within far larger united fronts where we will often find ourselves in a minority.

Part of relating to the period effectively means transforming how we conceive of ourselves as a revolutionary organisation. We often talk of a ‘party of leaders’ but rarely think about what this means in practice. Before the recent crisis we had already developed a top down method of maintaining and directing the activity of party members.

Primarily this has meant focusing on the next set piece event as a way of maintaining a sense of scale, which required a high degree of substitutionism from the centre. A high degree of centralisation is often needed with a ruthless application of resources where they will have the most impact, but it must be balanced with well rooted local units rooted and politically engaged with those around them. These discussions need to shape the collective discussion that informs our practice – an experience very different from that currently employed inside the party where centralism to often means substitution by the full-time staff.

## What should a revolutionary organisation look like today?

The model of Leninism defended by Alex Callinicos (Is Leninism Finished?) does not fit the current period because it is not based on an analysis of perspective but a

response to an internal crisis.

It is a notion of Leninism geared to win over activists shaped by experiences of a previous period. We are neither in a new down turn nor an industrial upturn but a sustained crisis marked by high level of politics and bursts of struggle.

Revolutionaries need to organise in such a way as to draw in the best new activists and synthesise their experiences. To paraphrase Trotsky, there are no settled questions when the revolutionaries are a minority, we need to seek to win over and work with all those who want to “tear the head off the system.”

To relate to the new period means a sharp turn away from the practices we are currently institutionalising. It means challenging the established political culture in the party and leadership. The manner in which many responded to the recent crisis revealed an understanding of the party as an institution rather than a living tool in the struggle. What was once a heterodox set of ideas marked by a heretical desire to face up to a changing world has become a new orthodoxy. Our publications, meetings and Marxism timetable reveal an attempt to transmit a closed body of ideas to the faithful. We are attempting to reassert a distorted version of our tradition in a way that seals us off from new ideas and experiences. We should be confident to face the world. To learn from, understand, and change it. Instead we increasingly ignore realities that do not fit our ideas rather than adapting our ideas to better explain the world

We need to start from our core beliefs: that socialism can only be built through the self-activity of the working class; that Marxism provides a framework to understand and act on the world; an uncompromising stand as the tribunes of the oppressed; and a commitment to building a mass revolutionary party.

If we are to win a new generation of activists we must be a part of the struggle but also a centre of discussion on how to understand and change the world. Only through an open engagement with those around us can we hope to pull together the forces we need to build a mass revolutionary left. The SWP will not grow into a mass party through the gradual recruitment of ones and twos but a revolutionary organisation in the current period must be able to create a cadre capable of discussing and winning a wider audience for its ideas.

Youth is a marker of a genuine revolutionary group. Lenin, Trotsky and Cliff all focused on the need to build parties based on the most dynamic and youthful elements because of their energy and new ideas. It is a disaster that we have lost almost all of our student groups. We need to change course sharply to win back those who have left. We need to show that our ideas are not counter-posed to their experience, but that we can learn together through common work in a revolutionary organisation.

We also need to organise genuine discus-

sion which does not presuppose we know all the answers. We should have public day schools on the shape of the working class, the role of revolutionaries, oppression and liberation, the shape of the radical left and an urgent attempt to rebuild the dynamic and critical culture that marked the best of the IS tradition.

**Rob (Croydon)**

## **BUILDING THE BRANCHES: RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND CADREISATION**

This paper was submitted to a meeting of the Leeds District branches in May of this year. It was an attempt to promote discussion on how best put the party back on track after such a ‘bruising’ and acrimonious period of internal conflict.

At the time of writing it was not clear the extent to which our student base had all but vanished in the two Leeds universities. Neither was it clear how deeply divided and polarised opinions in the district had become and to a considerable extent, remain unresolved.

However this paper is submitted in the spirit that whatever the outcome of conference, it will serve as a contribution to those still determined to build a revolutionary cadre in what remains the most unfavourable of external circumstances.

### **Leeds District SWP. Building the branches: recruitment, retention and cadreisation.**

An informal discussion and ‘kick-about’ suggestions paper. May 2013. Brian Par-kin, Harehills/Chapelton branch.

1. The immediate situation is a temporary period in which two or more decades of neoliberalism has shifted the centre of political gravity decisively to the right. The result has been that Social Democracy in the UK (and elsewhere) has bought some or other version of an austerity economic policy package as the solution to the profound and systemic ills of capitalism.

And after 3 years of the worst assault on working class living standards in over 60 years, it is undeniable that most people will settle for an ‘austerity-lite’ alternative rather than endure any more of the present medicine.

2. This means that despite numerous outbreaks of resistance, there is every chance of the present government making it to a

full 5 year term in office. This means that as the resistance may polarise a minority to the left, it also means that some of those abandoned to despair, turn to the nationalistic right for the illusion of scapegoating.

3. On the left there is now more room for a populist centrist current than the space available for revolutionaries. And as the SWP is by far the biggest revolutionary available option, then we are going to feel the squeeze from the ‘radical reformist’ current to our immediate right.

The new Left Unity initiative is the biggest challenge now facing us, and with the radical exercises such as a Peoples’ Assembly and a transitional programme which will no doubt dig up some form of an Alternative Economic Strategy- (which whether we like it or not, was actually quite popular with many trade unionists in the late 70s/early 80s), we are going to be confronting an ‘alternative’ that will have the appearance being both coherent and workable.

4. In the run-up to a May 2015 general election this package is likely to find a growing resonance with the kind of people that we would regard as our ‘natural’ audience. And furthermore, it will provide a platform for certain opportunist (as well as sincere) sections of the left trade union bureaucracy. If this current grows- and present indications suggest it will, then it is bound to have an effect on our membership- not least those members who are less rooted in our revolutionary theory and practice.

5. ‘Punching above our weight’- an attribute ascribed to us by the ‘friendly’ critics of the SWP, Owen Jones and Laurie Penny, was never a formula for the long term success of the revolutionary project. Sooner or later and as the going got tougher, we were going to have some more ‘weight’ in order to ‘punch’ harder. There is, nor has there ever been an alternative to building a bigger SWP and one that is increasingly more rooted in the working class.

6. To do otherwise would be to lapse into a substitutionism in which a small and loyal and increasingly hyper-active core of members are required to run around servicing an ever-growing range of activities with the risk of a reduced quality and eventually quantity of outcomes. In such a scenario, paper selling on demonstrations can become the sole measure by which the party assesses its impact at the expense of the real task of building a cadre that is interventionist on the basis of hard-won experience combined with a confidence and competence in the key ideas of our revolutionary tradition.

7. Harehills/Chapelton branch shows that it is possible to recruit in the current climate. But as Marxists we should understand that any situation is never fixed. Without a determination to retain new recruits, the

exercise soon becomes one of turn-over and an experience of mutual disappointment and demoralisation. Consequently, the branch treads water to stay afloat and the same 'loyalists' redouble their own efforts in order to keep up the same profile of paper selling and campaign leafleting and interventions.

8. And because the revolutionary project is both heroic and massive in scale, the default practice of substitutionism becomes underwritten with a culture of denial that whilst conceding that there may be problems, does so on 'a not in front of the children' way. And over time the ever-threatening prospect of a rising party age profile that with natural attrition will mean less weight with even less punch.

9. As I have suggested above, the coming period is not likely to be favourable for a significant and immediate breakthrough for recruitment into our party. Much of the available space for the far left will be largely filled by a populist centrist current attempting an a la Syriza breakthrough that they hope will be made space for by a major crisis in the territory traditionally filled by the social democratic left.

10. The SWP is likely to be faced increasingly with united front type movements not of its own initiating. For most of us (except for a very few survivors from the Vietnam Solidarity days), this will be a first. Furthermore, it will be a first in that this time the leadership of such movements will by and large be made up of people to some degree hostile to the SWP. Many of them as ex-members of the party will be adept at the cut and thrust and machinations of intra-party politics and may well command bigger numbers than we can. We may well have to re-establish our credibility with many within this milieu.

11. Some of the protest and campaign movements that arise in the present period will not conform to the basic definition of a 'united front' in that they will have been initiated by people who may not even understand what a united front is. The critical test for our organisation in such initiative will be to engage on the issues of agreement and NOT make purist elbow room for ourselves by seeking to accentuate possible areas of disagreement. To do so would be to make a sectarian departure from the responsible role of revolutionaries within united fronts which is to always shun the temptation to seek arcane points of debating advantage and instead build principled campaigns based on unity in action.

12. A comradely approach is essential in united front work. Although there will inevitably be differences, we must always remember that for most of the time we will be working alongside people who in the

main do not share our political ideas. But these people are our allies and to see them as a hostile competition and therefore 'our enemies' is to establish ourselves as sectarians from the start.

13. If we are going to survive, let alone grow on the basis of such an exercise, then we will have to be sharper and clearer as well as more skilful and patient in our united front work. And if our membership is not to be pulled rightwards by the initial successes (and there will be some) of the new centrism then it will have to be better trained in branches that are fit for purpose.

14. To this end the following suggestions might be worth consideration

- A welcome pack for each new member that informs them of the core ideas of the SWP and the ways we operate- not only as a party, but in terms of our trade union, student and wider campaign work
- Re-starting an education programme on a round-about basis
- 'Buddying' new members to make sure that they feel welcome as well as ensuring they have a fixed point of contact to whom they can refer any questions or concerns
- Not forcing onto newer members daunting responsibilities when they appear unconfident
- Making sure that new members are not left floundering alone in any of our united front work. We should ensure that the branches periodically insert a discussion topic on the 'essential art of the united front' in the branch meeting programmes
- Holding open debates on differences within the party as a means of 'clearing the air' and off-setting the possible slide into factional acrimony
- Breaking away from a 5 year plan recruitment quota mentality. Members as turn-over are useless. We have to nurture them into full-rounded revolutionaries
- We have to get rid of any self-satisfied cliques. The party has to be open, comradely and welcoming to all of its membership
- The concept of membership has to be clearly defined: subs paying (where possible), regular branch attendance, involvement where appropriate in wider party activities as well as an adherence to the general rules and constitution of the party
- Lapsed members should be made welcome and wherever possible recruited back into our ranks. But failure to meet any of the membership criteria should be to the exclusion in any of the policy making decisions of the organisation
- Branches (as a very minimum) should have the following 'officers':
  - \*Secretary
  - \*Meeting organiser
  - \*Membership/contact/Marxism organiser
  - \*SW organiser

15. Whenever possible the above should meet as a branch committee

16. And this is contentious. A branch newsletter (fortnightly) by hand delivery or email to all members and contacts. In the past it has been argued that a newsletter will tempt people to stay away from the branch meetings, because as they get the information anyway, there is little need for them to attend meetings.

I think that given the sheer size of the party periphery in relation to its active core as well as the range of issues that will arise over the coming period, on-going information on branch activities will keep people informed and engaged in the work of the organisation. As such it could be seen as an investment tool for future re-recruitment.

**Brian (Leeds City Centre)**

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## ME AND THE PARTY..... A PERSONAL JOURNEY OF 9 MONTHS AT THE SHARP END OF THE STRUGGLE.

A funny thing happened to me in January of 2013, I voted against the Central Committee on two issues (once against the entire CC once against the CC Majority group) at the party conference having never done this before; January 2013 was a bit of an eye opener for me.

One issue was a strategic / tactical issue and one was a question of principle.

I voted against the CC regarding the "should we support Jerry Hicks position" myself, Frank W, Gill G, Ian A and Julian V were the 5 members of the SWP unite fraction committee who opposed the CC at the conference.

My position (the position of the 5 members of the SWP unite fraction) was massively defeated. My vote at that conference on the acceptance of the recommendation of the disputes committee report was also defeated by a wafer thin margin as was my vote on the Central Committee.

At a recent meeting at Marxism Alex Callinicos asked a question of a comrade "what do you do if you loose the vote?" I think the actions of the unite fraction leadership provides a useful example of what comrades in the tradition of the International Socialists who understand democratic centralism do when you lose a vote on a question of tactics and strategy, the vote was taken by the highest democratic body of the party and we were obliged to follow it, there was no more discussion, it was not

required.... We campaigned our collective asses of and secured Jerry Hicks 118 branch and 19 workplace nominations, 9 branch nominations were from my county of Cambridgeshire. When the election was put to the membership of Unite Jerry received 79,819 votes an absolutely amazing result. During the campaign I coordinated the activities of the unite fraction and from that the industrial intervention of the party nationally over this important trades union election campaign. It wasn't just me; Gill secured her branch nomination for Jerry speaking in opposition to Frank W (Unite EC Health sector) who resigned from the party in protest at the parties support for Jerry. Ian A set up Jerry's website for the campaign, was at most of the face to face meetings with Jerry during the campaign and secured the workplace nominations of 4 Fujitsu sites as well as his own branch, Julian put the case for Jerrys nomination at his branch which we lost as it's a bit of a united left (unite broad left – backed Len during the campaign) stronghold but secured his workplace nomination.

Over the period from the SWP conference of January 2013 till the close of the campaign and the result announcement on the 13th of April there were 320 emails all related to the general secretary election campaign on the swp-unite-fraction email group, there were also skype teleconferences and more phone calls than I care to remember. Maps locating major unite workplaces in most regions of the country were produced and used to direct the intervention of the party nationally. The united left and Len McCluskeys campaign actually did shit a brick once they realised the fact that the SWP was incredibly organised and taking the election campaign very seriously. I was sent an email from Steve Turner the unite Executive policy director and Len McCluskeys campaign manager during the election campaign on the 15th of March which was titled "SWP activities in your area – BE AWARE" I almost fell off my chair as I laughed so hard.

During the election Jerry Hicks campaign was attacked on twitter and other social media sites disgracefully by Len and the united left as being "rape apologists" and the question was put why should unites female members vote for a candidate supported by the SWP, these attacks were disgraceful but despite my protestations the SWP did not respond seriously to these allegations. We did get an article written by Julie S from the CC in the guardian as a right of reply to an article by Laurie Penny but without meaning to offend Julie S (who I have a great deal of respect for) this article was not the defence of the party position we needed.

During the campaign (the period from January to April) I had to temporally shut down the SWP unite fraction email list twice due to comrades using it to factionalise, my actions were not one of a comrade trying to damage the party rather that of a

comrade trying to build the party organisation in the country's biggest trades union.

Then we come to the second issue on which I opposed the central committee at the January 2013 conference on the question of the disputes committee, prior to the January 2013 conference I had signed the CC statement and was not involved in any factional issue. My position changed after the January 2013 conference session on the disputes committee, let me be frank, I'm a big bloke with a thick skin but when I walked out of the venue for a fag break on evening of the 6th of January 2013 I was actually in tears and gave serious consideration to keeping on walking, I didn't walk but resolved then and there to do all I could to fix the problem which evidently had occurred. I was a member of the In Defence Of Our Party faction (IDOO) prior to the special conference in March and I have signed the statement of intent to form a faction at this year's conference.

A lot of mud and rubbish is slung around at comrades who oppose the CC around the disputes committee report, some of which is that we don't want to build the party, sell the paper or that we have moved away from democratic centralism, I would urge comrades to look a mine and the unite fraction leaderships example. We understand democratic centralism and do want to build the socialist workers party but don't judge us by our words judge us by our actions. Words are cheap actions are solid gold. I have said all I am going to say on this subject unless the CC responds to me directly.

This pre conference period will be tough for many comrades I would urge all comrades in unite and in the wider party to listen to my words and judge me by my actions. Join me in opposing the current leadership. We have had a tough year as a party. We can get through this if we do a couple of things, firstly apologise to the two women who raised issues with a former member of the SWP, and secondly be a tribune of the oppressed.

**Andrew "ozzy" Osborne (Cambridge)**

## BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

One thing that has become clear, at least in my eyes, amid the crisis in the party is that the question of whether, or not, we need a revolutionary party of the kind our tradition has argued for is seriously at stake.

Others elsewhere (such as Alex Callinicos in his Socialist Review article In Defence of Leninism) have charted how some of those who have attacked the SWP

in recent months have tied their critique to an assault on the very idea of a party like ours.

As Alex noted, Owen Jones, to cite but one example, seized on the crisis in the party to argue "the era of the SWP and its kind is over".

By "its kind" we are to understand any notion of a revolutionary socialist party based on the traditions of Russian 1917, the Bolsheviks, Lenin and Trotsky. There are, rightly, genuine debates and disagreements over various aspects of what that tradition is and what such a party should look like. But Jones is attacking this tradition and this type of party in its entirety.

Such a party is an "historically outdated model" agrees former leading SWP member Dan Mayer (writing under a pseudonym) on the Counterfire site.

Others who have left the party over the last year explicitly reject any notion of a revolutionary party and instead look towards a model based on the Syriza formation which has grown in Greece. Long time friends of the SWP such as Michael Rosen have weighed in to, saying that socialists should reject "the form that your organisation has".

*In fact, I think we need to sharply reassert the diametric opposite of what all these – and others like them- are suggesting. More than ever we need a party precisely of the SWP "kind".*

This is, I would argue, not from any dogmatic article of faith written in some socialist catechism. Rather it is because the argument for a party of "the kind" that Jones and the rest wish to reject has been, and is being, confirmed by the reality of the world and the experience of struggle.

There is an old cliché, nevertheless true and apt, that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat its mistakes.

The argument for a party of the kind we argue for is not plucked from the air or some academic debate. It is based on actual historical experiences of workers' struggles – principally the success of the Russian revolution of 1917 and, in a negative sense, the defeat of revolutions elsewhere in the same era – above all in Germany from 1918 – 1923.

Through this experience there emerged, crucially from the practice and writings of Lenin and Trotsky, key elements in an understanding of the need for a particular type of party. Many of these ideas were then further developed and theorised by the Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci.

In our own tradition writings by Tony Cliff (above all his biography of Lenin); Chris Harman (in his Party and Class) and John Molyneux (in his Marxism and the Party) have further developed these ideas in turn. What are some of the core ideas and arguments?

Firstly, workers' struggle is an inevitable feature of capitalism. Despite ups and downs in struggle, and even prolonged downturns and periods of defeat and

retreat, the system itself drives, and always will drive, workers into struggle and large scale revolts.

These struggles, at their highest points, throw up the potential for the overthrow of the system and its replacement by a society in which workers collectively and democratically run society.

For this to happen the question of the state is central. The state, above all the police and army, are not and never can be neutral or any kind of ally in winning a better world, but must be smashed and replaced by workers organised power

If workers all agreed on this and acted together we would have won socialism a long time back. The problem is workers consciousness is uneven. For much of the time many workers are persuaded to accept and support ideas and institutions which support and shore up capitalism.

Ideas and organisations – loosely labelled reformism – also grow out of the uneven consciousness in the working class. They reflect workers desire for change, but shy away from a revolutionary transformation of society. All of historical experience shows that such ideas and organisations will lead even the most inspiring struggles to either eventual containment within the system or to disastrous defeat.

In order for the potential of workers' struggles to be realised and this danger avoided the minority of workers who are clear on the need to overthrow the system, and who draw on the lessons of the rich history of workers struggles, need to be organised.

This minority needs to be organised not in order to cut itself off from the wider working class, but in order to intervene in the struggles of and arguments within the working class to increase the influence of ideas which can help ensure victories.

Of course there is much more to the notion of "our kind" of party, but it is this core conception which is under attack.

If it was the experience of 1917 and its aftermath which crystallised the argument for our kind of party, it is certainly not the only experience which underlines the argument.

This year we have the 40th anniversary of the disastrous defeat in Chile in 1973, which in a negative way underlines the same conclusion. And similar conclusions flow from the experience of many of the other great revolts from 1968 through the 1970s – from France 1968 to Portugal 1974-75.

And what of today's experience? Perhaps the sharpest example is Egypt, where we have seen the greatest revolutionary upsurge of recent times.

The potential for the revolutionary transformation of society in Egypt is clear. But so too is the tenacity with which forces seeking to prevent that and roll back the revolution will organise and fight.

The need for a sizeable and well rooted party within the working class which is

crystal clear on questions such as the reactionary role of the army, the defence of democracy, on the nature of Islamism and much more has been amply demonstrated by events of the last few months.

Of course there are comrades working hard to build such a force in Egypt – and we must do all in our power to support and assist that process. It is no insult to their efforts to recognise that the lack of a large enough and rooted enough party, of precisely the "kind" under attack in current debates, is critical in the development of the revolution in Egypt.

Another crucial lesson of history is that simply waiting until a revolutionary upheaval before trying to build such a party is often too late – evidenced above all by the tragic fate of Rosa Luxemburg and the German revolution from 1918 to 1923.

The more a party is built in advance of a revolutionary upheaval, the more experienced and rooted it is in the working class struggle, the more trusted it is by the most advanced sections of the working class, the greater the chance of it then successfully rising to the challenges of a revolutionary period.

In short, the case for "our kind" of party is as strong today as it was in 1917. But let us be clear about some other things.

Do we think that the SWP is *the* party which is capable of leading the working class in Britain to a successful revolution, or do we believe that we will become that party through a simple numerical increase in our size?

The answer to both questions has to be a decisive, and humble, no.

Any party capable of leading the working class in Britain to a successful socialist revolution will not only be a mass party, as opposed to a few thousand strong, but will also only emerge through a profound political process within the working class and its organisations.

There will be mass fissures and breaks in organisations like the Labour Party, the growth of all sorts of other formations within the class and a whole complex process of the coming together and sometimes breaking apart of such formations – and only out of all this could emerge the kind of mass party needed.

But just because we recognise this, does this absolve us from seeking to build even in small scale the kind of party we argue for? Not at all. We have a duty to do so, as the existence of a party like the SWP will be a crucial element in any process within the working class out of which a mass revolutionary party can emerge.

It is also true that the existence of a party of our "kind" is not just a matter of looking towards a revolutionary upheaval in the future. Such a party is also sharply relevant to helping ensure struggles in the here and now stand a greater chance of winning.

To cite just two examples, among many, the existence of a party of our "kind" has been central in the building of two struggles

which have shaped Britain for the better in recent years – the Stop the War movement and Unite Against Fascism.

If the case for building a party are clear there are also many other important questions about the nature of and the dangers facing any such party.

Here I want only to focus on two dangers which I think are critical in the current period. They are the twin dangers of adaptation and sectarianism.

I think it is now clear that underlying much of the crisis in the SWP the background of decades of a very low level of class struggle, but one punctuated by repeated waves of powerful and important movements – from the anti-capitalist movement, through the anti war movement, to student revolt and eruptions like the Occupy movement and so on.

Of course our party had to, as it always should, relate to and thrown ourselves into all such movements. But, as I am sure others will chart in much more detail than I can here, this has had a powerful impact and effect on the party and many of its members.

It has led to a pull away from seeing working class struggle as the key agency for change, and a key focus for revolutionary organisation, and instead seeing the movements as a substitute or short cut to social change. And along with that then comes a political adaptation to the politics of such movements.

You cannot explain the loss in recent years of leading and talented comrades such as Lindsey German, John Rees, Chris Bambery and Chris Nineham without understanding this. And nor can you understand the current crisis in the party without seeing this same powerful pull at play.

While many supporters of the faction or now self styled "opposition" have sought to deny these pulls away from our traditions and ideas, I think it is now clear enough if you look at their practice and read some of their writings.

So articles appearing on various blogs in recent months from comrades Rob O, Dave R, Mark B and Roderick C I think taken as a whole point in this direction.

Their argument runs something like this. The struggles by organised, mainly public sector, workers have failed to break through. We therefore need to refocus away from this layer towards the more unorganised, precarious, usually younger workers found outside these layers of organised public sector workers. This argument is often tied to a whole analysis of the impact of neo-liberalism on the working class in general.

But this layer of the working class we now need to refocus on, runs the argument, are not organised at work, but many are political. So we need instead to focus on where they can be found – in the social movements and in fights over oppression.

Now it should go without saying that we must and should relate seriously to all

social movements and all fights against injustice and oppression – and I would argue the SWP has an exemplary record in doing precisely that.

But this is not what is being argued here. It is in reality to see this arena of work as a substitute for, an alternative to, a politics and perspective which has at its heart a focus on workers organising and fighting back at work.

Along with this also comes an adaptation to the politics current in many of the movements and within struggles against oppression – often justified by all sorts of talk about understanding notions which add little to any genuine understanding of oppression like intersectionality.

This is in contrast with what I think is our correct tradition of immersing ourselves in all such movements and every struggle against oppression – and uniting with all those engaged in the same struggle – while arguing through our distinctive socialist politics while doing so.

Central to that distinctive politics is always arguing for the centrality of linking all fights back to the key issues of class, exploitation and workers organising and fighting at work. We must never forget, for one moment, Rosa Luxemburg's oft quoted comment: "where the chains of capitalism are forged there they must be broken"

It is also clear, I think, that the adaptation to movementism in the party at present takes a particular and peculiar form – perhaps best described as a kind of voluntarism, and one which breaks from the whole conception of the centrality of the method of the United Front.

We don't need to analyse the objective forces or situation, we don't need to bother with discussions with wider forces – in the unions or movements. Nor do we seek to use the method of the united front to reach agreements alongside others which can then promote larger scale struggles than we could otherwise do. Instead the job of revolutionaries is simply to act and by sheer act of will create the necessary struggle.

This is certainly the sense you get from articles which have appeared in recent months on various blogs by Mark B – on pop up unions but much else – but also implicit in an (otherwise knowledgeable and interesting ) article by Jonas L which draws on the experience of the Stalinised Communist Party in the US in the late 1920s and 1930s. It is also the mark of many of the arguments I have heard in numerous party meetings over recent months – and which most recently showed itself in practice in the "Sisters Against the EDL" initiative some comrades pushed for in Tower Hamlets.

But if adaptation to the pull and politics of movementism is a key element underpinning the factional opposition which has emerged and persisted in the SWP over the last year there is another danger.

This is a retreat into a mind-set which sets a course towards sectarianism. This

should be no surprise for in truth these two – adaptation and sectarianism - are always twins, with one comes inevitably the other.

In a correct attempt to stand firm against the dangers of adaptation to movementism and to defend and maintain the core politics and traditions of the party there comes a danger. This is to begin to counterpose the party, its routines and internal cohesion, to engagement in and dialogue with those involved in wider movements.

I do *not* think the party has slid down this road at present. In fact perhaps the most important and inspiring feature of the last year is precisely how well the party has, despite its internal crisis, related to the wider struggle – from building UAF, through the bedroom tax to the struggles in the workplace and different unions.

What is a real danger, however, and one which can set us on a course which ends in the place sketched above is allowing the factional divisions in the party to become the prism through which everything is seen.

Many in the faction or "opposition" have certainly fallen into this trap, and unless they break from this way of thinking are setting a course which will sooner or later take them outside the party.

But also some comrades who rightly start from wishing to defend the party and our core traditions have, I believe, allowed themselves to become imprisoned in a similar fashion.

Everything becomes seen through the prism of factional differences, when in principle "we" are always right and "they" are always wrong. The language and the mindset becomes one in which it is always "us" against "them", they say black so we say white.

This can lead to a refusal to listen and engage in dialogue, debate and comradely argument with those who disagree – inside and also outside the party. It can eat away at our ability to engage with the reality of a situation and the actual merits or otherwise of any argument. And it can easily slide towards a view that "we" are right and the sooner we get rid of anyone who won't accept that the better.

Such a way of thinking can live for a while- sometimes even a long while – alongside exemplary practice in struggles. But if allowed to develop and become entrenched, such a way of thinking will, at some point, inevitably become an impediment the kind of internal life necessary for a healthy and vibrant party, and also to engaging with and working with forces outside our ranks. It will set us on a course towards sectarianism.

At the most recent National Committee, in my opinion, the tone of at least some contributions was dripping with the smell of this way of thinking and warned of this danger.

It would be a real tragedy if in an entirely correct desire to defend the party from the

pull of adaptation to movementism, and from the disastrous price we would pay from a culture of permanent factional organisation, good comrades were pulled into a spiral whose centre and end point was sectarianism.

There are many examples of left groupings, with many excellent revolutionaries in their ranks, which have gone down that road. They have rolled on, and even grown at times, for many years – but have become increasingly irrelevant to the real course of working class struggle. The Bordigists in Italy and Lutte Ouvriere in France are just two obvious examples.

We do desperately need to fight sharply against the pull of and adaptation to the politics of movementism if we are to pull the party out of its current crisis. But we must also fight to do so without becoming trapped on a course and within a way of thinking which will set us sliding on a course which ends in sectarianism.

In the Greek tale of Odysseus his ship had to chart a course between two monsters – Scylla and Charybdis. Building a revolutionary party is always a similar challenge – avoiding both danger of adaptation, but steering too away from the danger of sectarianism.

#### Paul (Tower Hamlets)

## NEITHER ONE NOR T' OTHER

The present situation in the SWP is very dangerous. There are two (at least) consolidated blocs, one grouped around what appears to be a majority on the current Central Committee, the other around what was (and probably what will be again by the time that this appears) the IDOOP faction. Neither of these is strong enough to knock the other out except by wrecking the party.

Neither of the authors are members of any current or recent faction. One has never been a member of any faction, and the other has never been in one since the Left Alternative of 1975.

Unfortunately, going by the behaviour of the partisans of both blocs at Marxism 2013, many of them seem quite prepared to gallop off in the direction of mutually assured destruction heedless of the consequences.

Despite the formalities of the existing party constitution, we have landed up with two (at least) permanent factions. We both think that permanent factions are a bad idea, for all the well rehearsed arguments. However, we are where we are. No amount of huffing and puffing about conference votes will blow this particular



house down. The debated of the past year have been accompanied by an excess of righteous indignation on all sides, which has seriously impeded sound decision making. What is needed is to work clearly and calmly to move out of this place of danger.

One thing that is clear is that the party's structures are not 'fit for purpose'. One place that this obvious is the '3-month rule' on strategic and theoretical discussion and the frantic and futile attempts to proscribe online debating. This particular cat is well and truly out of the bag and cannot be stuffed back in. The point is not to ban something that is unbannable, but to manage the process in the interests of the entire party.

We would guess that the overwhelming majority of comrades would be quite happy for a properly managed discussion site, with linked blogs, moderated by a group who enjoy the confidence of all sections of the party. Current, insurgent, sites can be merged into this. This appears to be so banal a suggestion that it is baffling that no-one has yet suggested it. Baffling, unless, of course, we recognise that the two camps are so entrenched in their positions to do anything else but lob anathemas at each other from the depths of their bunkers.

At the centre of the structural issues stands the central committee. As we will argue below, it has been dysfunctional for at least seven years and the tinkering measures proposed by the recent Democracy Commission did nothing to rectify this. Without breaking this particular logjam the necessary development of our strategic and theoretical understandings will continually be destabilised.

It is clear that one major reason for our present troubles has been sustained poor decision making from the Central Committee, specifically in the Delta case but latterly over a number of other issues. Indeed, we wonder how the phrase 'bound to cause trouble' never occurred to anyone during the formally correct but practically stupid application of various procedures.

The worst aspect of this is that the Central Committee seems to have learnt nothing from the Respect crisis of a few years ago. To summarise for the benefit of new comrades, the SWP were a founding constituent of Respect. In 2008 a major clash erupted (to most comrades out of the blue) between the leading party members working in Respect and George Galloway and his supporters. This swiftly led to an acrimonious parting of the ways, and the end of Respect as a serious attempt to build a significant radical (although admittedly non-revolutionary) organisation to the left of Labour.

It then emerged that these differences had been brewing for a considerable period of time, but had been kept from most of the party membership by the Central Committee. It also came out that the Central Committee centrally involved with Respect

were at loggerheads with other Central Committee members over wider strategy. The upshot was a huge row, the removal of the Central Committee member primarily engaged with Respect (John Rees) and the eventual departure of him and three other Central Committee members and a block of their supporters to form Counterfire, (and the International Socialist Group in Scotland).

The Democracy Commission was established in the aftermath of this debacle, charged to recommend necessary changes to the party's structures to prevent a recurrence. In the event, it proposed precious little change. However, there was a major outbreak of *mea culpa* from the then Central Committee, with industrial quantities of swearing on grandmothers' graves that such a thing (keeping disagreements on the Central Committee from the wider membership) would never happen again.

Imagine our surprise, therefore, when on 3rd January this year, two days before the beginning of the annual conference, that we received an email announcing that there were to be two different slates probed by members of the outgoing Central Committee. As we later discovered, this not only reflected a profound split in the outgoing Central Committee over the conduct of the Delta case, but also serious differences about perspectives on strategic issues, including students and industrial work.

Not only did this last minute revelation make it almost impossible for conference delegates to effectively interrogate the issues behind the split, but it also totally compromised the pre-conference discussion. This fundamental disagreement on the outgoing Central Committee did not drop out of a clear blue sky on New Year's Day.

It clearly had been maturing over weeks and probably months beforehand. Had the party been made aware of this in November-December last year, it is inconceivable that the pre-conference discussion would have taken the form that it did. It is also extremely unlikely that delegates would have been elected on the basis that they were, nor that resolutions submitted to conference would have taken the form that they did. Nor, it's fair to conclude, would the 'Facebook Four' incident have occurred.

Despite having sworn blind to the contrary, at the first serious crisis the Central Committee defaulted back to its behaviour prior to the Respect crisis. It failed to realise that the response from the party to that incident was 'last chance for the slate system'. We conclude that this last chance has been expended, and that the slate system has been demonstrated to be not for purpose.

The problem with that method of electing the Central Committee is that no-one (unless you are in a very select loop of personal associates) has a clue as to who on the Central Committee is actually pro-

posing actions and strategies that are at fault and then persuading a majority of the others to go along with them. By the same token, we have no idea who remains unconvinced and outvoted, nor what concerns are voiced. This makes it impossible for the party membership to decide who should remain on the Central Committee, who should be replaced, and who should be the replacements.

It is quite obvious from the behaviour around the last conference that some individuals on the Central Committee must have pushed for particular decisions and that others went along more or (probably) less happily, while some were completely opposed.

But with the current system of *omerta* it is impossible to work out who is responsible for poor decisions.

Have the motivators of particular courses of action really convinced other Central Committee members of the merits those actions and perspectives, or have they bullied them into uneasy acquiescence by the (implied) threat of a block walk-out?

We haven't a clue, and yet a knowledge of this is vital for the party to be able to assess what has happened and to make effective decisions as to who should be in the leadership bodies (the Central and National committees).

What is more important, though, is to insist on a more open and transparent leadership. This would trust the rest of the party by embracing a new way of relating to the membership. As a first step we would invite each CC member to state of their individual positions and arguments held by them during the German/Rees/Bambury ascendancy and the same for the recent Delta affair and its consequences. We do this not to apportion blame but for clarity in order to avoid repetition of earlier mistakes, especially given their prominent role in the People's Assembly initiative.

What is worse is that the practice of the existing Central Committee effectively nominating who should fill vacancies means that new members lack any personal mandate for their role as members of that leadership body. They are only there because some existing member(s) nominated them and the party conference was left no option but a routine approval since it had no independent basis for being able to make a judgment on their suitability. An aptitude for being an organiser does not in itself fit a person for being able to make strategic decisions, nor in being competent in crisis management, as we have seen to our cost over the past year.

Given the choice of accepting or rejecting an entire slate for the Central Committee, and having little basis for working out who might be a suitable alternative, it is hardly surprising that conferences have regularly approved slates proposed by the outgoing Central Committee. But as continuing practice since 2008 has shown, it isn't working.

Instead of this current structure we would propose a system that would constitute better oversight and accountability of the Central Committee and involvement of the general membership in strategic decision making.

This could involve the enhanced interactive website already alluded to, an increased role for the National Committee and Party Council, enhanced Party Notes and/or published Central Committee minutes, or some combination of the above.

We also conclude that an essential component in the actions to be taken to restore the party to full effectiveness is an end to the slate system of election to the Central Committee, to be replaced by individual elections.

The complex mechanics of achieving this means that after a full discussion during this pre-conference period the 2013 conference will have to make a concrete decision via the usual commission method.

**Barry (Bradford) and Mick (Barnsley)**

## WHO WILL TEACH THE TEACHERS?

1. When Alex used and repeated in several articles the phrase “the Central Committee must campaign among party members”, it seemed an obvious restatement of the task of leadership.

But in the reality of the party’s internal life in January it took on a different meaning, suggesting not an open and comradely debate, but an imposition of the authority of the CC on a reluctant membership. Criticism of any kind has been denounced as “an attack on the party”, a “diversion from the real tasks” and those of us who have insisted that it was necessary dismissed as (willing or unwilling) tools of various enemies. As a result the party is polarised into critical and uncritical camps and the substantial issues – the way in which the CC dealt with the complaint against MS and the women involved, and the wider issue of party democracy – ignored.

The relationship that Alex and others have posited between leadership and party members seemed analogous to the relationship we describe between the vanguard and the working class in general. The advanced sectors of the working class have grasped the reality of a class society beyond the specifics of their particular experience of it in local and sectional struggles. Their task then is to lead the day to day struggles and to campaign to convince those they fight with of the larger vision of class society. That’s a very simple summary of course, but it serves to highlight the relationship between leadership and led in the working

class movement.

The analogy is simply wrong. Every member of the revolutionary party has taken a political decision to identify with that vanguard, and made a commitment to lead wherever they are. The difference in experience among members is horizontally distributed; every member comes to the party as a result of their contact with class society and their desire to fight for a different world. Their experience will, of course, be partial and very possibly contain contradictions. We are none of us immune, after all, to the ideological pressures of capitalism nor to the material limitations it places upon us. And that means none of us.

2. Political recognition within the party, and election to the leadership, can come as a result of playing a leading role within the movement, or as a recognition of the particular contribution a comrade can make at a point in time.

But it can never represent an acknowledgment of superiority, nor a permanent arrangement, because the politics of the revolutionary party are the outcome of a permanent and active collaboration among all its members. as a result of which strategies move and change. The central committee’s role is to organize, in the day to day and to lead while remaining always accountable to the party. It cannot substitute its internal discussions for the debate that drives the party forward.

Greater knowledge gives individual comrades a greater weight in particular discussions – and that is the only authority they can claim. Furthermore, that authority has to be won again and again – it does not come with the job nor is it timeless. What yesterday may have been an authoritative intervention may tomorrow become an obstacle to progress. In Cliff’s words, “Marxists generalize the living, evolving experience of the class struggle”.

John Molyneux (in *Marxism and the Party*) argues this:

*“Because the party is a combat organization, it has no room for a layer of passive card holders or of privileged, secure bureaucrats. Its membership must be active and self-sacrificial (sic) and is likely therefore to be young.”* (165)

There is no suggestion here that youth enters into a kind of apprenticeship at the feet of the master. Lenin’s argument with the ‘committeemen’ struck at that suggestion very forcefully.

On the contrary, the experience of the young is an essential and equal component of the political debate which is the material out of which the party’s strategy is forged. The very suggestion that they are in some sense more vulnerable to the pressures of capitalism or more open to other, non-revolutionary influences than anyone else, falls into the same trap that Alex falls

into – the presumption that there is a layer of the party that has become immune to such pressures.

That can only lead in one direction – towards a situation in which that leading layer sees the party as hostile because it contains contrary and even contradictory arguments and interpretations. Yet that is its very quality, its value – that it makes and remakes a revolutionary politics in a vigorous and impassioned argument with the wider society.

To have relinquished that contact, or refuse to engage with those influences, creates defensive corrals from which the defenders exclude the potentially corrupting influences of a shifting, changing wider world which comrades, because they work and organize with others outside the party, are far closer to. When the wagons are hauled into a circle, that contact is lost. Within the besieged fortress are those who bear the truth; but the bearers of truth never won a battle nor changed the world.

3. There is a growing gap between our theory and our practice; the experience of the real world does not consistently inform or shape our theoretical development – or at least it does so less and less.

I feel that this reflects the growing influence of an academic Marxism which operates without reference to the concrete application of theory – and that the SWP comrades most engaged with that milieu are comfortable and complacent about it. The result has been that the extraordinarily rich theoretical tradition on which the SWP stands has not developed as it should in recent times and in response to obvious shifts in the balance of class forces, to the new role of Labour as a collaborator in the austerity drive, to important ideological changes, to the impact of globalization.

The so-called theoretical developments around the united front, which John Rees offered in a recent article as an example of a new direction, are rarely more than justifications of tactical decisions. And yet we are living today through a period of massive change, in which we can only operate to the extent that we understand and debate those changes. The experience of argument and discussion which was once the feature of the party’s internal political life, and the source of its political development, has now all but disappeared.

It is almost as if, like Brecht’s government, we blame reality for not corresponding to our expectations

A critical example is our attitude to the trade unions and their rank and file. There seems to be a serious contradiction here which has simply been brushed over. We seem on the one hand, especially in our references to the Minority Movement, to be dedicated to the building of rank and file organization. This is the repeated narrative in relation to the trade union movement, which blocks any serious discussion about what is happening in the working class. Yet

in reality we appear often to be working with the bureaucracy at various levels in developing initiatives which are essentially top down, while at the same time denouncing the trade union bureaucracy.

The problem is that this seems to make another, quite dangerous assumption – that the working class is essentially combative but is constantly held back by the bureaucrats. That was the narrative on November 30th 2011. When the predicted rise in the level of working class resistance did not appear, there was no explanation – only a sort of repetition of the same narrative in the hope that something would happen. Why have we continued with that position? Was it because the CC was unwilling to acknowledge that their original idea had proved mistaken?

Yet what theoretical perspectives are the CC defending? It is entirely a defence of the CC's *right* to determine what is done. There is no analysis to explain it.

Yet in that same period some extraordinary things were happening. An extremely combative and imaginative student movement was emerging, unexpectedly perhaps, and dramatically, that coincided with Occupy and other social movements.

Here again, comrades took leading roles and brought a layer of wonderful student comrades into the party. But the leadership simply failed to respond to their experience, and to the political implications that followed when their movement too faltered after such incredible beginnings. We offered no bridge between their experience and the international socialist tradition, only the kind of political education that Freire calls “banking education” – namely the delivery of pre-digested ideas to be learned and repeated.

So the new ideas, the new reality that the movement had responded to, and the comrades' experience of it, was ignored – instead of it being the foundation of political development, building on the experiences and understandings of the party's new recruits. It was as if you could only enter the theoretical arena after a long period of waiting in an anteroom. So there was no controversy, no argument, no cultivation of the habits of democratic debate which Hallas argues is the essence of democratic centralism.

*“A revolutionary party cannot possibly be created except on a thoroughly democratic basis; unless, in its internal life, vigorous controversy is the rule and various tendencies and shades of opinion are represented, a socialist party cannot rise above the level of a sect. Internal democracy is not an optional extra. It is fundamental to the relationship between party members and those amongst whom they work.”* (Party and Class 21)

And he goes on

*“The self-education of militants is impossible in an atmosphere of sterile orthodoxy. Self-reliance and confidence in one's ideas are developed in the course of that genuine debate that takes place in an atmosphere where differences are freely and openly argued. The ‘monolithic party’ is a Stalinist concept. Uniformity and democracy are mutually incompatible”*

When eventually and reluctantly, the CC suddenly reversed its strategy towards the student movement, it did so with no explanation, no argument, replacing both with a loyalty test, which just reinforced the gulf between the leadership and that significant section of party members. The concept of a party that is democratic only for three months a year, and that the assemblies that take place in between are constructed and controlled by the central committee is a pathetic caricature of Hallas's clear vision.

Are we fetishising discussion? The old chestnut, thrown at me several times in recent months, that “you just want to sit around talking instead of acting”, is fairly easily answered. There is no ban on talking while walking, marching; to be an active socialist should mean discussing the world with comrades while being active in it. And while we will act together our controversies will contribute to our intervention rather than detract from it.

4. How then do we create a symbiotic relationship within the party that will in turn generate that relationship between the party and the class? Surely the starting point must be that we address the same reality. If a significant sector of the party fails to recognize the portrait painted by the leadership, then the leadership is likely to be wrong – because they in turn will be unable to win those they lead and influence to recognize it.

The issue we have to address is what has allowed the CC to grow increasingly distant from party members, to the extent that it is now defending its own interests against the interests of the party and the class.

Increasingly it has not been the best interests of the class that have dominated the party's thinking but the best interests of a party leadership which it deems to be synonymous with the best interests of the class. This has a long history. The CC has been full time for decades and its contact with the world of work is at best second hand.

The existence of an NC, for example, which should discipline the CC and continually test the adequacy of the CC's leadership, is vitiated by a method of selection of members by the CC.

Control from the centre is so overwhelming that it is impossible to imagine local leaderships emerging at a distance from the CC and capable of acting independently in specific circumstances.

The same can be said of CC elections,

where the slate is invariably a list of candidates approved by them. The restricted discussion period and the method of leadership makes it unlikely that dissenting voices can be raised in an atmosphere of respect and mutual recognition – for the best and worst of reasons.

The best is the loyalty of comrades; the worst is the creation of full time servants of the CC rather than of the party, who act as a transmission belt downwards and as a block on independent critical thought rising from the party's base to its leadership.

The process towards the Special Conference illustrated that at its very worst. The defence of the bureaucratic and administrative methods referred time and again to constitutional rules – as if our political conduct should be governed by rules whose task is to reflect our organizational methods, rather than be laws governing them. In a formal sense, the CC won a vote across the country – but it did so by using those rules to impede debate at the same time as mobilizing a large number of comrades across the country who had not participated in the debate within the party until that point, representing the internal crisis as an attack by hostile external forces. Hence the response of many comrades to ‘defend the party’

The moment at which the leadership refuses to recognize the origin of that imbalance is the moment at which it defines itself by differentiating itself from the majority of party comrades. And that – to define your relationship with the working class and the movement by *difference* – is the very definition of sectarianism.

5. The starting point for this internal debate was the Disputes Committee and its decision. The Party leadership argued that the central issue was confidentiality. But whose? In reality, they were arguing that the CC's actions should not be open to scrutiny, in other words that *they* should be governed by confidentiality – as they already are, since the CC publishes no record of its discussions.

Clearly confidentiality was not really the issue. There was a question of justice. And there was a question of our attitude to oppression. Yet both these issues were hidden behind the assertion that the CC's decisions were beyond questioning. The argument that the conference decision was democratic falls on a very simple ground. Bourgeois democracy is characterized by the fact that the information on which a decision should be made is withheld or distorted or hidden behind mechanical and administrative precepts.

In a socialist democracy there is no privileged information and insofar as we practice it internally (which can be questioned) it can only be legitimate if full knowledge is provided and other options offered for the resolution of the question. Neither was the case at conference, which makes the argument about party confer-

ence's democratic procedures specious. The Special Conference on the 10th March abandoned even the pretence of democratic procedures, drawing on the "passive card holders" as John calls them to join the CC in its battle with the party itself. And subsequent persecutions of critical comrades have served to reinforce the parody of democracy that we are operating.

This is more than simply a question of uncomradely behaviour. The hostile and confrontational attitude towards party comrades *over time* has led to a deeply flawed strategy, or to be more accurate to an absence of strategy – a gap then filled by frenzied activity, and in particular paper selling and campaigning around specifics.

Now, the successful campaigns – from Stop the War through UAF to the Jerry Hicks campaign have all been united fronts of one kind or another. We have been instrumental in all of them and have won widespread respect for our energy and commitment.

There has been much less respect for the manner in which we have conducted ourselves politically within those campaigns. There is no doubt that we were a moving force within STWC – but we were not the sole leadership and nor was the movement dominated by our *politics*, though it was led by our tactical advice.

This was by no means uncontested, but we dealt with criticism bureaucratically and with arrogance. We *declared* ourselves the leadership and the comrades representing us in the leadership of Stop the War – comrades Rees, German and Nineham – came to believe their own myth.

Their vocation to lead reproduced their attitudes within the party, and they adopted exactly similar methods and postures within Respect, which grew out of Stop the War. Was it really Galloway who destroyed Respect?

Or was it our total failure to argue with him politically, because of the short term benefit he could bring those comrades (and not the party as a whole), until it was too late, that destroyed the organization?

In the case of UAF we have led in the absence of other organizations, but absolutely not without the support of many local groups and movements. Yet the relationship we have with them is much the same, and our claims for UAF – that it is solely responsible for the weakness of fascism in this country – is plainly partial and misleading. We have believed the myth to such an extent that the party has been prepared to abandon fundamental ethical and political positions to defend Comrade Delta because he leads that organization and he was clearly seen as indispensable.

These are not organizational questions, but profoundly political ones. As Hal-las says, debate is not an optional extra, it is the process through which we know and understand the changes happening around us. The shape of the working class is changing, the main struggles that are

emerging now across the world and not just in Britain are the many forms taken by struggles against austerity, in defence of welfare, against capital itself in the form of the banks.

The simple truth is that these movements have a new and different character. They are diverse, multiple, often very locally based; they arise around specific issues and are in the best sense defensive.

Many of the people involved have no history or experience of political organization. This means of course that they are vulnerable to left groups seizing control of the movements opportunistically, just because they have organizational experience and the energy to work hard.

But that is not the same thing as winning the movement *politically*. Party Notes recently claimed that the SWP is at the centre of the bedroom tax movement. Already? It's still in its earliest formative stage – it has no shared strategies.

These are evolving as the weeks go on, and hopefully growing at the base of the movement. We are after all committed to the self-emancipation of the working class rather than its representatives. Though that is the very heart of the international socialist tradition, we seem often to forget it in our practice. And though we, the left that is, may actually control these movements, those who have driven it will, as often as not, simply drift away in disillusion, permanently lost to the revolution.

The reality is that we announce ourselves as the party of the working class, and dominant on the left ("punching above our weight"). But what is important here is not the relative division of spoils within the left but the weight of the left in the wider movement. In Britain the left is small and quite marginal. Yet many key fighters – the vanguard of the class – are members of the SWP. Their position is now significantly weaker. We cannot claim, and now less than ever, dominance. That means that our method of working will have to change in recognition of that.

The practical conclusions are harder to identify, since what we are essentially addressing is an issue of political culture. But since we are talking about the party's leadership, there is a serious issue about its composition. The slate system seems to me to encourage a situation like the present in which the CC presents a united face to the party come what may. In the history of our movement it has been common for leading committees to reflect internal debates – for factions for example to be represented there. Why not now? We are a revolutionary organization in a bourgeois democracy – we don't have any need to operate with a command model.

In a revolutionary situation that may well change, but we are a little way off from that still. And Greece and Spain tell us that when resistance is generalized, it won't necessarily bend to a central leadership anyway. There is also no obvious

reason why the CC has to consist only of full timers; and there are plenty to suggest that shouldn't be the case.

We should stop trading quotes from Lenin. Not that he has not much to teach us, but that the first lesson he will offer is that the forms and methods of organization of revolutionaries will be shaped by the historical circumstance, and will change constantly as those circumstances change. There are no rules to be applied, no constitutions to obey. There is a revolutionary method – one part of which acknowledges that the teachers must themselves be taught by those they set out to instruct.

**Mike (Glasgow North)**

## BUILDING UNITE AGAINST FASCISM IN HARINGEY

The killing of Lee Rigby on 21 May this year was followed by a huge spike in Islamophobic attacks: in the week following his death monitoring group Tell Mama reported 212 racist incidents which included 11 attacks on mosques.

The wave of attacks was in marked contrast to the response to the 7/7 tube and bus bombings, which came against the background of a strong anti war-movement. Unfortunately Rigby's death took place after relentless Islamophobic campaigns by the politicians and media, with the anti-war movement in abeyance and trade union leaders failing to follow through on the anti-austerity strikes.

These factors meant the mood presented anti-racists with markedly less favourable terrain upon which to push back against Islamophobia.

On the morning of 5 June the Bravanese Somali Al Rahma Islamic Centre was burned to the ground with letters 'EDL' left scrawled on one of the charred walls. The attack, which took place in Muswell Hill, (just inside the London borough of Barnet) was perhaps even more shocking because of where it was - a middle class neighbourhood of north London.

Such incidents require a speedy response to both bring solidarity to those under attack and to show to the racists and fascists that we will not let them divide our communities and to show we have the ability to bring significant numbers onto the streets to protest against their violence.

Haringey Unite Against Fascism had been planning to re-launch the organisation but events overtook those plans and in effect that re-launch was brought forward.

## How the vigil and public meeting were organised

We immediately made contact with the centre the following morning and it was agreed that a vigil/rally should be organised for the following day. A flyer was produced and distributed throughout the locality.

The rally was highly successful, attracting some 500 people.

Speakers at the rally included the officers from the centre, representatives from all the mainstream political parties, trade unionists and local socialists. Many spoke from the wider local community alongside students from a nearby school, who had been encouraged by a comrade who teaches there, to make hundreds of 'solidarity cards' with messages of support for the centre.

The breadth of the response showed we had succeeded in pulling those to our right onto our ground. Naturally the mainstream parties were reluctant to draw out the links between the attack and the role of the government and media in whipping up Islamophobia in the months and years before Rigby's death but others did so.

At the rally it was announced that there would be a public meeting in Muswell Hill the following week to bring together all those who oppose this racist violence. There was an overwhelmingly positive response, with MPs, local councillors, London Assembly members all agreeing to speak.

Even government minister Lynne Featherstone attended, rushing back from the airport after a ministerial meeting abroad.

The chair of the Islamic centre spoke, as did the chairman of one of the biggest mosques (Wightman Rd) in north London.

Over 200 people attended the meeting with the Somali community making up a sizeable portion of the audience, followed, numerically speaking, by a large turnout from the Labour party. It was one of the first signs that the fear that was permeating the Muslim community was beginning to turn into anger and a determination to fight back.

## Building a wider base for UAF in north London

All this work has now put UAF in a good position for future anti-fascist work. It meant when the EDL yet again said they were coming to Tower Hamlets we were able to pull people around the Somali community centre into working with us as well as local unions – Unison, the largest union organisation in the area paid for all the local publicity for our Tower Hamlets mobilisation. In addition the local NUT association finally passed a motion backing UAF, with the UCU branch at the college redoubling its support of UAF.

We are now looking to gain sponsorship from across the trade union movement to

enable school, college and university students to go on the UAF educational trip to Auschwitz.

Plans for a local LMHR gig are being laid, with the aim of attracting local youth.

We have also agreed to help launch an appeal for funds to rebuild the burned down community centre with model motions for trade unions to pass and donate money. The centre had been promised help from local councils but no practical help has as yet been forthcoming.

## Role of the SWP and the united front

The SWP is a central organisational component of UAF. Our commitment to UAF flows from our political understanding of the importance of creating a united front against the fascists, centred on the labour movement to which fascism represents a mortal threat. As Trotsky put it:

*"If the Communist Party [in Germany], in spite of the exceptionally favourable circumstances, has proved powerless seriously to shake the structure of Social Democracy with the aid of the formula of 'social fascism', then real fascism now threatens this structure, no longer with wordy formulas of so-called radicalism, but with the chemical formulas of explosives. No matter how true it is that the Social Democracy prepared the blossoming of fascism by its whole policy, it is no less true that fascism comes forward as a deadly threat primarily to that same Social Democracy, all of whose magnificence is inextricably bound up with parliamentary-democratic-pacifist forms and methods of government."*

He calls fascism "a razor in the hands of the class enemy" in the face of which "we will inevitably have to make agreements against fascism with the various Social Democratic organisations and factions, putting definite conditions to the leaders in full view of the masses".

It is this strategy that is embodied in the UAF, as presently constituted.

We also appreciate that fascism has to be understood as being primarily based among the radicalised middle class. We don't fall for the myth of 'white working class' susceptibility to fascism – a line of argument that allows the EDL to attempt to pose as a voice for a working class supposedly 'ignored by multiculturalists'.

The leadership of the EDL is thoroughly petty bourgeois in the classic sense. For example, a journalist working undercover inside the EDL described them as 'little business types'. Their street leader, Stephen Lennon, owns a video store. Many of the football hooligans that have been attracted to them are from this class. But we can't be complacent because as they have grown, in fits and starts, they have been able to attract

some working class support.

Our understanding of fascism is therefore rooted in the lessons of Germany when we lost and of 70s in Britain when we won.

We have to build wide support around the concrete aim – Trotsky's 'definite conditions' – of stopping the Nazis organising while at the same time challenging them politically.

In the face of the social weight of the organised working class the Nazis were but 'human dust' as Trotsky put it. Provided we can bring those forces to bear in the struggle today against the fascists we can win. But this depends not just on what we do but also on whether our side is offering a solution to the crisis. The strategy requires not only bringing the working class into the struggle against capital but also winning behind it sections of the middle class.

## Sectarianism and squaddism

The platforms we were able to bring together at the Muswell Hill rally and public meeting were not contradictory in this regard as we always had speakers who pointed to the economic crisis and the role of the mainstream parties and media in whipping up racism. But this had to be done in a way that wasn't reduced to personalised moralistic attacks.

It meant, for example, in Tottenham branch having to conduct careful and considered discussion about how we could avoid the mistakes of sectarianism and squaddism that sees the job of fighting fascism as one confined to those with the 'right' politics and prioritises physical confrontations by small groups on the one hand, and on the other makes the different but related mistake of accommodation – in short we had to consider how we work both with people to our right but also against them.

Both of these mistakes we have seen recently – with the breakaway by anarchists and some comrades at the recent Tower Hamlets counter demo which was ineffective and led to mass arrests by the police; and the equally serious error of the likes of Bob Crow, who in a similar way to how the CP in Germany at one stage raised the slogan of 'national communism' which in effect, despite its intention, appeared to make concessions to the 'national socialism' of the fascists, raises the slogan of 'work permits' to defend the wages of British workers, even though he tried to cover it in a left veneer by at the same time insisting, quite rightly, that nationalism is merely an 'accident of birth'.

Both mistakes stem from a similar outlook: an unwillingness to take anti-fascist and anti-racist arguments into the class.

Take also the peculiar and artificially concocted case of the tiny splinter formation that emerged in Tower Hamlets in the shape of the 'Sisters against the EDL', set up by ex and present members of the SWP.

This feminist splinter group inserted into a context where we had won an argument over a number of years for mosques to hold mixed anti-fascist meetings of men and women, consciously set out to divide our forces into men and women in the name of gender equality!

More than that, the politics of its architects relied dangerously on the Islamophobic idea that somehow the Muslim women of east London were presumably more oppressed than other women and needed their white sisters to come riding to their rescue.

It also confused those working with us who may have seen this development as in some way connected to the SWP and UAF. It is one thing to intervene in a genuine current of self-organisation by an oppressed group but for revolutionaries to set up such an organisation in order to confront a supposed 'male-dominated leadership' is a mistake. This was made abundantly clear by the small numbers they attracted on the day.

Again, as Trotsky underlined, by starting from our general politics we can arrive at the correct orientation, and in that sense in Britain today we are in a far better position in that the dominant approach in the movement, despite its contestation by forces to our the right, is the correct one.

A number of other developments need to be noted in the current situation. Firstly, the hard racists are not popular and can be isolated, as shown by the Muswell Hill attack and the magnificent response. Further, multiculturalism is not just a fact – it is something a majority of people want to defend, although Islamophobia can threaten to undermine this, so we cannot be complacent.

The perspective the party has argued for in the anti-fascist movement has been vindicated by events and allows us to orient confidently in the future with the expectation of being able to mobilise the anti-racist majority, even if we are not in all instances successful. And by isolating the fascists politically it will make it easier to hammer them on the streets.

There is nothing inevitable about the rise of fascism in the midst of capitalist crisis, or its defeat. The speed at which the EDL, who previous to Woolwich were on the defensive, were able to get people onto the streets was worrying but equally impressive has been the overall success of the UAF around the country in bringing forces together to confront them. The EDL's 'big one' in Tower Hamlets saw them mobilise only around 600-700 supporters against the 7,000 on our side.

Success, therefore, over the short and long term depends on the nature of the political perspective that wins the day in the anti-fascist movement and the state of the balance of class forces.

## Revolutionary jump

The role of revolutionaries is crucial to the success of the anti-fascist movement. In order to be effective we have to be disciplined by our understanding of our strengths and weaknesses so that we act in a unified manner, especially in the face of the enemy in the guise of both the fascists and the state.

We need a strong SWP to put the argument against the capitalist system that keeps regenerating the basis for fascism. UAF is the shield and the SWP has to be the sword that cuts away at the basis for fascism by leading in the class. As we argued earlier the situation in the class struggle helps to shape the fight against the fascists. A confident combative class makes our task immeasurably easier. The past shapes the future so it matters what successes, or mistakes, we have made historically in how we position ourselves in the present. The failure of the German CP to get their orientation right made it harder for them to give a lead when circumstances offered greater revolutionary promise after the Wall Street crash of 1929. Trotsky uses the example of someone trying to jump over an approaching obstacle: a 'running start' is required, but it should be started not too early and not too late. The obstacle he had in mind was the task of achieving the proletarian revolution. He argued in 1930 that the German CP in its ultra-left 'third period' had been on one long run to the proletarian revolution when circumstances were not conducive. Tragically, this meant that when the time to actually embark on a running start – in order to make a 'revolutionary jump' – the party was exhausted and its cadre disorientated; the SPD workers had learnt to be wary of the CP's previous adventurism. Nevertheless, Trotsky still insisted there was time for the revolutionaries to correct these errors, but as we now know it was not to be.

We need to be part of the militant minority in the class trying to raise the confidence to fight on our side. By delivering real gains in the class struggle over who pays for austerity we undermine the potency of racism. To defeat the fascists we have to both be the best anti-fascists but also the best class fighters. We are part of the working class not elitist purists shouting on the sidelines at an irredeemably racist 'white working class', as some would have it.

For sure not everything is rosy in our garden. We are weak further north of Haringey – in Edmonton, Enfield, Barnet, Finchley, Hertfordshire etc, and this is a problem we need to address. But we have succeeded in starting to bring wider forces into play, and have also seen newer party members taking up a leading role in our anti-fascist work. Anti-fascist and anti-racist work is for many comrades, including the authors of this contribution, a key reason why we became revolutionary socialists.

We should not be afraid of recruiting to our party. On the contrary it is essential that we do in order to strengthen the strug-

gle against fascism – and the class struggle against the capitalists who, in more desperate times for them, may turn to the fascists to save them from the wrath of an insurgent working class, as they are in Greece today.

**Michelle & Julie (Hornsey & Wood Green), Gary & Vivek (Tottenham)**

## THE BEDROOM TAX & BENEFIT JUSTICE

The SWP's leading role in the formation and development of the anti-bedroom tax and benefit justice federation has played a significant contribution to the struggle in opposition to the vicious assaults on our class. The campaign's strength lies not only in the value of vibrant united front work rooted in the working class but also in relationship to the resistance of women's and disabled people's oppression.

The intervention of the SWP in the bedroom tax campaign has been critical. Lenin argued that the spontaneity of the masses' struggle must be supplemented by the consciousness and organisation of a party. Our role in this struggle has been key in 1) pulling together spontaneous and disconnected campaigns 2) building local grassroots campaigns. In both respects this has largely involved relating to members of the class with no previous experience of political activity. Organising on a national level including two successful benefit justice summits attended by more than five hundred people from England, Wales and Scotland has given confidence to and empowered local campaigns, provided for the sharing of resources to even out growth and ensured stronger, nationally co-ordinated activities.

Our politics have been able to shape and sustain the campaign, for example being able to give context to the dismissal of the application for judicial review to ensure it did not have a demoralising effect, imparting an understanding of the role of the courts in relation to government policy and emphasising the importance of mass resistance as a way to win.

Through our politics we have been able to identify and argue for a focus on the bedroom tax as the weak link in the long chain of callous and cruel attacks on social security. Unlike the poll tax which was universal, the bedroom tax only affects a particular group of people comprising around 660,000 households in total. The majority of these are disabled, with many already hit by cuts and there has already been at least one suicide as a direct result.

It is also completely unworkable and has been shown to cost millions more to implement than it will save with the burden

falling on housing associations and local authorities. It simultaneously exposes both the sheer brutality of and the ideological agenda at the root of so-called welfare reform. The bedroom tax is almost universally hated and can be used to show up the unfairness of the whole raft of welfare reforms. A recent social attitudes survey confirmed that public opinion is indeed turning.

Crucially, the anti bedroom tax and benefit justice campaign has been led by and rooted within the working class. Actions like UK Uncut's Evict a Millionaire and The Mass Sleep Out have been useful for galvanising public anger over the bedroom tax but relatively few people affected by the bedroom tax participated in them. Our campaign was involved in these actions, most notably playing a leading role in organising the protest at Iain Duncan Smith's mansion, but while providing a useful counter to the relentless Tory propaganda in the final analysis such stunts are substitutionist.

It is through the local grass roots bedroom tax campaigns that we have seen the most vibrant demonstration of the creative power of the working class, from the thousand mothers march to family placard making days to the sharing of powerful testimonies in front of UN special rapporteur, Raquel Rolnik to court protests. Where local campaigns have been at their most organised we have seen evictions halted and councils pushed to take up a policy of no evictions.

The anti bedroom tax and benefit justice campaign has provided an opportunity to relate to and recruit from new layers of the working class through focusing on an issue that has driven many to political activity for the first time. As Lenin said, "It is of great influence on what closely concerns the masses, how they can be won, how made enthusiastic" (Clara Zetkin: Lenin on the Women's Question<sup>17</sup>). In particular middle-aged women have come to the fore of the campaign as inspirational, hard-working and determined class fighters.

Many are carers or disabled people or both, thus highlighting issues around social labour. The lived experiences of these women are testament to how, as Lenin saw in 1913: "Present day capitalism conceals within itself numerous cases of poverty and oppression which do not immediately strike the eye... Millions upon millions of women in such families live (or rather exist) as "domestic slaves", striving to feed and clothe their family on pennies, at the cost of desperate daily effort and "saving" on everything except their own labour" (Lenin: Capitalism and female labour<sup>18</sup>).

The SWP's role in the anti bedroom tax and benefit justice campaign is also of significance to the development of an

understanding of disability as a form of oppression within the party, about which there was some debate within last year's internal bulletins. Some of the measures it was agreed to undertake such as a day school on disabled people's oppression have not yet happened. This has been due to a concentration of effort on building the anti bedroom tax and benefit justice campaign. through involvement in active struggle alongside disabled people party practice has evolved with respect to access and inclusion. Comrades are now in a position of championing access within initiatives such as the People's Assembly where an understanding of inclusion principles is generally less advanced. Increased engagement with politicised disabled campaigners with a broad range of different impairments has provided a useful experiential basis on which it would nevertheless be valuable going forwards to embed a wider understanding of disabled people's oppression and in particular the social model of disability among comrades more generally.

As we go into the autumn the question of the bedroom tax and welfare reform looks set to become sharper. Shadow Work and Pensions secretary Liam Byrne has now publicly called for the abolition of the bedroom tax and with Labour on the look out for ways to put a dividing line between them and the Tories in the run-up to the next general election there is growing speculation that Ed Miliband will announce a commitment to scrap the bedroom tax – should Labour take this step it will be in no small part due to the pressure from those tirelessly resisting the bedroom tax and a significant victory for both the campaign and the wider battle against benefit cuts.

Meanwhile the first round of Discretionary Housing Payments are coming up for review, those who have been trying to pay the bedroom tax are running out of things to sell and out of options and those who haven't been paying are starting to get summonses. As a party we need to ensure we can continue and build on the existing campaign as the level of struggle rises. Resistance to attacks on benefits will be a thread running through both co-ordinated civil disobedience and strike action planned for the autumn. It is key that we provide the leadership to join up community and industrial action.

**Ellen (Croydon)**

## FOR A UAF FRACTION

2013 has been marked by a steady drip of mainstream racism emanating from mainstream parties, and an attempt by the EDL

to regain their strength post Woolwich. The SWP correctly mobilised for counter EDL demonstrations in the aftermath of the Woolwich killings, and more recently in Tower Hamlets. We have also insisted that in the current context of recession, war and racist scapegoating, our anti-fascist work will be need to be strengthened, despite the decline of the BNP and the inability of the EDL to capitalise on islamophobic sentiment post-Woolwich.

This IB piece proposes a fraction for our anti-fascist and anti-racist work, as outlined in the democracy commission. The purpose would be twofold: Firstly, to spread experience of where we have managed to create vibrant and viable local UAF groups. Secondly, to give comrades a chance to address some of the political questions that have arisen from our anti-fascist work. These include the problems posed by police repression of anti-fascism, how we can defend of the 250+ arrested in Tower Hamlets, how we relate politically to new anti-fascist networks that have drawn in much larger numbers of young people than UAF has been able to mobilise. We also need to address the issue of the differing roles of UAF and revolutionary socialists within it. The rise of UKIP and the mainstreaming of racist ideology has led to calls from our leadership for a 'stand up to UKIP' press campaign- what has come of this? What is the reasoning behind it? What can we do to help?

We face the pressures of being we face as both coalition builders and revolutionaries within UAF. These pressures are the sign of a real campaign, involving real social forces. A UAF fraction will serve to hold each other to account in what will continue to be difficult terrain.

**Robin (Euston)**

## TIME TO DO THE RIGHT THING

*It's quite simple, once it became clear that the organisation had screwed up, all you needed to have done was say, 'the organisation has screwed up'.*

*Then, you could and should have quickly put into place the procedures that people follow in workplaces and announced that that was what you have done. Then you could and should have set up a discussion process which examined why and how an organisation espousing your views on sexual oppression, liberation and equality could have got it so wrong. Then you could and should have continued that discussion on how to get it right in future.*

*We all make mistakes. There is abso-*

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1920/lenin/zetkin1.htm>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/apr/27.htm>

*lutely no reason why the SWP shouldn't have made a mistake. That's not the issue. The issue is how you handle a mistake when you make it.*

Mike Rosen (Open letter to the SWP)

When close SWP supporter and friend Mike Rosen wrote a more in sorrow than in anger, or perhaps more in bewilderment than anger open letter to the SWP it showed just how deeply our internal affairs had not only divided us but also damaged us as a Party in the eyes of many who have supported us.

Since Mike wrote that piece there have been two important developments that can allow the Party to admit 'we screwed up' apologise to the women concerned, show why such a thing couldn't happen again, and finally begin to move on. The challenge will be whether we seize the opportunity to do that, or continue along a road of grudging and belated concessions which up to now has proved to be a path that has satisfied no one and failed to solve problems or heal divisions.

The first is the fact that the second woman (whose very existence at one stage was denied) finally had her case heard. This took an incredibly long time to happen, and had to be forced through against manoeuvring and factionalising by a section of the Disputes Committee, and indeed a section of the Central committee.

It is not for me to make any comment on the outcome of that hearing other than to urge the Party leadership to publish the report in full as the woman comrade concerned has been the subject of truly awful gossip, speculation and bullying, and I believe the report will take the wind out of the sails of the gossipers, speculators and bullies, which seems to me is the very least this comrade is owed.

The second is something I can comment on, which is the report of the commission reviewing the Disputes Committee procedures.

On the whole (with a couple of important reservations) I believe this report should be welcomed. Most of the procedures outlined are a great improvement on what went before.

The Commission makes no comment on the original case, but by implication the changes it is proposing directly relate to a series of shortcomings that occurred in the original case. To list but a few:

*In cases when CC members themselves are directly the subject of a complaint, we think that CC members should not sit on the DC panel at any hearing, and nor should comrades who have served on the same CC as the individual concerned. However, CC members, like any other comrades, may still be called as witnesses by the DC or individuals involved in the hearing.*

The committee that heard the original case had two CC members on it, plus two who

had served on the CC with M plus another former CC member.

*We feel that co-option of other SWP members should be considered more frequently by the DC, particularly when a comrade who is the subject of a complaint or allegation is well known in the organisation. Co-option should also be considered as a means to ensure geographical/gender balances and to draw on wider experience in the party where this is important in ensuring that any process is seen to be fair.*

There were no co-options for the original case

*All parties should normally inform the DC panel of any witnesses they intend to call no later than 2 weeks before the hearing. The DC panel itself may also want to call comrades to speak at a hearing or to answer questions. The details of all those to be called should be passed to all parties no later than one week before a hearing.*

The complainant was not allowed to know the names of the witnesses for the other side

*We support the Democracy Commission recommendations that while direct confrontation should be avoided, the comrade against whom a complaint has been made should normally be in the room during the hearing and can ask the DC panel for the right to ask a question of any witnesses at the hearing.*

There was no provision for the complainant (or anyone she may have wanted to nominate) to ask direct questions of M or his witnesses.

All of these proposed procedures (along with equal access to information which the commission fails to address, but hopefully will consider at amendment stage) would have meant a much improved hearing for the original case.

Lest anyone think that my attack on the original procedures is a factional attack on anyone let me be clear here; the original procedures were largely drawn up by me. At the time I felt them to be a real improvement on what went before, but I have to admit when it came to this case they were simply not fit for purpose.

Nor can I merely claim to be an architect; I chaired the hearing, and did so within the framework of these flawed procedures. By the end I had reached a different conclusion about the case than everybody else on the Disputes Committee panel, but also was increasingly concerned that the procedures didn't work. Immediately following the conference vote I began arguing for a commission to review those procedures.

So I cannot, and indeed have never sought to shirk my own portion of blame for what went wrong.

I long ago personally apologised to both

women, and want to use this article to make that apology public. To the two women; I acknowledge I failed you, the structures failed you and the Party failed you, my apology is sincere and unconditional. To quote Mike Rosen I made a mistake and I acknowledge it, and have done everything within my power to rectify it, in so far as I can.

Now I am asking, urging, pleading even, with the leadership of our Party to do the same. The DC commission's report is an admission 'we screwed up' the findings of the second case is an admission 'we screwed up'. Let us say so, apologise, and explain why it must never happen again.

If not we will repeat once more the piecemeal errors that have got us here.

Just look at the record:

The opposition demand a review of procedures: The CC at first says no, then says yes but only to investigate leaks, and finally without openly acknowledging the opposition was right agrees to a wholesale review.

The opposition says M must not be employed by the Party or hold any position. The CC says no we cannot agree to this, but then quietly tells everyone this will in fact be the case.

The opposition demands the second case is heard, yet only after months of wrangle do they (DC and CC) at last agree the case must be heard.

Ironically M resigns rather than face a hearing, so that the individual for whom some were prepared to tear the party apart in defence of, walks away leaving a trail of destruction behind him.

We have to stop this destructive pattern now, the Party must publicly acknowledge mistakes, publicly apologise, examine how we got here, and explain how we will never get here again. Taking these steps can finally begin to allow us to move forward.

I can think of no coherent political reason not to do so, and to be honest any failure to do so can only be interpreted as an attempt to appease that minority faction in the party whose defence of M at all costs, attitude to the women concerned, and general hostility to anyone raising these questions has left them stranded many miles from our political position on women's oppression.

**Pat (Euston)**

## SILENCE

During the first week in July I talked to four comrades, all on leading bodies of the party, all of whom I have known for at least thirty years. They all asked me not to use their names. They all told the same story.

I believed them. I talked to each of them for at least 45 minutes. None of them had



been in the opposition (nor had I). They had all been involved in trying to get a fair hearing for the second complaint.

The second complaint against M, by a second woman, X, was brought after January. This was a complaint of alleged sexual harassment, not rape.

The four comrades had assumed that there would be a fair hearing of the case. They believed that an organised group, including several members of the central committee, was trying hard to prevent a fair hearing. They thought this was wrong.

The four I spoke to said the CC was deeply split over this, and those who wanted a fair hearing eventually won out. M then resigned.

As one comrade I talked to put it, we have had three factions in the SWP. One was the open opposition. The second was a faction inside the opposition organising for an early exit. The third was the faction for M and against a hearing. What they did was wrong because anyone should have the right to a hearing on a complaint of sexual harassment. It was also reckless, putting the interests of one man ahead of the future of the party.

I have another concern as well. People in the movement remain polite to us individually, to their credit and to ours. But outside speakers almost all shunned Marxism. Our name is dirty. That is a political fact in the world, and we have to face it and deal with it.

At the moment we cannot deal with it. No one from the leadership has responded to Eamonn McCann's devastating speech at Marxism. Worse, no one from the leadership has had the courage to respond to Michael Rosen's open letter. If we cannot reply in public to old and close friends like those two, then our leadership is modelling for the whole membership an inability to respond to anyone's criticism. And shamed silence will finish us a serious force in the world.

**Jonathan (Oxford)**

## THE SWP AND THE INTERNET

1. "Getting it right" on the internet requires people, money and attention. It cannot be done on the cheap.

2. We need a variety of internal and external sites and forums, and these should not all be "uni-directional", from the centre out type websites.

3. Just as there are things we would not say, or ways that we would say them, in an open-to-all campaign meeting that we

would say in a branch meeting ( eg "comrade, you took an ultra-left position in the last UAF meeting" ) and there are things that we might not even say in a branch meeting ( "eg do you think X's partner's alcoholism means that X cannot continue as paper organiser ?" ), there are different standards of behaviour and discipline appropriate to different forums.

4. A Party which does not have internal crises is a sect, so there will be more Party crises in the future.

5. Party members, particularly younger and more recent recruits, will want to discuss these crises on-line, in an immediate and disintermediated manner, in front of the entire party.

6. Existing, high quality, "official" party publications are not sufficient for this purpose in the age of the internet.

7. The Party should have an internal forum where such discussions can be had in a "constitutional" manner. This should be moderated, and have various formal and informal standards of behaviour which will develop over a period of time.

8. There are of course lots of difficulties with such an internal forum, such as security, accountability, unequal access to the internet, leaks, flame wars, separation from real activity, etc.

9. There are technical and procedural ways to minimize these difficulties but they cannot be eliminated. The alternative however, is worse. Not having such a forum means that in the next party crisis people loyal to the party but desperate to express themselves in the same way that they would on any other subject will be driven into the hands of people who are essentially not loyal to the basic aims of the party.

10. Internal forums are not the only new kind of site that we should consider. We should also consider external discussion forums and the effect of wiki-like collective self-publishing techniques ( think Wikipedia with press-button "book" production ) on our concept of a Party Publication.

**Adam (Bury & Prestwich)**

## DO WE NEED INTERSECTIONALITY?

A whole series of new – and renewed – groups, protests and movements have appeared in response to the new sexism, increasingly defining themselves as feminist in one way or another. Earlier this year a compilation of articles was published called *Fifty Shades of Feminism* – there really are!

OBJECT, which campaigns against objectification of women's bodies in the media; UK Feminista, which organises summer schools for feminist activists; and the revival of Reclaim the Night, all draw largely on the "second wave" feminism that characterised the end of the women's movements of the 1970s, but all are much more open and friendly towards the left – and men – than their forebears sometimes were.

On some campuses new FemSocs have begun to revive activism. All these groups tend to focus on body image, sexualisation, porn and violence against women.

Protests have also flared up around specific issues – the Slutwalks, anti-rape protests in India, the pro-abortion movement in Ireland.

Writers such as Laurie Penny, as well as many feminist bloggers, represent some sections of the new feminism. Penny's book *Meat Market* focuses on the contradictory pressures on young women like herself, so sexualised yet so unliberated.

In some ways she draws on radical feminist ideas about "male violence", but she is also hostile to what she sees as the restrictive, judgmental tendencies of second wave feminism – the idea that it was "anti-sex" and had a static idea of "woman" that didn't allow for different experiences and interests.

Here Penny, along with some of the feminist bloggers and students involved in new activism, draws on the ideas of "intersectionality".

This is an approach currently popular in academia, which essentially seeks to understand how race, gender and class oppressions intersect, influence each other, shape the experiences of individuals and groups in society.

For those who have grown up in a post-1989 world in which the "end of history" was declared, Marxism was dead, and identity politics and single issue campaigns dominated the political agenda, this is a positive step.

But I think we also have to look further back for an understanding of the roots of intersectionality and its trajectory. We can best understand the ideas of various new feminisms by understanding the fallout from 1968.

The Women's Liberation Movement at its high point was part of a wider movement

– anti-war, civil rights and, particularly in Britain and Europe and less so in the US, workers' struggles – and ideas around all kinds of liberation abounded. People felt the whole thing was going to change.

When the class struggle waned, the sense that systemic change was possible declined.

Some drew the conclusion that only reforms were possible – many feminists joined Labour parties, etc, and at best looked to a Rainbow Alliance of women's groups, black groups, trade union bureaucrats and reformists.

Others looked to separatism and lifestyle, others went into academia and formed Women's Studies departments.

A consequence of this late 1970s fragmentation was a women's movement cut off from wider struggles, dominated by white middle class women (especially in the US). Black feminists said what about our experience? What about class? bell hooks was a key figure here with her book, *Ain't I a Woman?*

This critique would later be termed "intersectionality" – that the sexism experienced by a black woman is not the same as that experienced by a white woman, similarly with the class divide. It is worth noting that those US socialist feminists who had been shaped by civil rights and anti-war movements bristled at the accusation that they hadn't an interest in black women or those from colonised lands.

However, the black feminists clearly had a fair point. But it also represented a shift from political definitions to identity: from defining yourself as "Marxist feminist" or "radical feminist" to "black feminist". This was part of a more general shift to identity politics, seeing a matrix of different oppressions and forms of domination – class, patriarchy, white supremacy.

In the course of the 1990s another set of ideas was arising in the colleges, also rejecting the idea that complete system change is possible but calling for resistance nonetheless. Post-structuralism, looking to the ideas of, for example, Michel Foucault and later Judith Butler, rejected identity politics.

Black feminists' mistake was to simply create more categories when we should resist them all! But for post-structuralists there is no top-down power structure. This lets rulers off the hook while seeing "domination" and power relationships everywhere – bringing struggle back down to individual relationships.

Both sets of ideas declare there are no "master narratives", all knowledge and experience is partial, limited, and there is no one "truth" or reality. Hence the focus in a lot of recent feminist writings on personal experience and stories.

The influence of both intersectionality and post-structuralism can be seen in the new feminism, which is also part of the general anti-capitalism of the last 15 years. Feminists today who use the term

or at least the approach of "intersectionality" do so because they want to fight the whole system but they think you need to be a hyphenated activist to achieve this: a Marxist-feminist-anti-racist against the capitalist-white supremacist-patriarchy.

There is no acknowledgment of how class – exploitation – can be a source of power; it is seen rather as another source of oppression. Racism, sexism and "classism" are three bad things we should be rid of.

For Marxists class is not simply a burden. Class struggle and its relationship with historical changes in the mode of production is the heart of Marxism – that is to say Marxism is about movement and change, not about simply describing how things are now.

Of course, it is not necessarily easy to convince someone of the power of the working class when their experience is of two decades of relatively low class struggle. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't persevere with the argument.

Recognising that class exists and shapes people's experience, as many activists today do, is not the same as understanding the power of the working class to transform the whole system.

There is a danger, if we too uncritically embrace the ideas of intersectionality, that we give ground to the dominant belief that Marxism hasn't taken oppression seriously. Shanice in her article on the Revolutionary Socialism blog accuses the SWP of not understanding (as an intersectional approach would) that oppressions don't simply co-exist but shape each other – for example that a black woman's experience of gender oppression is different from a white woman's.

She writes that "There are times when SWP's theory of women's liberation today seems to come solely from a white perspective." She then argues that our focus on, for example, abortion and contraceptive rights doesn't take account of the experience of African-American women in the US in the 1970s. I don't know what the response of revolutionary socialists in the US at the time was, but we have certainly argued that we are "pro-choice", which means defending for example disabled women's right to have children as well as every woman's right to an abortion.

A more relevant example for the SWP in Britain today is the particular experience of Muslim women in the face of growing Islamophobia, and we have been at the forefront of arguing that issues such as the veil must be understood from the perspective of the women concerned, against right wing and liberal arguments that would impose so-called "Western values" onto those women.

The fantastic response of comrades in Birmingham to the recent attempt to ban the veil in a college is testament to our approach.

The politics of the revolutionary socialist tradition has been shaped by the real

struggles of real people. This is why knowing our history is so important.

One example of the consequence of applying an intersectional approach to the history of our tradition is *Sojourning for Freedom*, a new book about black women Communists in the US in the first half of 20th century. It is brilliant that their stories be told, but unfortunate that in order to fit them into the author's intersectional approach he refers to them as "black feminists" – certainly not what they would have called themselves, as he points out.

Identity trumps politics and the author ends up rewriting history into a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby the only people we can call "communists" are white men! And the struggles of black women inside the Communist Party USA are made unwinnable in retrospect because of an inherent problem with Marxism rather than because of the political twists and turns of Stalinism.

This static, unhistorical approach misses out how people are influenced politically – so one black woman met the CP because of the outreach work they did, but says she was inspired to join them after reading about the policy of the Bolsheviks towards the peoples of the east during and after the Russian Revolution.

Marxists understand that we all experience life as a complex mass of social relations, and that this shapes our responses. But we also understand the role of political struggle in uniting people with different experiences. So the recent Bookmarks book *Say It Loud!* looks at the fights of generations of immigrant and black people in Britain and how they transformed the working class movement.

We have always focussed not on describing experiences but on fighting for unity in our class – this has meant dealing with the messy nature of being a human under capitalism, because our class is black and white and brown, male and female and transgendered and has all kinds of sexualities and identities.

There is a thirst for ideas that can explain the system that is so obviously broken – we need to fight alongside women and anyone who is fighting, but also argue they should take another theoretical step from recognising class to understanding the role of class struggle in potentially transforming all human relations.

For this reason it is important to understand the direction of travel of those looking to intersectionality. For many young activists trying to understand different oppressions and how they relate to each other it is potentially a step towards us; for those coming from a Marxist perspective and arguing that we need to adopt it, it is a retrograde step that concedes to the idea that Marxism can't explain oppression.

**Sally (Walthamstow)**

## NEW LEADERSHIP, STRONG BRANCHES, A PROPER APOLOGY

The SWP has suffered the worst year in the party's history. We have had to have three conferences in one year, the numbers attending Marxism have fallen by half, and the party has suffered hundreds of resignations. Everywhere in the organisation, we see ageing and decay. If the SWP is to survive, we desperately need to change course.

The basis of survival is at least clear. First, there will need to be a significant change in our leadership: at the minimum it will need to involve the removal of the minority of our old CC who voted against the adoption of the second DC report, and of Alex Callinicos, whose intervention at our January conference ("this is war") set the party up for our last eight months of continuous internal conflict. A new set of comrades needs to emerge, not selected on the basis of how they voted in the last 8 months, but on whether they are capable of moral leadership and of playing a consensus role.

Second, at every level of the organisation, we need to break the culture of "following orders". It was this mentality, that the next rank up of leadership is perfect, which led the first DC into repeated errors. How can you properly investigate a leadership you have been trained to think infallible? The purges which members of our outgoing CC have authorised in North London, Walthamstow, and Manchester must stop. The relationship between the CC and NC, and between each of them and the branches, needs to be reversed. Initiative has to be allowed to come from below.

Third, there needs to be a public and meaningful apology to the two women at the centre of the complaint. After our conference in January 2013, Charlie Kimber wrote to all members of the SWP saying, "We believe that both parties to the case should have their right to confidentiality and their right as members in good standing respected."

Eight months later, no-one can pretend that the situation is still the same. The person about whom the first complaint was made (until 2013 a member of our Central Committee) has resigned from the party, and following a second complaint our disputes committee has found that he has a case to answer on a complaint of sexual harassment. He is no longer a mere non-member of the SWP, and if he wanted to join the party, he would have to apply to join.

The phrase "case to answer" is itself

curious. The former CC member resigned from the party in July 2013, just weeks before the DC that was due to hear complaints against him. A decision was taken, even before the new DC panel had been selected, that the disputes procedure investigating the second complaint would be limited to the two options only of "case to answer" or "no case to answer".

Where an employer investigates a complaint against a worker, or a grievance against a manager, or where a union investigates misconduct, or where a professional body investigates allegations of misconduct casting doubt on a worker's fitness to conduct their profession, in the employment tribunal, or in the family or criminal courts - all of which investigate complaints of sexual harassment - an investigation is not halted halfway merely because the person subject to the complaint says "sorry, I won't attend a hearing". In all these other bodies, a decision maker investigates, and makes a decision as to what probably happened. In all of them, a wilful refusal to attend is taken as a small but significant sign of guilt.

Only in the police, where senior figures are allowed routinely to resign to forestall misconduct investigations, is there a culture of protecting senior figures by refusing to investigate fully when the senior figure resigns, and stopping a decision short of saying robustly, "yes, on the evidence before us, he did it".

The DC recommended that the party apologise to the second complainant because her move to another place of work and to what she complained was a more mundane job with less political content, caused her "unintended but nonetheless real hurt and distress". Our outgoing CC waited a month accepting the need to apologise in these terms. Its apology was partial and expressed its reservations with the DC report.

If the party wants to remove the terrible stain that has accumulated over the last three years, we will have to go further, and apologise properly and publicly to each of the two women.

In terms of the second complaint, the DC did not go far enough in suggesting that the party only needed to apologise for moving her but not for the sexual harassment which was what her complaint was about.

Following the most exhaustive investigation of which the party is capable, a two-day hearing in which a number of witnesses were heard and documents read, the DC found that the former CC member had a case to answer for allegedly sexually harassing the complainant.

The period of time her complaint relates to is one when she worked for the party and he was our National Secretary, the person who appoints everyone else who works for the SWP. Part of her complaint was that it was his role in the party which meant that she was required to keep on seeing him.

There could be no logic to justify say-

ing: "We accept the complaint of sexual harassment has enough merit so that we can decide to place an obstacle on the former CC member rejoining the party, but we do not believe it has enough merit to oblige us to apologise to the woman concerned."

In terms of the first complaint, the reasons for an apology are slightly different. Part of the need relates to our acceptance that we need a new disputes process. In drawing up new procedures the party has accepted that our old rules were not good enough. But those were the rules under which her complaint was heard. If our old procedures need change; it must follow that the complainant was never given what we now consider a fair hearing. On those grounds alone she would be entitled to an apology.

There is another reason. In both complaints the women sought an investigation of what they said was sexual conduct involving the same man. If the decisions had been heard in the reverse order, with the first complaint determined after the second, then by the time the first complaint had been heard we would have already decided that there was a case to answer on a complaint of alleged sexual misconduct.

Anyone who has ever been involved in even the simplest kind of workplace investigation will know what this means. Where a company investigate a worker for two thefts or two assaults, and finds on one of them "case to answer", the second hearing is inevitably more robust. The worker has to do so much more to be heard and believed where at first sight there appears to be a pattern of similar behaviour by him.

The same point applies with even more force in the courts, where what is called "similar fact" evidence is allowed in sexual cases - the similarity of the alleged behaviour justifies placing an extra burden on a person to disprove the case against them.

So the party has a choice. The CC could say now to the first complainant, "We don't know whether all your complaint was true, and in truth we will never have the full answer. But we are serious about our politics, and if there is any possibility at all he did it, that is enough for us, we must and will apologise to you."

Or, if that is a step that our outgoing CC will not take, the new report into the future of the DC recommends there should be an appeal process against the DC's decisions. If this is the only way in which the party will allow proper findings about our former National Secretary, then so be it. To reclaim any scrap of our former standing, the party must revisit the first complaint - and, this time, investigate it fairly and properly.

You cannot re-build any sort of healthy party around an injustice. As one of the steps needed to bring the party's crisis to a conclusion which we can explain to the outside world, the two women who made complaints each require a full, public apology.

**David (Central London)**

## ON FACTIONS, PERMANENT AND OTHERWISE

At the special conference in March I spoke against the CC's 'clarification' of the party's constitution to limit factions to the 3 month pre-conference period. Although I was accused of wanting permanent factions, I in fact tried to argue that the provision for temporary factions in our constitution only made sense if it was possible all year round. Factions were designed to allow a group of comrades to challenge what they took to be a disastrous turn by the leadership. Did we really think such a disastrous turn could only happen in the autumn months, or that it could always wait until then to be corrected?

But recent events in the party have shown the need for a genuine debate about the role of factions within our party democracy. The traditional criticism of permanent factions, which we have levelled against the parties of the Fourth International and their successors for decades, is that they entrench divisions within an organisation, and lead people to put their factional interests before those of the party.

Moreover, progressing within an organisation requires joining a particular faction. A Norwegian friend of mine told me that when he joined the Left Party in Norway he had to join one of the factions, not because he agreed with either of them, but because it was the only way to have a voice.

In this kind of situation, the original political basis for the disagreement fades, and what is left is competing blocks, jockeying for influence within an organisation. Factions become part of the institutional lifeblood of the organisation. They begin to have their own candidates for elections, their own leaders, their own meetings. If you want to get on in the organisation, and have any influence on its direction, you'd better get in with one of the factions. Personal loyalty replaces political clarity.

These are certainly negative features. But on the basis of this description, we ought to admit that, despite banning them, the SWP has had the worst aspects of permanent factions for at least 6 years, and probably longer.

Three times in recent years the organisation has been thrown into deep turmoil due to attempts to defend the role of an individual figure in the leadership.

In 2007, over whether John Rees remained as National Secretary of Respect. In 2009, over whether he remained on the CC. And in the past year (or more) over the continuing role of Martin Smith. As much as there have been real issues of politics and principle underlying these problems, they mainly played out over issues of personal loyalty, what you knew and who you

knew. And most members knew next to nothing.

In each of these cases, networks of allies mobilised to defend the individuals concerned, because they were seen as somehow central to the party's strategy. Meanwhile, different networks mobilised on the other side. Members were, as always, forced into basic questions of who they trusted more, which of the leadership you thought was *lying to you least* (this was certainly the judgement I had to make as a full-timer based outside of London in 2009).

Given the complete absence of accurate information about events, this inevitably means you trust those you have worked closest with, whether it's those of a similar age, or within your factions, or whatever. What you know becomes dependent on who you know, what you believe dependent on who you believe. This gives all the worst aspects of permanent factions – the blind personal loyalties, the entrenched differences, the culture of patronage – without even the political clarity that comes with acknowledging their existence.

All of this is possible because of a basic lack of accountability and honesty within the organisation. The kind of information that would actually allow people to form judgements based on anything else is systematically denied to us.

This was obvious at the National Committee meeting in November last year. Despite an extremely limited amount of information given by the CC, it was clear that many members of the NC knew far more details of the case, and were already prepared for a full-blown defence of the accused.

In the run up to the conference a campaign was launched to try to re-instate him to the CC. On the other hand, contributions to the IB were edited, and the CC refused to circulate a statement signed by 30 comrades making suggestions for changes to the disputes process. The amount of information available was carefully managed to try to ensure a certain outcome. At the January conference we even had the preposterous spectacle of the faction that was not a faction – meetings of CC supporters, from which others (including some CC members) were excluded.

This was neither the first nor the last time this had happened. In the run up to the 2010 conference sections of the CC mobilised secret meetings of supporters to discuss how to defeat the Left Platform (one of which I attended). It has been obvious for anyone who wants to look that similar meetings have been taking place throughout this year, orchestrated by a minority on the CC, with the majority turning a blind eye to it.

It's obvious that our formal ban on permanent factions has not prevented the worst aspects of factionalism from setting in. We need an honest accounting about what might prevent this. We need an end to the culture of secrecy that permeates the

organisation.

I have no confidence in the current leadership to change direction or change course, they have had so many opportunities and squandered them. However, we are Marxists, and we don't think blaming our failings on a few bad apples is ever good enough. It is clear is that our current party structures have not prevented this culture from developing, and the current leadership has actively encouraged it. We thus need to be talking about changing both.

**Dan (Norwich)**

## THE QUESTION OF POWER

The controversy surrounding the Disputes Committee has stimulated a number of debates within the party and has had the unprecedented effect of causing some comrades to openly form a faction outside the pre-conference period, with others leaving the SWP.

It is clear that there are political differences being aired but these have, in my opinion, been hard to follow because have been conducted in the shadow of the Disputes Committee cases which clouded discussion of the underlying politics.

I think that it is important that we feel confident to air our differences within the SWP, in a fraternal environment. That is, after all, how we will develop our ideas and how newer comrades will further their understanding of our tradition.

We must facilitate an environment within our branches, day schools etc, where people can ask questions, no matter how simple and explore ideas no matter how off beam they may seem. We will win some people this way, others will conclude that a Revolutionary Socialist Party is not for them and they will drift away, but will hopefully continue to share some of the ideas that attracted them to the SWP in the first place and work with us collaboratively in united front campaigns. Some may eventually be won to our tradition and join or rejoin.

All this may seem obvious, but recent events have polarized the party and left a number of good comrades on both sides of the argument angry and upset. We cannot afford for this to continue, we have an important job of work to do fighting for our class. We cannot afford to be divided.

To move on we need to go beyond the arguments around the Disputes Committee, but I don't think we can do that until we have had an honest, and yes, very fraternal debate about our sexual politics.

I don't pretend to have the answers, and am certainly not an expert, but wanted to

try and open up the debate.

My understanding of our tradition is that we form sexual relationships freely without the constraints of bourgeois morality. Relationships should aim to be respectful, honest and non-exploitative. We all enjoy sex in different ways and that as long as everyone involved is fully consenting, we do not judge.

However, I think we should acknowledge that power is in play in any relationship and should ideally be balanced between participants.

We live in a society governed by bourgeois ideas and laws. Comrades newer to our tradition may be operating with a different understanding/expectation of the conduct within sexual relationships.

To avoid hurt, upset and possible exploitation I believe that it is incumbent on those forming sexual partnerships to be aware of and sensitive to potential imbalances of power.

It is not good enough to say that we are revolutionary socialists and have no hierarchy just because we join the SWP – we all carry the baggage of living in a bourgeois society.

It is undeniable that, even though we strive for equality between members more than other organisations, there are those with more influence and power.

Imbalances in power risk impinging on freedom and consent within relationships.

I believe that in our organization, those in positions of potential power need to be acutely aware that others look up to them and of the risks that this poses. They should ensure that they behave in a way that does not take advantage of this.

We live in an exploitative, oppressive society which affects both sexes but women more than men. We should be sensitive to the fact that some women, whether new to a revolutionary socialist organisation or not, may feel that a relationship does not meet their expectations or the philosophy of the SWP, but do not have the confidence to challenge this or to rebuff unwanted attention.

Are women's expectations of sex and relationships different now than they were in the first flush of the Russian Revolution?

Are both women and men's expectations of the behaviour of their partners within a sexual relationship the same now as they were then?

When does avoiding moralism and possession slip seamlessly into lack of respect for sexual partners, hurt feelings and exploitation?

I think we need to try to understand the underlying politics which will direct our attitudes to and expectations of our personal relationships so that we can get on and focus on the wider political issues unclouded by the haze around the Disputes Committee and, most importantly, unite to get on with fighting the real enemy, the EDL and this brutal Government who are

intent on making us pay for their crisis.

**Jackie (Tower Hamlets)**

## SWSS – THE LAST SEVEN YEARS

Given all the arguments about the party's student work I thought it might be useful to write an account of my experiences as a member of SWSS over the past 7 years.

The CC has talked about mistakes that have been made in the party's student work but they have failed to specify what they mean by this and seem to have gone for an approach of smashing up the party's student organisation. Whether this was by design or just due to the incompetence of those put in charge of student work is unclear to me. Having been involved in SWSS more or less continuously for 7 years I feel my recollections may be of some use to those trying to make sense of the mess.

My account starts in 2006 a different period than we are in now where the party's main focus was on the dying (but still big) anti war movement and NUS was retreating from its previous fight to stop top up fees.

I have started then since it was when I began University rather than any great significance of the year. It will cover the years from then to the present varying in focus from Oxford, Liverpool, Manchester and back to Liverpool since that is where I have been based. This piece has turned out to be rather long. If you are only interested in the events of certain years then parts of the piece can be read separately.

### 2006-7: The last year of the anti war movement

My first term at University was started by a large demo outside the labour party conference in Manchester. This was Tony Blair's last conference as labour leader and the recent Israeli invasion of Lebanon (and defeat by Hezbollah) and saw a large demonstration outside it organised by stop the war. It was actually before term started at Oxford but was probably the first weekend of term for many other Universities.

I arrived at Oxford eager to get involved in SWSS (having joined party several months earlier at a large stop the war demo) only to find there was no group there Socialist Students being only group. I had limited contact with SWSS nationally in my first year because of this and so my recollections of this year may not be typical of the national situation this year.

The first term was spent initially trying to organise a student respect group helped

by the local branch. Half way through was a national NUS demo. Whilst student now may be regretting paying £9k fees I was in fact the first year to pay £3k fees. The NUS had half heartedly organised a demo 'Admission Impossible' it was built very badly in Oxford and so the coach consisted of a few union hacks and assorted left wing freshers wondering why there wasn't more of a movement.

This demo enabled me to discover there were other SWP members in the University and with other people we met on this demo decided to set up a Stop the War group in the University (something else that was lacking). Being a different period this was reasonably successful managing to pull in a small group including SWP members, socialist students and a few non aligned people (plus being Oxford an anti war Tory).

The second term was mainly focused on building a joint Stop the War/ CND demo calling for troops out and also no to trident renewal which was being decided then. Youth CND had agreed to underwrite our coach to the demo. Building the demo wasn't too difficult and we managed to fill the coach despite the labour club refusing to join our coach and taking their banner there on public transport.

Throughout this period no attempt was made to build a SWSS group but instead unsuccessful attempts were made to get ppl to go to local branch meetings (I'm fairly sure this was a local Oxford strategy rather than the national orientation at the time). Though we didn't know it at the time the demo was the last big Stop the War demo (only flashpoints caused by Israeli aggression have caused matching mobilisations since). Attempts at building Marxism in the University were not that successful and I made a decision to break with the local branch next year and attempt to build a SWSS group from scratch on my own.

### 2007-08: Reorienting after the end of the anti war movement

The strategy at the start of this year was to continue to build Stop the War and set up a SWSS group. I was now in touch with the SWSS office so can only assume that actions were more in line with a national strategy.

The start of the term was marked by a week day Stop the War demo in London (possibly to mark Parliament reforming). Building a weekday demo proved quite hard and over the summer stop the war had lost our allies in socialist students as they made a workerist turn and stopped building in the university. The demo was not a major success (only 2 people went from Oxford) but soon the news broke that Nick Griffin and David Irving had been invited to speak at the Oxford Union (the debating society not the student union).

The attempt at launching SWSS was

also a major failure. A mix up over rooms at start of term and trying to build a meeting on my own resulted in Chris Harman wondering lost around Oxford and not finding the meeting which had only managed to attract 2 people. This severely weakened any chance of launching a SWSS group from the start of the year, but didn't put me off from organising further meetings (either I was quite mad or Rob Owen was very good at persuading me to do things).

The invitation of Griffin and Irving became the main focus for the term. There had been no UAF group in the university but the student union was very opposed to the initiation and a reasonably large campaign was soon launched with support of the labour club.

This period also managed to coincide with the split in respect which presented a number of problems. Comrades in the student office and UAF office kept warning me about the dangers of Socialist Action using the respect split to try and recruit people around me. Given the limited numbers of people around me this proved quite unhelpful advice and the bigger danger of the labour party marginalising me in the campaign happened uncontested.

The UAF campaign went well despite never winning the majority of students to idea of no platform. A pre demo rally two weeks before Griffin was due to talk attracted 1-200 people and motivated sufficient numbers of students to become active in building the demo. The future NUS president Wes Streeting spoke alongside local councillors and UAF speakers.

The day Griffin was speaking saw a several thousand strong protest that surrounded the venue. SWSS comrades from London broke into the venue and held a short occupation of main debating chamber forcing the event to be held in a small room elsewhere ruining the event for Griffin.

Building SWSS through this campaign didn't go so well having very little to start with meant building anything more very difficult. The largest SWSS meeting of that term had 5 people and managed to recruit a second person to the party.

On a national scene we had launched a save NUS democracy campaign in response to proposed changes being made. The split in respect had little effect on student work since student respect went more or less unanimously on our side of the split. The end of term saw a large world against war conference and a reasonable sized student respect conference.

The second term saw less happen. A series of mix ups and small SWSS meetings saw the only other person in SWSS drop out. The stop the war group struggled to find a purpose as the anti war movement was definitely at a lower level now the group had been slightly neglected when building anti fascist activity the previous term.

At the end of the term was an event the Oxford Radical Forum organised by a

first year student frustrated at weakness of the organised left in the University. This was a reasonably big event which had its high points and low points (Peter Tatchell and Dan Randall attacking the SWP in a section on where next for the left was a definite low). The event was however in many ways to launch of SWSS in Oxford since I managed to recruit the organiser of the conference.

The holidays saw a NUS conference where we intervened as student respect (despite Respect having split 6 months earlier and fighting elections as Left List/Party). This conference went well for us winning a surprise victory against the new constitution and doing well in NEC elections. The final term saw a joint NUT/PCS strike against the pay freeze being implemented by the labour government then. Using the Oxford radical forum we were able to mobilise quite a few students to join the solidarity march. We also held 3 SWSS meetings of slowly increasing size the meetings were on working class with striker (6ppl), Egypt and on Gramsci the biggest SWSS meeting we'd yet had with 15 or so ppl. We also managed to get quite a few Oxford students to Marxism that year. The Stop the War group struggled to find any purpose there was some discussion of an anti recruitment campaign to try and get army banned from fresher fair but this generated a strong response from the OTC so was abandoned as impossible.

## 2008-09 : The economic crisis hits

At fresher fair this year we had two stalls one for SWSS and one for stop the war. The start of freshers week saw the crisis really hit with the bankruptcy of Lehman brothers.

This made it easy to sign people up on the basis of the crisis of capitalism we got over 200 peoples details. There was a quite ultra left demo organised by the party invading the Bank of England (or some cafes nearby anyway) which we took 2 new people who promptly joined the party. Our initial meeting was a big success cramming 60/70 people into a room designed for 20 to hear Callinicos talk on why Marx was right about the crisis in capitalism. Future meetings were not so large but we recruited a reasonable number of people that term (4/5 a lot for a group starting the year with 2 people). This period also marked HD taking over the student office and so was no doubt the beginning of a descent into autonomism of the student work.

Nationally in this period we were focusing on Another Education is Possible conference (an attempt at a united front around political questions of education also known as AEiP) as well as more ultra left anti capitalist demos. The AEiP conference was a success attracting around 150 students and calling a demo for free education

in February (the AWL had been running an open letter calling for this for sometime before this event). The second ultra left anti cap demo on Halloween outside canary wharf was less of a success. It attracted several hundred people but was unable to get more than 100m from the tube station due to heavy police presence.

Continuing to build on the ideological crisis created by the financial crisis the party nationally decided to hold an extra Marxism event in December that year. It was a one day event in friend's meeting house. It fell on the last weekend of term for Oxford so was difficult to build for (we only got 4 people, 2 of them non members) but was generally a successful event and managed to pull in a new layer of comrades. One of the non members who went was subsequently to join the party and pay a key role in building the SWSS group.

Throughout the term we got students to join in with Saturday sales with the branch (achieving higher sales than for a while). We also held one joint public meeting between the local and University branches which was successful. Holding a SWSS caucus, a public SWSS meeting every week, and a reasonable level of activity in terms of stalls/demos meant there was not much crossover between the branch and University groups. I also never pushed students to get involved in the branch since it was very weak (so might put people off) and thought more important to build where we were.

At the end of the term we made one more attempt at re-launching the Stop the War group with a focus on the upcoming protest against NATO meeting in Strasbourg the following Easter. We held an organising meeting and decided to hold a public meeting in the first week of term either on the subject of Afghanistan (to build for Strasbourg) or if there were any flare ups over the holidays on that (calling this meeting turned out to be an act of entirely accidental brilliance).

Come the end of term we suddenly became aware there had been significant divisions on the CC and that John Rees was to be removed from the CC by conference. He had done the Oxford aggregate so I was unaware that any arguments along these lines were happening. The fallout was slightly surprising but didn't really seem likely to have that much effect on me at the time.

The Christmas holidays also saw another development the start of operation Cast Lead Israel's assault on the Gaza strip. This saw a massive wave of protests against this in solidarity with Palestine. The weekend of party conference there was a massive demo in London of maybe 100,000 people. Clashes erupted outside the Israeli embassy which lead to Starbucks being smashed and large numbers of people being kettled (I left the demo with a group of SWSS comrades to go party conference and think we were last out before the kettle closed). In

the aftermath of this demo there were large numbers of arrests of predominately Asian youth who were brought up on charges of violent disorder. Stop the War and the SWP failed badly at the time in responding quickly enough with a defence campaign to prevent a reasonable number of them from ending up in jail. Those that had the confidence/ decent legal advice to plead not guilty by in large got off.

Term started soon after this and we had already switched our handily planned stop the war meeting to be on Palestine and managed to get in speakers from the Pal Soc and Isoc (who turned out to be a Tory) to broaden out the meeting. At the time several other Universities had gone into occupation in solidarity with Palestine with a variety of different demands around getting Universities to condemn to assault and provide humanitarian assistance to Palestinian students affected. We held a SWSS caucus at the start of the week and the meeting (which attracted 1/200 people) unanimously voted that we should follow suit and go into occupation. After an hour of discussion afterwards we decided to reassemble 10am the following morning to go into occupation the target being part of the Sheledonian library offices inspired by a report of an occupation of that building in the 1960s.

We easily managed to secure the building we were occupying but made the rather foolish error of not realising we could be locked in the courtyard the building was located in.

We had sent a team to begin negotiations with University management straight away. The occupation itself was quite a major disappointment to me (it turns out all the things we say about spontaneity of people organising were not as true as I thought).

A combination of a poor choice of space to occupy (offices meant hard to have meetings all together) and a blockade by University management meant we lost much momentum.

The negotiations were dominated by postgraduate students with Palestinian nationalist politics and so after 6 hours of occupation we left without a clear victory but promises by the University to look into our demands (we had also not won a commitment for no victimisations of those involved the building had CCTV installed so we were all recognisable). We ended the occupation by marching on one of the colleges demanding they renamed their Shimon Peres lecture series (something there had been protests on the previous term).

Coming out of the occupation a group was established that continued to meet and agitate around the demands we had occupied for. We also managed to recruit a long standing stop the war activist as well as a few others out of the occupation. Nationally there were around 30 or so occupations. We tried to coordinate the different occupations through stop the war which held a national

coordination meeting of the occupations. This was not that successful an approach since the politics of the occupations were not that of stop the war and there was also difficulty in sustaining the movement since many of the occupations hadn't lasted that long and Israel had stopped it's assault before most of the occupations took place.

With hindsight, though we didn't recognise it at the time, this movement of occupations over the assault on Gaza was in many ways the start of the 2010 student movement. The occupations created a large pool of left wing student activists who were interested in more than just solidarity with Palestine.

For example a rival coordinating group of the occupations/ student left was set up by Worker's Power which I believe evolved into national campaign against cuts and fees (NCAFC). Many of those who had occupied with us in Oxford were also involved in climate camp protests and went on to help found UK uncut.

The next national event was the Another Education is Possible demo for free education. Building for this in Oxford was not massively successful since we were focusing on the aftermath of the occupation and didn't manage to convince many of them to come. In the end we had about 10/15 from Oxford getting bus together most not brought by us. The demo had around 800 people in total which for a demo called by the radical left outside of any movement was a success.

The mood on the demo was militant responding well to anti capitalist chants and we had a sit down at one point to block some road or other. Returning to Oxford that evening I was informed by the student papers that Gordon Brown was due in Oxford a few days later and so naturally a protest was called. After a while of not really knowing what to call the protest about we decided to do it on everything.

The protest was a great success. We managed to bring in different groups to protest over different things. We had redundant car workers from Cowley car plant, the occupation group protesting over Palestine, an environmental group protesting against new coal plants, SWSS protesting against the crisis, a refugee group protesting for Asylum speaker rights and probably other I have forgotten. In total were about 4/50 people there. At one point a senior proctor (head of Oxford Uni's private police force complete with silly hats) came over and asked us to be quiet as we were disrupting the prime minister's speech. Naturally when I passed this message on to the crowd people decided to shout that little bit louder.

Probably due to the time pressures of everything else SWSS meetings in this period struggled a bit with numbers. Some of those we had recruited earlier in the year dropped away and though there was a national push to try and have student recruitment rallies the meeting we had only

attracted 10 or so and failed to recruit any more.

The Easter holiday saw several mobilisations. The G20 summit was being held in London and a number of mobilisations were held around this. The TUC called a march which attracted 20,000 or so on the Saturday (I didn't attend). Then on the Wednesday there were two protests one organised by Stop the War focusing on Downing Street the other a more general anti capitalist protest with 4 feeder marches aimed at the City of London.

Due to a focus on internal arguments the SWP messed up these protests and prioritised the stop the war protest (which attracted 3,000 or so) instead of the much more radical anti capitalist protests (I was with the majority of the student cadre at NUS conference in Blackpool so missed both). This protest attracted 10,000 and was very radical mobilisation attracting mainly young people from outside the existing left. The police reacted violently kettling the protest and killing Ian Tomlinson. The next weekend was a stop the war protest against NATO summit in Strasbourg which Stop the War took 3 coaches nationally to. There were 5 of us from Oxford at the protest.

In the aftermath of these protests there were various arguments in the party about how we managed to miss the anti capitalist protests. My analysis at the time was that it was due to the weakness of the student fraction organisation. If I had not been at NUS conference I would have prob organised a 20/30 strong Oxford student block on the anti cap protest I knew it was going to be the better protest but was never asked my opinion (many others in SWSS must also have been of the same opinion).

This period also saw a number of industrial battles. The first non battle was the sacking of all the agency staff (several hundred people) at the mini plant in Oxford. The SWSS group and much of the left in Oxford responded by organising leafleting of the plant and a protest at the gates. We held a small joint meeting with workers fight a tiny group that spent all it's energy leafleting the car plant every week.

This managed to attract a 6/7 workers from the plant but in the end it came to nothing as there was no move to occupy which we were arguing for (the union had agreed to the sackings in order to protect the core full time staff). We managed to get many students down on several mornings to leaflet the plant.

Over Easter a more successful struggle happened in London where Visteon workers occupied. Then in the final term there was a demo called by Unite to save the British car industry.

We mobilised for all non London students to go to this (it clashed with a Palestine demo in London). Oxford SWSS sent about 8 people I was too busy with my final exams to go. There was a lot of cross class collaboration by Unite at the demo so it didn't amount to much. On top

of all of this was the Lindsey Oil refinery dispute (British jobs for British workers) SWSS groups across the country went down to picket lines to argue about this which along with rest of party was reasonably successful.

During this the democracy commission was meeting. Out of this came a call for a stronger fraction organisation of students and setting up of a fraction committee. I linked in the mistakes over the Stop the War v anti cap protests and our failure to build a national movement out of occupations to weakness of national structure saying "I think the student section should be encouraged to be a slightly more autonomous of the party. Currently due to high turnover and inexperience of student comrades the student office has a much more influential role in SWSS than the office has in other sections of the party's activities. Whilst this is often very helpful it does have problems, such as weakness of any national student united front activity, due to lack of leaders outside of office. There was a recent move to develop a federal student committee which I thought was a positive move in developing new leaders amongst the student cadre". Points I think are still valid to make today since the problems I describe were never overcome.

The year had seen many ups and downs and had seen a lot of different struggles. The SWSS group had gone from being just me to having 6/7 comrades building it and being able to pull in much wider forces. A combination of recruiting a key second person at the right time and responding to the explosion of the financial crisis with hard left rhetoric and ultra left anti cap demos. This enabled us to win a large audience amongst students radicalised by the crisis.

Before I move on to the next year it is worth recounting that several struggles happened outside of term time that summer. The occupation of Vestas wind turbine factory a previously un-unionised plant where struggle occurred due to large intervention of outside socialists (including many in SWSS and SWP). There was also a UAF protest that finally shut down the BNPs annual festival a source of local demos over the years (in response to them getting two MEPs elected that May).

## 2009-10: Fighting the rise of the fascists

The next September I moved back to my hometown to become organiser in the Liverpool district. There was no SWSS group here before I started so my knowledge of the national SWSS picture for this year is fairly reduced.

There were a few student members in Liverpool scattered between the two Universities, there was also a student anti fascist group that we had been active in. Our strategy for the upcoming term was to hold SWSS meetings to try and build a

SWSS group and to intervene and build the anti fascist struggle. The fact that there was an upcoming EDL demo in Manchester (their first outing into the North) in October added extra impetus for this.

Building for the demo was a success. Two coaches went from Liverpool one from the University and one from the local town. The demo itself was quite a surprise. This was the biggest EDL demo outside of Luton to date. We outnumbered them and were kept apart by lines of police but this was the first sign the EDL were here to stay and we needed to seriously respond to them (they had held two very small demos in Birmingham that had been failures for them).

Another focus for anti fascism for us was Nick Griffin's appearance on the BBC's question time program. Attempting a national mobilisation for that was more difficult (only managed to get one student down to this). The demo itself was very militant and after hanging around for most of the day various attempts were made to storm the studio some people getting inside the building.

In terms of building SWSS things went less well. After a successful initial few meetings the group failed to recruit anyone and so limped along quite weak. This led someone we had recruited from labour at Marxism to drift away leaving few reliable members. The NUS called a series of local demos over education funding then. The largest being held in Liverpool and attracting 2/300 people but nothing came out of this.

The BNP in Liverpool ran a campaign against our Saturday sales for a while turning up in force on two occasions and isolated individuals a few more times. This period also saw a second another education is possible conference (which no one from Liverpool went to) and a national stop the war demo (we took a 2/3s full coach from Liverpool to that with one or two students). Something that was more of a focus was the postal strike going on at the time.

We attempted to build support for the strike among the student body and did manage to get students to the picket line. The strike was sold out by the CWU which led to the President of CWU resigning/ being expelled for backing the sell out. It also led to the closure of the sorting office in Liverpool which was a union strong point and had seen several unofficial strikes.

By the end of the first term all our activity on campus was focused on building the anti fascist group which was reasonable successful though didn't manage to build out of the anti EDL demo in Manchester as much as we might have hoped.

January saw me us building for right to work conference in Manchester (attempt to get students from Liverpool to that were not massively successful) and me getting sacked as an organiser for being fairly rubbish (I was). This led to the complete collapse of the SWSS group and the only

activity on campus was building for anti EDL demos. The demo in Leeds was a Yorkshire only mobilisation by the party so while some of the group went I didn't. There was also a protest in Stoke where we were hopelessly outnumbered (4 of us from Liverpool joined counter protest of 2/300 against a much larger EDL presence).

In response the party called a national mobilisation in Bolton against a planned demo there. Students from across the country came to that. We took 2 coaches from Liverpool again. The demo was not the success we hoped for. Numbers were fairly even and we suffered mass arrests (including me) following attempts to actively confront the EDL. The party's response to this was mixed. Poor planning for this eventuality in advance meant that many comrades were bullied by police into accepting £80 fixed penalty for public disorder (that was never offered to me). In the aftermath though a very successful defence campaign (Justice for Bolton) was organised UAF/ Manchester SWP which saw everyone that took part get charges dropped or found not guilty and three people successfully suing the police for injuries received that day.

Nationally I'm unsure what SWSS was doing in this period. AEiP was dropped due to it not really doing anything and the Education Activists Network was set up in London to build for student support of strike action by staff at Kings. This was then branched out to a national initiative. The rest of the year saw the election of the coalition government and the recruitment of one of the activists from the anti fascist group to the party (at an anti Tory riot organised on facebook that naturally never happened). More things may have happened but I was less involved in politics at this point.

## 2010-11: The year of Milbank

September saw me moving to Manchester to do a Masters so my account leads from there. Manchester had a much stronger SWSS group than either Liverpool or Oxford had done. With the new coalition government our national focus was on building a strong anti Tory/ anti cuts movement. The imminent release of the Browne review into higher education funding meant we all knew there was going to be a fight on this issue.

Starting the term we had a number of focuses. The main ones were building the SWSS group, activity within the student union anti cuts campaign and getting students to the Tory party conference demo. Building SWSS was reasonable successful, we achieved the typical 300 sign ups at fresher's fair, had big first meeting and managed to get a full coach of student to the Tory party conference (in Birmingham) on one of the first weekends of term. We also built the student union anti cuts meetings which were building for the NUS demo later in the term and took part in activity



from there.

In this phase of the anti cuts meeting we were very successful. We had weekly public SWSS meetings of 40/50 people and caucuses of 8 or so. We had twice weekly stalls on campus meaning many people saw us as being the ones building the movement. We were also arguing for a strategy of occupation for the student movement not immediately but as something that would inevitably happen. The SWSS group was able to recruit on the basis of being the best/only activists against the cuts and immanent fee increases.

In the build up before Milbank there was an Education Activist Network conference in London. We had managed to persuade the SU to pay for a coach to this but struggled to get any students outside of SWSS to go. The coach was filled with comrades from Leeds and Liverpool I can't comment on the conference as I wasn't there seeing little point in a conference in London in a very busy term for other things. We also had a national UAF demo in London a failed attempt at broadening out UAF the turn out from Manchester was poor due to "bending the stick in too many different directions it ended up getting mangled" in the words of a comrade at the time (otherwise known as lack of time and not prioritising that demo). The demo itself was reasonable sized and appeared to work for people in London just not something people saw the point in travelling to.

The NUS demo 4 days later is something that will go down in history. We had 14 coaches from Manchester. Comrades had been carefully split up to be on different coaches to maximise our paper selling operation though we couldn't cover them all.

The demo itself was massive and traffic delays meant our plan of forming a Manc SWSS bloc on the demo failed. My initial thoughts were of disappointment since demo was big but little seemed to be happening as we marched away from Parliament. We saw the autonomists from Manchester head off to occupy the Lib Dem HQ and continued on. Reaching Milbank more exciting things so we led the half formed SWSS block we had to the front and found that there were comrades already inside occupying the entrance.

Lacking anywhere else to go we played push and shove with the 12 police officers there for a bit before the glass door shattered and we could all get in. Some more smashy smashy happened before I left to go and sell papers on the stall outside. We then left to get the coach home. Massive traffic jams in London meant that we had spent 2 hours walking down the coach arguing with people about whether smashing up Milbank was a good thing or not before we had got 2 miles away from it (or so it seemed). The consensus was that the demo was good but there were quite a few ppl at that point worried we would have put off people with our violence.

Correctly judging we had a massive opportunity ahead of us we pushed for an immediate anti cuts meeting the following day which the union promptly called. The main post demo meeting which had been planned advance was the following Monday (the demo was on a Wednesday). That meeting we initially faced lots of arguments about whether we should distance ourselves from the throwing of fire extinguisher off Milbank tower. Then we called a vote for occupation and lead most of the meeting out to occupy the Universities offices. This occupation lasted a few hours and involved 40 odd people.

The call had gone out for a day of action on 24th November. We caucused over the weekend to come up with plan for a march around Uni with plan for larger occupation on that date. We then changed this plan at the last minute to marching to town in order to work with ppl with other occupations more. The meeting on Monday attracted 200 maybe and was split up by union exec into working groups for different things. Having sufficient numbers we could cover most of the different groups all arguing for the same plan.

When the groups came back again we managed to push for a vote on calling a demo according to our plan which was unanimous. Throughout we had to arguing strongly against the autonomist consensus/people going off and doing their own thing model of organising being pushed by the SU sabs. We also planned a second occupation in the run up to the demo to help build for it. It was noticeable by this point the argument about fire extinguishers had gone since ppl had discovered from their experience no one cared and were mainly glad someone was fighting back.

Our SWSS meeting that week on the topic of violence turned out to be not to have arguments on it that we expected. The occupation planned for Monday the following week turned into a banner painting session in the foyer of the Uni's largest lecture building not having numbers to go into a lecture theatre. We turned this into our base of activity for the next three days but thankfully never had to sleep there.

The 24th November day of action saw widespread college walkouts. In Manchester 3/400 very excited college students lead out by comrades arrived at our assembly point 1 hour early.

Numbers swelled as student from other colleges and the University joined us. There were prob several thousand in total larger than we had expected and certainly more than the police had. They promptly pressured the Student Union (with my agreement) to change the demo finishing point on the basis we would not fit in planned place. Lacking a PA at this end (we had sent one to end for rally) and being one of 6 Stewards there was no way to communicate this change of plan to the participants. When we reached the city centre and the police changed the route of

the demo people reacted angrily and soon the demo split in two with half following the initial route and assembling at the town hall.

A few hours of chaos ensued with students running all over Manchester as part of the protest. We then decided to push for a return to campus with a plan to occupy and end the demo on a good note. The Uni had managed to realise our plan though and locked down our primary target. After more chaos a small group of 20 managed to get in a lecture theatre to occupy. We were locked in so had no food that night but from a very small start the occupation went on to last for over 2 weeks.

The occupation was very tiring to keep going and as small hard to know if was really sensible. It did give us a base to organise, attract lots of interest from the press, gain lots of passive support from non students (we raised over £5000 in 2 weeks to fund people to get to fees vote demo) and lots of active support from college students. Our base amongst University students was weaker than we would have liked (the SU had policy to support occupations so no problems from there). The activity we organised from occupation was constant postering to get in more people. We held events at various times (but we were locked in from 6pm every night when building closed a major problem for us). There was also a lot of leafleting, banner making, banner drops and lecture shout outs. Various comrades did collections for us and got student to speak at union meetings. There was a further day of action the following week with more walkouts by college students though a slightly smaller demo than the previous week.

National in this period there was various coordination activities between the occupations. I went over to visit Leeds occupation (where they were practically having physical fights with autonomists) and we held a national coordination meeting in London. In addition there was another education activist conference (which I didn't go to as it was in London).

There were a number of problems with the SWSS strategy in this period. Part of it was that the structures of SWSS were completely unable to cope with high level of activity and there was not enough discussion between comrades in different places.

Like we had contact with different occupations through Skype calls many evenings in the occupation but no horizontal communication in SWSS.

The lack of a named student committee which could have supported student office meant the student office was left struggling to keep in contact with all the groups. I feel as a national force in the student movement we did punch below our weight at this point.

The other problem we had was lack of clear strategic direction. When leading a movement (which SWSS was in Manchester) which we know can't win (workers

needed to move to break Tories and no chance of that happening in a 2 week time period) there are various problems. We just pushed at being best activists and trying to turn people around us into better activist to build the movement bigger and better.

In keeping with the party's old maxim "keep it broad; keep it radical". Conversations at a later date indicated there was a different strategy in the heads of those of the student office that involved pushing at more ideological questions about what was happening to education. I was unaware of this at the time possibly due to me being relatively hostile to the student office at the time cos they weren't pushing for action that could win.

Occupying a University is something that drains energy a lot from people having less hours of sleep, eating worse food and being locked in constant battles with autonomists (we initially won them using weight of numbers in Manchester but don't think people were so lucky elsewhere). This affects your ability to think strategically about what is happening. We did manage to recruit quite a few people and could hold caucuses 15-20 strong on occasion to try and plan interventions. Towards the end of the campaign our focus was on getting as many people to London for the fees vote day as possible. It was clear to many comrades the occupation was becoming a drain on us but we never moved decisively to close it since was the movement to many people involved. We just spent less and less nights sleeping there.

The fees vote demo itself doesn't really need much discussion. We arrived 2 hours late to find everyone in Parliament square with many police lines before parliament. The police were vaguely kettling us from 2pm and can remember trying to push through police to get out, facing down horse charges and the like.

I got forced through the police line at one point by a metal fence and decide to take a break. An hour or so later a crowd from outside forced their way into a kettle by crafty use of a sound system (by in large students would never attempt to push police lines but when police attacked sound system people would push them back). As the news of the vote came through to the demo at about 5pm scenes became more violent. The police were slowly letting people out of a kettle so I left to catch coaches home. We only managed to take about half the people back we had come with as rest were stuck in the kettle still.

The next day as we were taking the occupation down with many people still in London (and someone in hospital with broken collar bone) everyone was knackered and not up for anything in immediate future. Next came the Christmas holidays (and need to do all coursework and revision for exams that had been put off by occupation).

Over Christmas people suddenly had more time and ideological arguments where

had massively all over the internet (even reaching the pages of the guardian newspaper). These were on all sorts of different things but were mainly due to a whole layer of people new to politics suddenly having the time they didn't have during movement to think about what went wrong and why we lost.

## 2011: towards the TUC march

The new term saw two demos called one in Manchester, one in London at the start of Jan. It also saw the start of the party's recruitment drive and the launch of the why you should be a socialist book.

The Manchester one was organised by NUS, the London one by the radical left. The holidays also saw the revolution in Tunisia and start the movement in Egypt. It became immediately obvious that the movement we had previously had gone when a protest over EMA very early in Jan attracted only 40/50 people. This proved the cliché "up like a rocket, down like a stick" was a least partially true though at this stage the movement was not over and had left behind a lot of people who wanted to hit the new term building stuff.

The NUS demo followed immediately at the end of peoples exams so not that much work was done building it. On the day itself it was obvious we had a much larger activist left than we had before but that people who weren't activists just didn't come. There were not significantly more Manchester people on the demo than people from Leeds for example. The autonomists in Manchester had also become a lot more organised. They held a national gathering in Manchester attracting 150/200 people, we intervened for a while before getting thrown out for trying to sell the paper.

The demo started with the NUS president being forced to flee by angry students. The NUS then lead us marching out away from town to a park. There were lots of trade union speakers talking about how great the students were but a distinct lack of actual trade unionists. People listen to a few speakers before getting bored throwing fruit at a NUS vice president and leading a breakaway march into town. The Manchester SWSS group and district committee had wanted to organise this ourselves but had been overruled by the CC/ student office. The breakaway lead to the usual chaotic scenes of students running all over city centre that we had seen on earlier protests.

When term began proper the anti cuts group was getting organised with the wider forces. After some long and frustrating arguments the number began to drop off as people realised the movement wasn't what it had been. We were able to rally people around a perspective of building for the TUC demo and UCU strikes where hopefully the working class would provide support to a flagging student movement. Building SWSS this term proved difficult as people were by in large not moving into

activity so getting comrades to do stuff was harder and less people turned up to meetings. Our two most successful meetings were a meeting on Egyptian revolution and an open debate on autonomism which attracted a lot of the better elements of them and lead to useful discussion.

Also happening this term was the student union elections. After a series of arguments in the SWSS group we agreed to stand me and a non member active in SWSS for positions (running for this was probably my second biggest political mistake of my life after becoming organiser). The autonomists at this point decided the way to reinvigorate the student movement was to go into occupation again. They occupied the same building as before for over a month this term (not disrupting lectures). Making it clear we thought it was a mistake our comrades didn't sleep in occupation but visited regularly to give half hearted support. The group doing this was mainly based on new activist rather than hardcore autonomists but were in a group called Manchester Autonomist students.

The election campaign was just as exhausting as the occupation and politically a lot less useful (I came 5th out of 5). The occupation didn't manage to attract the numbers they'd hoped in but with nothing else to do was continued right up to the TUC demo and UCU strikes preceding it. At one point this term we had a recruitment rally which was quite successful for non students but without the activity we struggled to attract any new students.

The UCU strikes (2 one day strikes in a week) were not the massive success that we had hoped for. The union's action was very weak and we managed to get similar amounts of students to non students on picket lines. In many places the pickets were held together by post grad students. This did not help us in are arguments about importance of working class. For the TUC demo we managed to send 3 coaches of students from the University (about 1/3 being FE students). The demo itself was very big as everyone knows. I operated a 4 line whip on the SWSS group to try and hold people to sell papers at the end as long as possible.

The college students and many others had gone to Oxford Street at this point to smash up shops in the hope of re-enacting the Battle of Seattle (1999 birth of anti capitalist movement) and getting the trade unions to unite with them. They had learnt the (wrong) lesson from Milbank that smashing up buildings started great things. The day ended with the Fortnam and Mason occupation which is remembered but whilst that was happening there were fires and dancing in streets all around that part of London (I had quite a long run to make it back in time for the 8pm coach).

After Easter the SWP suffered the split of our Glasgow SWSS section and in Manchester we also suffered from loss of a few

comrades over a domestic violence/ rape disputes case unrelated to the current mess in the party.

When the autonomists' strategy had failed and people learnt the hard way the working class movement is really really slow to move the remnants of the student movement died. The layer of politicisation thrown up by the movement didn't die so easily. May and June saw the spread of slut walk protests across the country protesting against the victim blaming that afflicts those who are raped. In Manchester it was organised by many of those who had occupied with us and attracted 500+ people.

The rest of the summer term was spent building for Marxism this was not nearly as successful as one might have hoped given the year. This was presumably due to people being less interested as the movement had died. At the end of the term there was more strikes J30 which yielded a large demo in Manchester. The student presence on this was very low compared to earlier demos. The different timings of the student and workers struggle had prevented any effecting linking up of the two different campaigns.

In has been said now that what SWSS did wrong was not make a strong theoretical turn at this point. I'm not sure this would have lead to more success. The main problem we had was how to build out of a dying movement. We had consistently argued that we needed to look to the working class but in most people's eyes we were proved wrong by events. The working class simply didn't move. They came out on one day for a march and went home again.

In order to do better I think we needed a useful analysis of how to cope with drop off in the struggle the rocket/stick quote doesn't really help. Having led a movement into defeat also makes people less likely to agree with you. Arguments we had won (eg over consensus) the previous term we were unable to win know since the movement tried majority voting and it hadn't worked. What we needed was an analysis of where we were and how we could get back to having a movement. I don't think we had one and so lost rather than won people over this period.

## Summer 2011: The riots

While this piece is mainly focused on SWSS which was not organising at the time of the riots due to it being summer holidays I think it is helpful to fit the riots into our analysis of the student movement. The main motor of the student movement had always been thousands of FE students being priced out of education in a time where there were no jobs. In many ways the riots were driven by the same anger.

Going out to see the riots in Manchester I was struck by the similarity with the previous student demos. The age spread of people was similar. There was the same

anger, the same energy, the same lack of clear plan or direction. The riots happening that year was a different section of the youth of Britain joining the fight against the Tories. If the student movement had still be around then who knows if they could have joined forces. Whether we would be able to overcome the raw alienation expressed is unclear but their fight was the same fight of the student movement and their anger was the same anger.

## 2011-12: Trying to restart the movement

The end of that academic year saw the end of my Masters degree. I then went through another short period of limited involvement in SWSS before starting my PhD in Liverpool that December.

This year we began with a fight to get the NUS to call a national demo in the first term. It was hoped this would restart the movement and with the working class moving a bit more at this period would be something that could really have legs on it. This failed to succeed and so NCAFC (an organisation of the radical left) called the national demo instead. In Liverpool the activist left had won half the union exec so there was little difficulty in getting coaches to this demo. Also happening that term was an Education Activist Network conference in London and a Student for Revolution event (a sort of mini Marxism for students) at the end of the term.

Not being a student then I was only limited involved in building stuff. Liverpool also had a much weaker SWSS group and left generally than Manchester (there had been no occupation there for example). Two coaches were filled to the NCAFC demo. The police had been upping the rhetoric and apparently had rubber bullets on standby for use on the demo. The demo itself was 10,000 strong and was very receptive to radical chanting. It didn't quite have the same vibrancy of the previous demos and was very heavily policed (a group of electricians trying to reach the demo were prevented for example). There was also a desire for unity with the working class, students broke out with general strike chants when passing building strikes (since was the ongoing electricians fight at the time).

The demo lead to nothing, there was no real resurgence of the student movement. Many people were disappointed by the turnout and there was no clear national or local focus for a fight then. This was the same time as the occupy movement was strongest but this never really linked up with students since students were no longer fighting. We did have our most successful SWSS meeting of the term around that though.

The next action on that term was the N30 strikes. These were obviously a massive event for the working class. There was

however less of an impact on the student movement. The left responded well but beyond that there was little desire for action from the student body. Student in Liverpool tried to occupy but that only lasted one night after it failed to attract more than 20 people to take part.

The end of that term saw the students for revolution event in London. Despite initial big plans for this we ended up only getting two people down to the event. Partially due to distance partially due to weakness in movement/ SWSS group. The event was successful especially if you were from the south. It was by in large student lead and helped win a generation of SWSS to the party's politics. We recruited the one non member we took from Liverpool to this event.

Overall this term was a frustrating one to be active. We were getting used to operating on a much smaller level than had done previously. It did however prove a successful one for SWSS. We made up for having done badly on recruitment in the previous year and by providing an explanation of where the struggle was going won people. The ongoing workers disputes of electricians and N30 strikes also helped make concrete what we meant by power of the working class. Unfortunately that generation we recruited to SWSS then are by in large the ones who have left the party and set up the Rev Socs but that was not known at the time.

The New Year saw a second frustrating term. There was a very fractious NCAFC conference in Liverpool at the start of term (a campaign we didn't really ever support) followed by a term of no action from the student movement. The NUS had decided to call a student walk out in March but without a movement behind them they could not deliver anything. This was another case of events (apparently) proving us wrong in practice, we had always arguing it was important to get NUS support for things but it turned out they couldn't always deliver in practice. Obviously we also have an analysis for this but made it harder to win people. The SWSS group in Liverpool collapsed at this point due to losing our organiser and comrades leaving the group. Our most successful meeting this term was the one for international women's day attracting 8/9 people.

The only thing left to do that year was build Marxism. This was reasonably successful considering the lack of members in the group. Overall this year was a mixed one for SWSS. Hopes of a revival of the student movement proved unfounded. The strikes early on it the year made it easy to recruit people to the party but there subsequent sell out and lack of more action made the rest of the year much harder.

## 2012-13: The end of SWSS

This time last year SWSS started the year being geared towards a hot autumn. While

I didn't really believe there would be a hot autumn since all was due to happen was NUS demo, a TUC demo and a vague promise of strikes. Two demos and some strikes provided a good basis to build for so started the year with an optimistic plan of SWSS meetings and hope that the NUS demo would prove something to organise around.

The SWSS meetings started off ok and we managed to recruit someone else taking out group up to 3 people. Building for the NUS demo proved to be a different story. The guild of students and anti cuts group didn't work together well and the guild seemed to have no plan of how to involved students in the campaign.

The first demo to occur was the TUC demo. This was smaller than previously but still had a good turnout. Getting students to go had proved very difficult and the Guild was focusing on the NUS one (in hindsight our arguments on the NUS NEC against dissolving student demo into TUC one seem to have been a bad call). The demo was good but not a game changer.

Then came the NUS demo, the turnout was ok with two coaches going. The demo itself was a major fiasco. The NUS true to form decided to march us away from Parliament where anything might go wrong. When the march reached parliament we attempted to form a breakaway protest. The police were however well ready for this and could easily hold us back. More adventurist elements of the student movement actually formed a blockade to stop the rest of the march abandoning us at this point. After a while of fairly obviously pointless push and some furious chanting we retreated over the bridge and continued the NUS march. Heavy rain and a long route away from the centre of London acted to depress everyone. On reaching the end point everyone was soaked tired and depressed and soon retired to the pub. The only people at the rally were angry at the NUS and so occupied the stage to shut down to rally. Getting the coach back to Liverpool I'm not sure anyone was glad they had gone on that demo.

At the end of this term the expulsions of 4 comrades signalled the start of the crisis in the party for me (I understand those in London had be arguing about things for longer). The outcome of the annual conference, where student delegates were by a vast majority in one of the two factions, led to students being very unhappy with the party leadership (and with large sections of the membership too).

From this point on the SWSS group in Liverpool was finished. Nationally the picture was marginally different. The new CC pushed a line that there was a problem in our student work due to a lack of understanding of our politics. Those arguing that it might have been due to issues of rape were a minority of the party and so clearly wrong. This began a period of very poor relations between the vast majority of the

student groups and the national office. People were shouted at by the student office in an attempt to make them do things. Nominations for NUS conference election were mysteriously not handed it without telling people who were running or even making it clear if it was a by mistake or a deliberate plan.

Two major things that stand out as being destroyed by the student office were the students for revolution events and our intervention at NUS conference. There were probably also countless local things that acted to push the student cadre out of the party. Following on from the success of the previous year's students for revolution event there were two events planned one in Manchester one in London. However a decision was made that unlike previously when it was used as a chance to help develop our student cadre by getting them to do the meetings it was decided that the CC should do nearly all the meetings. This created a fairly dull event marked by poor attendance and very poor discussion in the meetings.

NUS conference was always going to be difficult for us this year. While we are proud of saying how well we handled the Assange case in the paper the NUS women's campaign took a different view. The NUS had decided to no platform rape apologists using George Galloway as a high profile example. Our opposition to this saw us coming under strong attack (not being helped by our 3 NUS NEC members all being male). For some reason the student office decided that removing our sitting member for opposition to the CC in the run up to annual conference and replacing them with another man would be a good idea. No doubt in their heads they were standing up to the dangerous feminists. However doing this resulting in SWSS going from topping the block election to only gaining 6 votes and half of conference walking out when our candidate made his speeches. They also decided that our very credible candidate for the FE seat should be removed from running for similar reasons (unfortunately they lacked any FE students to replace this person with, effectively handing the position to the AWL).

The result of this and the party insisting that the reason they disagreed with the CC was due to their failure to understand our politics not due to mistakes in the handling of the disputes case was that many SWSS groups decided there was a serious problem with the SWP. Some of our previous flagship groups in places like Manchester and Sussex disaffiliated from the party and resigned en mass. Many went on to form Revolutionary Socialist societies across the country aiming to build a radical youth movement based on socialist politics (presumably gaining inspiration on the name from our Egyptian comrades).

What could have been done differently to avoid this is in many ways obvious. I find it hard to conclude the actions of the stu-

dent office were not deliberately designed to push people out of the organisation. The new term has seen further changes in the student office, adding Amy L to the student office while hopefully reduce the level of organisational incompetence shown by the student office but if this will overcome any problems seems unlikely.

## Conclusion

I wrote this piece for three reasons. One of which was to show to people what we had, what we have now lost and what we might hope to have again in the future. It has become apparent that many comrades have had very little idea of what students in the party actually did (or how many we have). I hope this gives a feel of what our student work has been like over the last few years.

Secondly I did also originally have the intention of trying to demonstrate to current students the student office has always been a bit useless and people need to work out what to do on campus themselves. I'm not convinced I managed to achieve that aim though.

The final reason is that is it nice to remember the good parts. This year has been horrible for most people in the party and writing this helped me remember the reasons we fight again.

**Dominic (Liverpool)**

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## THE CRISIS AND UNITED RESISTANCE

Exactly five years ago, it was announced that one of the worlds' largest banks, Lehman Brothers, had collapsed. A couple of days later, in order to prevent another crash, the world's largest insurance company, AIG, was bailed out with money from the American state. A couple of weeks after that, what was then the world's largest bank, RBS, was prevented from crashing by a bail out from funds provided by the British state. Strings of bail-outs of core capitalist companies followed on both sides of the Atlantic. Without those bail outs, many more institutions would have followed Lehman into Bankruptcy.

Five years on from those days we are still feeling the after shocks of what was a seismic change in the worlds' financial system.

I think it was clear, almost immediately, to anyone who thought about it at all, that these bail-outs would have to be paid back. The capitalists would re-organise and they would begin clawing back their losses.

And it was obvious, I think, right from the very start, that the bosses would attempt to claw back the loss from ordinary people - from the working class. And, as it turned out, it is clear that they have been achieving that. Real wages since 2008 have seen an unprecedented fall. The wealth of the wealthiest individuals has increased in each of the last three years by over 10 per cent.

In many ways we have been through, and are still in, five years on, the biggest crisis capitalism has ever created.

The political map changed after September 15 2013.

Of course the pressures had been building up way before that with similar but smaller collapses - straws in the wind - like the Bear Sterns and Northern Rock crashes. But the events of late 2008 were on a scale never seen before.

The political magnetic north changed for everyone, and everyone was in uncharted territory. How did we in the SWP respond to this seismic change?

We did not respond in any way to the new political conditions.

There was no re-orientation, as I saw it. It was if the compass we had been using to chart our course before the crash got jammed. 'People before Profit' was the vehicle for building before September 2008, and continued to be the vehicle for a long time after.

The only immediate response was the 'Democracy Commission'. I'm still not sure what that was about, or what it achieved besides wasting six months, navel gazing, when we could have been working out a response to the coming onslaught. When eventually there was a response, it did not position the party effectively. The response was the Right to Work campaign. There is nothing wrong with that slogan, it is correct, but it is not enough, it doesn't take on the enemy head on.

I think it was possible, had the analysis been right, to attempt to build, right from the start, at the end of 2008, a framework that tried to unite all those wanting to fight the cuts (the job cuts started almost immediately - with the closure of many workplaces like Woolworths etc)

People in the leadership were saying then, and still are, that we cannot 'suck struggle out of our thumbs'. No, we cannot, but we can attempt to build a framework.

The Anti Poll Tax campaign was sucked out of our thumb. A framework of resistance was built before any poll tax demands were issued and while a majority of people at the time thought any resistance was futile. (Actually, Socialist Worker was slow then - in getting behind the anti-poll-tax campaign - just as it is slow now in regard to the People's Assembly against Austerity, but more of that just a bit later)

With a framework in place, instead of just arguing from the sidelines that the slogan 'British Jobs for British Workers' is wrong, it would have been possible for us to attempt to win over to the organisa-

tion, workers who agreed with us over that issue.

I heard Tony Cliff speaking at a meeting say 'I love the Poll Tax'. By that, he meant, he explained, that it is an attack on everyone, on every worker. Thatchers' Tories had forgotten that they must apply divide and rule tactics when they try to beat us. This Tory mistake opened up greater possibilities for a united fightback.

In a similar way, the current austerity measures attack everyone, attack every worker and as with the Poll tax, this opens up the possibility of a united fightback. This time the attack is much more severe though and the stakes correspondingly higher.

We should not lose any more time. I don't know why the CC are not leading on the Peoples Assembly, as I think that right now this is providing the framework we need. Yes, comrades will and are getting stuck in and are attempting to build the local facets of the PA just as they did with the Anti Poll Tax campaign, but the lack of leadership presence looks sectarian, and will hold up progress.

The possibility is there now, yes, to suck out of our thumb, to build the frameworks we need, up and down the country, in every city and town, and to link these to where our core power lies, to workers and workplaces in every locality. We can learn how to build a successful fightback from studying how we beat Margaret Thatchers' flagship policy - the poll tax. .

Without a good map or a working compass, it is possible to miss a turn in the road and crash. The party has gone off the road. I don't think it is a fatal crash, but the party is in a ditch. The question is how do we get out of the ditch and begin to build again?

When I joined the party 25 years ago, it had a membership of 4,500.

Over a period of ten years or so the membership grew to a figure of 10,000 apparently. This was good. It was along the right lines. The party was being built.

But now I have heard that a figure of 2,000 may be an exaggeration.

This, obviously, is moving in the wrong direction. What happened to the 8,000?

I think the party is in the ditch it finds itself in, not because of what the CC have done, but what they have not done. They have not built in a timely fashion the right framework for fighting back against austerity and the cuts.

That wouldn't be so bad if they were now on the right track and were, well, if they were not invited on to the PA steering committee, if they were rebuffed etc, winning their way on to it by persuasive argument with the existing PA steering committee.

But the CC seem to be vacillating over the PA. Perhaps the CC are worried that if we were to immerse ourselves in the PA there is a danger of us becoming a 'single issue campaign'. The greater danger is in not getting involved and us becoming sidelined in my view.

I think we should be drawing all the red threads together - UtR, RtW, DPaC, DtRtP etc and the Peoples Assembly. If we are doing that we can get out of the ditch and beat the cuts.

If we don't succeed in developing a framework which will get us out of the ditch, then I think the driver and navigators (the rest of the CC might be better at it) should stand down or be asked to take a back seat, at least for a time, while the rest of the leadership tries to get the party building again.

Of course, the current intransigence, the reluctance to accept that any wrong decisions have been made by the leadership - generally on the party trajectory, and specifically for example on the rape accusations, only makes matters much worse.

We have seen too many splits already. I think the stance taken by the leadership, if not changed, if they don't accept that mistakes have been made and that changes are needed, will precipitate yet another one.

**John (Croydon)**

## **NOTE ON RECRUITING AND RETAINING MEMBERS IN LEEDS DISTRICT SWP**

### **Background**

This note derives from my experience of being responsible for the financial appeal and the re-registration exercise earlier this year. I am prompted to write it because unless there is a dramatic change in the political response to the current crisis we must see recruitment and retention of members in the short term as being measured in individuals not in significant surges; hence the importance of the patient and undramatic work that is outlined below in the Recommendations section.

The appeal but particularly the reregistration have generated a mass of information about our membership in Leeds District. This note was originally written for Leeds members only but it was felt sufficiently important that a revised note for wider circulation would be useful.

### **Reregistration**

Leeds District began 2013 with 201 registered members in the five branches. As a result of systematic contacting we currently have 73 plus 12-15 who are likely to reregister making a maximum of about 88.

This significant reduction of over 100 has occurred for a number of reasons - only

one of which is the internal disputes.

The most important reason is that the database has not been kept up to date for as long as five years. There are members who joined as long ago as 2007 who have never paid subs and no longer have valid contact details; members who cancelled a Direct Debit or Standing Order as long ago as 2007; members who transferred out years ago, etc. *This is not an issue confined to Leeds; for example 32% of members nationally pay regular subs (Conference I.B No 1 2012, p5) and Leeds is exactly in this average with 31.3%.*

Clearly this dramatic reduction in membership is not good news – I certainly didn't re-join the SWP after a long gap in order to precipitate such a reduction.

Concern was expressed in the debate running up to the last conference and at conference itself that some comrades were in favour of 'culling the membership'. I'm not sure if that accusation was actually true but this exercise made every effort to identify members as genuine members – even if they had not paid subs for many years.

'Members' were only deleted when we had no valid contact information for them and there was little if any knowledge of them in the District and these were the large majority; some others had left for a variety of reasons and could not be persuaded to re-join, yet others wished to be treated as a supporter or contact to be notified of meetings; some had transferred out of the district.

Further chasing would be counterproductive; time spent chasing cold names can better be spent following up our contact lists and reactivating reregistered (but quiescent) members.

## Some statistics

	Hare hills	Leeds CC	Leeds MU	Leeds U	Wake field	Total
Reregistered	31	27	5	3	7	73
Subs paying	25	17	3	1	7	53
Not reregistered	16	15	21	25	11	88
Subs paying	2	2	0	2	4	10

The District is contacting the 98 non subs paying members (78 'not reregistered' and 20 'reregistered'); perhaps 30 of these can be converted to subs payers, raising paid membership to 93. If the recommendations below are pursued systematically Leeds should be able to achieve 120 subs paying members by the end of 2013.

## Comments

In this rather dark cloud there are substantial silver linings:

1. We now have a clearer understanding of the resources available to us.
2. As a result we can more rationally prioritise and allocate those resources.

3. Comrades will not be so downhearted if smaller numbers than expected are involved in important campaigns; a recent example being the Moortown UAF campaign where meetings and leafleting had low attendances.

4. The retention of members is identified as a weakness which we must address and some suggestions are made below

## Recommendations

1. Each branch should appoint a comrade to be responsible for updating the centrally produced membership lists. The experience of Leeds suggests that if done properly this is likely to be lengthy task.

2. Each branch should appoint a membership secretary who should be responsible for developing a recruitment and retention plan. An active member should be allocated to each inactive member and ensure that as a minimum they :

i) should be encouraged to pay regular subs – however small an amount. (in Leeds there are currently 20 reregistered members who do not pay subs). Even a token amount paid regularly ensures that contact is maintained and a gesture of commitment is made.

ii) they should buy the paper weekly – for a reduced amount if necessary

iii) they should attend branch and public meetings whenever possible; baby sitting and transport should be provided if possible

Regular contact should be maintained with this group with the aim of reducing it to zero by an agreed date. Progress should be reported on a regular basis to the branch and to District Committee.

3. All contacts generated from our work should be allocated to the appropriate branch where the postal address is known. Where the address is not known the DC or branch should identify a group of comrades to work through the list and where there is a positive response allocate to the appropriate branch for following up with a visit.

## Conclusion

The first thing to state is the Leeds figures seem bleak but in fact they make no material difference to our resources. None of the deleted members paid subs so there is no loss in income; the only exception being a tiny number of subs payers (2 or 3?) who left as a result of the internal dispute.

None of the deleted were active politically – at least as far as SWP is concerned - so no loss of human resources, again with the exception of 2 or 3 who left as a result of the internal dispute.

The only material impact is that we may lose a number of delegates to the annual conference and our membership figures will look superficially as if we have suffered a catastrophic loss of membership; this was part of the reason to 'go public' to the wider membership.

The much quoted strap line of Gramsci's *Avanti* is relevant: 'Optimism of the will, pessimism of the intellect'. In this case pessimism of the intellect means having a clear understanding of the political resources available to us. With this understanding we can address the issue of building the SWP by systematic and focused work as described in the recommendations section.

**Mike (Leeds City Centre)**

# SWP CONSTITUTION

## (1) Introduction

The Socialist Workers Party is an organisation of revolutionary socialists dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism internationally and the construction of a world socialist system.

We belong to and develop the revolutionary communist tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky. Central to this tradition is the conception of socialism from below. As Marx put it, "the working class must emancipate itself, and in so doing emancipate the whole of society". Socialism cannot be achieved by acts of parliament or any kind of dictatorship or minority action but only through the struggles of working people throughout the world.

Since capitalism is a global system, socialism can only succeed through a process of world revolution. We are internationalists who support struggles around the world against capitalism, imperialism and oppression. Accordingly we strive to build international forms of organisation and solidarity. The SWP participates in the International Socialist Tendency, which seeks to bring together revolutionary socialists worldwide.

The SWP is an organisation of committed fighters for socialism who believe that the working class is the only force capable of building socialism in the world. We strive to construct a revolutionary party whose overwhelming majority are workers. We actively support all struggles against exploitation and oppression. Within those struggles we always seek to involve the widest numbers in joint activity, and to advance socialist ideas.

Democracy is at the heart of socialism

and is central to the workings of the SWP. The SWP is a democratic centralist organisation that decides its policies through full discussion and debate among its members and then implements these policies in a united and disciplined way.

The conditions of the class struggle change all the time, and effective socialist intervention requires members' involvement in constant democratic review of party activity and organisation. In order to be effective in both carrying out the party's democratic decisions and testing them in practice, we need to act in a unified way. Once decisions have been taken, all members are expected to carry out party policies.

Decisions by the Conference of the SWP are binding on all party members and bodies. Subject to the sovereignty of Conference, decisions taken by the Central Committee (CC), National Committee (NC) and Party Council are binding on caucuses, districts and branches, and individual party members.

## (2) Membership

A member is someone who agrees with the politics of the SWP (as outlined in "Where We Stand", which is printed in each issue of *Socialist Worker*), accepts its constitution, and works within and under the direction of the appropriate party bodies.

All members are expected to pay suitable subscriptions, depending upon their means, to take and sell *Socialist Worker*, and where possible to be members of an appropriate trade union and stand for the position of shop steward or its equivalent.

Any member over three months in arrears may be excluded from membership.

## (3) Branches and districts

The basic unit of party organisation is the branch. Branches may be organised on geographical or industrial bases.

Branch members meet regularly to determine the branch's work, within the framework of national policy.

Branch members may decide in a meeting to establish some kind of responsible branch structure to direct the branch's work. Such structures can, when so empowered, make binding decisions, subject to review and possible alteration by a full members meeting or higher body. General guidance about these matters may be given from time to time by Conference, the Central Committee or the National Committee.

Where appropriate, branches may be grouped together in a district. As with a branch, district members meeting together may elect a district committee to coordinate party activity across a district.

Establishing a new branch or district, or altering boundaries between them, is subject to the agreement of the Central Committee.

## (4) Conference

National Conference is the supreme policy making body and is held annually.

Branches and/or districts elect delegates to Conference on a basis proportional to their membership, as determined by the Central Committee. Only members of the organisation may participate in the election of delegates. Only delegates may vote at Conference and participate in electing leading committees.

Three months before each Conference the Central Committee opens a special pre-conference discussion in the organisation. Members are invited to contribute written discussion documents for internal circulation during this period. During the pre-conference period, district aggregates are held where CC members present members with a review of the previous year and an outline of party perspectives. These open meetings give all members the chance to discuss party work, raise questions and points of disagreement and collectively assess the party's development.

The Central Committee nominates a Conference Arrangements Committee of up to seven members, to be ratified or amended by a majority of delegates at the start of conference.

The CAC makes regulations and standing orders for the preparation and conduct of conference, subject to delegates agreement.

The CAC is responsible for the conduct of elections at the conference.

Members of the Central Committee, Conference Arrangements Committee, National Committee, Party Disputes Committee and full-time workers may attend Conference with speaking rights. The Central Committee may invite observers to attend conference, and these may be invited to speak.

A Special Conference may be called by the Central Committee, the National Committee (see section 6) or at the request of 20 percent of the branches. The decisions of a Special Conference are as binding as those of Annual Conference.

The procedure to call a special conference is as follows: if a branch passes a call for a special conference the branch must immediately inform the national office. The motion must include the issues that have led to the call for a conference. The national secretary must publish the motion calling for a special conference in the next issue of Party Notes.

The national secretary will also declare how many branches are required to meet the 20 percent criterion.

To call a special conference, 20 percent of branches must pass the same motion to the one originally passed, and inform the national secretary of this, within 28 days of the publication of the original motion in Party Notes.

## (5) Central Committee

The CC consists of members elected by the Conference according to the following procedure:

The outgoing Central Committee selects and circulates a provisional slate for the new CC at the beginning of the period for pre-Conference discussion. This is then discussed at the district aggregates where comrades can propose alternative slates.

At the Conference the outgoing CC proposes a final slate (which may have changed as a result of the pre-Conference discussion). This slate, along with any other that is supported by a minimum of five delegates, is discussed and voted on by Conference.

Between Conferences the CC is entrusted with the political leadership of the organisation and is responsible for the national direction of all political and organisational work, subject to the decision-making powers of Conference.

The CC appoints all full-time organisers. District organisers represent and are responsible to the CC. They work together with the party members in their district to ensure the effective implementation of party policies.

## (6) National Committee

The National Committee consists of 50 members elected at Annual Conference.

The National Committee assists the Central Committee in providing political leadership for the party and reviews the party's political and organisational work between Conferences. Its decisions are binding on the Central Committee.

In the event of a major disagreement between the Central Committee and the National Committee, the NC has the right to call a Special Conference.

The NC normally meets every two months between Annual Conferences.

## (7) Party discipline and the Disputes Committee

Occasionally disputes between members and breaches of normal party discipline may occur. The party has a Disputes Committee to investigate and handle these matters in a principled fashion.

The Disputes Committee's functions are to maintain and strengthen party unity and principle and to investigate complaints relating to disciplinary matters by its members or units.

The Disputes Committee consists of not more than 12 members. Conference elects up to ten of these, and the incoming CC nominates two.

The Disputes Committee is brought in where local structures prove unable to resolve disputes. Where appropriate, the Disputes Committee may arbitrate between members or party units.

Cases are normally referred to the Disputes Committee by the Central Committee. If a member has a complaint against a member of the CC or a party full-time worker, this is referred directly to the DC.

The DC has the right to refuse to pursue complaints if it deems any of the following to be the case:

1. The complaint is frivolous;
2. Based on the evidence presented, there is no case to answer;
3. The comrade concerned is trying to use the DC to win battles already lost in the democratic processes of the party.

In cases of serious breaches, disciplinary measures such as censure, suspension or expulsion may be taken by the Central Committee, or by a district or branch committee, subject to confirmation by the Central Committee.

Anyone who is disciplined and is unhappy about their treatment may appeal to the Disputes Committee, who will review the decision and can change or reverse it if they agree. The Disputes Committee may also take such disciplinary measures as it deems necessary on its own initiative.

Unless the Disputes Committee rules that exceptional circumstances prevail, comrades receive in advance a written statement of the case against them and are present when evidence is given to the DC. They receive a written statement of the DC's decision

The Disputes Committee may co-opt members to serve for particular investigations. The Disputes Committee reports to Conference, where its activities are subject to endorsement or otherwise.

## **(8) Party Council**

The Party Council is constituted of representatives of branches decided on a numerical basis determined by the CC. It normally meets once a year. Additional meetings may be called in case of need by the CC. Every branch shall have at least one delegate.

The Party Council reviews the political and organisational work of the SWP (or such aspects of it as it deems necessary) between Conferences, pools the experiences of the members in implementing the line of the organisation and advises the CC. It has power to take decisions on matters of general policy binding on the CC.

When appropriate, the CC may call national meetings of party members to discuss any aspect of party work and organisation.

## **(9) National Caucus**

Members in a particular industry, union or area of political work are constituted, where desirable, into a national caucus. The establishment of a caucus requires the agreement

of the CC.

Caucus aggregates are held from time to time, either on a delegate basis or otherwise.

Elected caucus executives direct the party's work in the appropriate area within the framework of national policy.

## **(10) Factions**

If a group of party members disagrees with a specific party policy, or a decision taken by a leading committee of the party, they may form a faction during a preconference period by producing a joint statement signed by at least 30 members of the party.

A faction will be given reasonable facilities to argue its point of view and distribute its documents. These must be circulated through the National Office, to ensure that all members have the chance to consider them.

Debate continues until the party at a Special or Annual Conference reaches a decision on the disputed question. Permanent or secret factions are not allowed.

## **Constitutional changes**

This Constitution (along with "Where We Stand") is agreed by conference 2003, and amended by the special Democracy Conference of 2009.

(a) Either document may be amended by a majority of delegates at any future Conference.







# National Committee elections 2013

Every year at SWP annual conference delegates elect a National Committee of 50 members. Its role is set out in section six of the party's constitution (which is in this bulletin). Those elected to the NC also attend Party Councils and Party Conference by right.

We call for nominations for the NC in internal bulletins 1 and 2.

**All nominations must be received by 9am on Monday 11 November.**

Please do not wait to the last minute to do this.

A full list of nominations will be published in advance. This will give delegates time to decide who they wish to elect.

Below is the nomination form. If you wish to stand, please fill it in and return it to me at the national office, or email the required information to [charlie@swp.org.uk](mailto:charlie@swp.org.uk) Each nomination has to be supported by five comrades, and the nominee has to agree to be nominated.

Candidates have to be registered

members of the SWP and up to date with their subs (this also applies to the comrades nominating the candidate). Each candidate should submit up to 50 words explaining why they should be on the NC. Please do not submit more than 50 words (last year the longest one submitted was 174 words – it had to be cut).

At conference, the CC, fractions, student committee and districts can submit lists of recommended candidates to conference delegates.

Nominee.....

Branch .....

Nominated by

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Please give a brief outline of why you should be on the NC (no more than 50 words)

.....  
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.....  
.....  
.....

Please return this form to:

Charlie Kimber, PO Box 42184, London SW8 2WD.

Or email the required information to: [charlie@swp.org.uk](mailto:charlie@swp.org.uk)