

**November 2012** ● Socialist Workers Party pre-conference

# **BULLETIN 2**

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# SWP NATIONAL CONFERENCE, CENTRAL LONDON, 4-6 JANUARY 2013

Dear Comrade,

Welcome to the SWP's Internal Bulletin 2 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:

- IB3: Monday 26 November, 8am
- Please note this is also the deadline for nominations to the National Committee (see back page).

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 £1.25 each. 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.

Aggregate dates are 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 though 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 delegates have increasingly submitted motions. These can be useful but should not, we think, be the main method of discussion. That should stay as the commissions.

The Party Council in September passed a procedure for submission of motions and agreed that motions should have some democratic basis - branch or fraction or district support or come from the NC or CC.

## The procedure for motions

- 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 - 8am, Monday 26 November 2012. 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. We are not going to define exactly what a properly-organised branch, fraction or district meeting is! Let's be sensible about it. It means you follow the normal processes.

- All amendments to motions must be in two weeks before conference - 11am on Friday 21 December 2012. They would need to be passed by one of the same bodies as for motions. Branches rarely meet in the two weeks before conference, so this time limit is essentially saying that amendments have to go through some sort of democratic process.

- The fact that a branch or district or fraction passes a motion for debate at conference does not in any way mandate that branch or district or fraction's delegates. 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. The SWP conference is not a trade union conference where delegates are sent from a branch with a clear political instruction as to how to vote on certain key issues.

- All motions and amendments should be sent 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.

The commissions process enables "emergency" matters to be raised.

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. The CAC proposals would be discussed at the start of conference. They could be challenged in the normal manner.

The CAC would 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 could 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. Conference is open to all.

### **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](mailto:charlie@swp.org.uk) or phone 020 7819 1170 or write to PO Box 42184, London SW8 2WD.

**Charlie Kimber, SWP national secretary**

## BUILDING THE PARTY

On 14 November millions of workers across Southern Europe will strike together. A fairly humdrum European TUC day of action will be infused with sharp class struggle. In Greece the resistance to austerity refuses to be broken or to go away, but the rise of Golden Dawn also demonstrates the very high stakes at the moment.

These are just snapshots of a world of turmoil where the economic crisis grinds on, where the political landscape can be transformed in days. These are not ordinary times.

In Britain the government is hated for its elitism, its arrogance and its contempt for the mass of people – remember the booring of George Osborne at the Paralympics! Only 20 percent of the cuts have been implemented, yet already it is clear just how fundamental the social counter-revolution attempted by the Tories will go. Even if Cameron survives “only” to 2015, his regime will have inflicted massive damage on our class. We have to get the Con-Dems out – and replace them with something much better than Ed Miliband’s politics!

The very big demonstrations on 20 October showed that the potential for resistance is still present. But we also have to recognise that we saw serious setbacks in the momentum of resistance this year. The betrayal of the pensions dispute, the reluctance of the union leaders – left and right – to call national strikes and the hostility of the Labour Party to struggle have all held down the fightback.

However, the question of who pays for the crisis is far from closed.

The economic crisis is far from finished. In a remarkable speech on 23 October, Mervyn King, governor of the Bank of England, admitted that “advanced economies across the world are facing a huge adjustment” and that young people today “may live under its shadow for a long time to come.”

He added that there is a “paradox of policy” whereby “policy measures that are desirable in the short term appear diametrically opposite to those needed in the long term.”

Continuing into his thicket of contradictions he said government and Bank of England policy was “encouraging households and businesses to switch demand from tomorrow to today. But when tomorrow becomes today, an even larger stimulus is required to bring forward more spending from the future... tomorrow has become not just today but yesterday. When the factors leading to a downturn are long-lasting, only continual injections of stimulus will suffice to sustain the level of real activity. Obviously, this cannot continue indefinitely.”

What a mess! One important understanding for the present is that whatever the problems on our side, the other side is economically and politically in very deep water. On 5 December Osborne’s autumn statement will signal even more cuts. On 15 November the Tories and Con-Dems will most likely have disastrous results in by-elections. Nearly every week ministers manage to find another reason for people to hate them.

The problem is the gap between the bitter anger towards the Tories and the level of resistance. This ramshackle government, weak and divided, is still getting away with murder. It is still carrying through a war against workers. According to a study on living standards by the Office for National Statistics, net national income per head in the second quarter of 2012, taking inflation into account, has fallen over 13 percent since the start of 2008 due to a combination of cuts, slashed services, pay curbs and high levels of inflation.

As we write this (on 25 October) it’s clear we have to throw ourselves into:

- Building the Unite the Resistance national conference on 17 November.
- Arguing and agitating for a general strike.
- Pushing for action locally and nationally. We do not want the call for coordinated strikes or a general strike to become a cover for inaction by the union leaders.
- Continuing to mobilise against the EDL and other fascists.
- Building among students, including the 21 November national demonstration.
- Arguing for protests across Britain on 5 December when Osborne delivers his new cuts package.
- Looking for all the opportunities for political agitation that emerge around a wide range of issues. Think recently of how the Hillsborough revelations or the Marikana miners’ massacre or the question of “One Nation” have offered opportunities for us to make political propaganda or campaign alongside others. There will also be many smaller and local events, protests and meetings.

While engaging in every form of fightback we also have to build the SWP. As we wrote last year, “The growth and development of the revolutionary socialist party is not an optional add-on. It has to be consciously built and strengthened in the course of struggle. We face a ruthless, centralised and brutal ruling class. The working class needs its own organisation.”

We believe the party cannot be built without involvement at the centre of all movements of resistance. The united front

method remains central to building the party and the fightback. Without struggle we are lost. That is why we place emphasis on united fronts such as Unite Against Fascism (see IB1), Unite the Resistance and Defend the Right to Protest.

But the working class is uneven. That is why the fighters and the most class-conscious sections need to organise together to win over others. We need united fronts, mass movements but also crucially the revolutionary party.

The SWP is the biggest organisation on the revolutionary left, but is still much too small for the tasks we set ourselves. That is why we have to grow – to shape the struggles now and to prepare for bigger and even more important ones in the future.

Our level of recruitment this year is slightly lower than last year.

## Recruitment

Recruitment to the SWP 2008-2012

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Jan	48	158	35	133	40
Feb	85	63	51	122	78
Mar	81	74	102	181	63
Apr	144	63	64	119	39
May	87	71	87	78	53
Jun	76	93	82	28	49
Jul	160	147	168	143	143
Aug	44	45	30	59	35
Sep	90	156	69	75	118
Oct	118	171	156	98	132*
Nov	74	106	126	66	
Dec	14	57	92	74	

Total 1,021 1,184 1,062 1,176 750\*\*

\* to 25 October

\*\* with two months to go

The registered membership of the SWP stands at 7,597. This is up on last year’s figure of 7,127, the 2010 figure of 6,587, the 2009 figure of 6,417 and 2008’s of 6,155. The membership that pays a regular sub to the organisation stands at 32 percent, slightly down on last year’s figure.

## Who joined in 2011?

By unions/college

ATL	1
BECTU	1
CWU	11
EIS	1
EQUITY	1
FBU	1
GMB	8
MU	1
NAPO	1
NUJ	1
NUT	18
PCS	7
RCN	1
RMT	3

TSSA.....	2
UCATT.....	1
UCU.....	13
Unison.....	33
Unite.....	35
USDAW.....	3
Higher Education.....	233
Further Education.....	60
School.....	18

#### By district (and % on direct debit)

Barnsley.....	5.....	80%
Birmingham.....	27.....	22%
Black Country.....	9.....	22%
Bradford.....	8.....	38%
Brighton.....	26.....	27%
Bristol.....	22.....	36%
Cambridge.....	4.....	100%
Cardiff.....	9.....	56%
Central London.....	33.....	36%
Chesterfield.....	7.....	14%
Coventry.....	7.....	29%
Derby.....	5.....	40%
Devon & Cornwall....	5.....	60%
Doncaster.....	2.....	0%
E Anglia/Norwich.....	7.....	71%
East London.....	59.....	25%
Edinburgh.....	14.....	64%
Essex.....	21.....	43%
Glasgow.....	28.....	50%
Hackney.....	17.....	47%
Home Counties.....	12.....	33%
Huddersfield.....	6.....	50%
Hull.....	3.....	100%
Kent.....	9.....	33%
Lancashire.....	7.....	43%
Leeds.....	29.....	48%
Leicester.....	16.....	13%
Manchester.....	30.....	40%
Merseyside.....	10.....	60%
North London.....	68.....	18%
North West London...	22.....	23%
Nottingham.....	5.....	20%
Portsmouth.....	5.....	80%
Sheffield.....	3.....	100%
South East London....	22.....	55%
South London.....	46.....	41%
Southampton.....	3.....	33%
Swansea.....	4.....	75%
Thames Valley.....	17.....	47%
Tyneside.....	16.....	56%
Waltham Forest.....	38.....	16%
West London.....	31.....	35%
York.....	3.....	67%

## Recruitment – a job for all!

There are objective factors which shape the level of recruitment. This year's figures partly mirror the lower level of strikes, but above all reflect that there have been far fewer anti-cuts demos and protests.

In 2011 we recruited 166 people at anti-cuts demos. This year we had recruited 11 up to the end of September. In 2011 we recruited 90 people at "other demos". In 2012 up to the end of September we had recruited 17. We have also had fewer people join over the internet.

On the other hand our recruitment at freshers' fairs, Marxism, Pride and anti-

racist activities is up on last year. Our recruitment on SW sales is also set to be higher. Such figures can never be exact, but they do give a broad impression of the year.

However, the level of recruitment is not just an objective question. It matters whether there is a culture of recruitment in branches and districts. The fastest way to greatly accelerate our recruitment would be for each member to recruit just one person in the next 12 months. If all the members who pay a regular sub recruited one person it would double our annual recruitment. Too often recruitment is left to "experts" or "specialists". We all have to get used to asking people to join and working to encourage people to join, answering their questions, suggesting reading and so on.

We want every comrade to be a leader at work, university, college, school or in their campaign organisation or community. That means talking to people, selling Socialist Worker, encouraging activity, asking people to meetings and trying to recruit to the party.

The bare facts on recruitment numbers are not enough. We also need to think about retention of members, participation and involvement. The party – nationally and locally – has to work consciously to develop new members as speakers, to prevent a separation between older and younger activists, to renew the leadership and to have a high level of political debate as well as activity.

The real issue is whether there is genuine growth in our branches and districts, greater influence in the working class movement, more involvement in campaigns and local movements.

We need to make every comrade a recruiter and have a sense of recruitment running through the party. We are not a special elite: there are thousands more people who at this time in this place should be in the SWP.

We are for "open recruitment", spreading the net wide, while also tightening up targeted recruitment.

There are some comrades who doubt whether people who haven't met us before but join on demonstrations or sales are "real members". Of course it's not guaranteed that someone who likes our defiance and militancy on an EDL protest and accepts the basic ideas we stand for automatically becomes a long-term cadre. It's a battle to win them fully, and sometimes we are successful and sometimes we are not. But if we hold a good number of those we recruit in this way it's worth it.

Some people (quite a lot in truth) join us because we are fighters and because we have a high profile, not because they have carefully weighed our Marxism against the alternatives. We are proud of being fighters, we welcome those who want to be part of that. We don't write them off because we discover they don't have our entire world view immediately.

When they sign a form they are presenting an opportunity, a chance for us to win them. The danger of only recruiting those you are sure will stick was mocked by Tony Cliff in 1977. "As a result of two tough years many of us are putting the sights far too low. We are afraid of being hurt and therefore look for safety. And, of course, if you try to recruit no-one, you are 100 percent successful."

Equally we need much more targeted recruitment where we have a long-term relationship with people and win them over time. Socialist Worker plays a key role in this. Those we sell to regularly are those who are most likely to join and stay members.

We repeat that every district and branch and industrial fraction must draw up a list of people they believe it is possible to recruit. We should also hold a national meeting specifically to discuss recruitment and branch strategies around this.

These possible recruits have to be followed up, and progress reviewed periodically. We are at present much too amateurish about this. We want the recruitment on demos and paper sales and picket lines. But we also want systematic work over time. And the one flows into the other. There is no political activity where recruitment is "inappropriate" or to be neglected.

## Retention of members

Everyone who says they want to be a member is important to us and we have to work hard to make them feel part of our organisation, to take part in its activities and the broader class resistance, to learn our full politics, to find ways to bring their energy and strengths into the party, and to take part in its democracy. This is a big task.

Nobody joins the party with a fully-fledged understanding of every aspect of the revolutionary Marxist views we hold. So we have to make sure that our meetings equip members with the arguments they need and introduce them to our tradition.

We have to encourage every member to read both the classics and new books. We have to provide space for comrades to discuss and debate and ask questions, both in formal meetings and in less formal settings such as after a sale or a demo or over a cup of coffee.

Systematic educational work is an important aspect of our efforts to retain and develop members. We launched the Education for Socialist course and accompanying pamphlets in autumn 2011. Additional material extending the course will be available later this year.

The course, aimed at new members, has played an important role in strengthening the party membership and giving newer members greater confidence.

Wherever we have new and less experienced members we should aim to run educational meetings. Districts should also consider, in consultation with the party cen-

tre, running one-off theoretical meetings and dayschools aimed at the party membership more generally, and tackling areas of theory that cannot be covered adequately in a branch meeting.

It is the job of the membership secretary and the whole branch to think through who we recruit, to make sure they are followed up, and to plan how they can be integrated into the branch.

We should also try to break down the idea that to take a role in the branch you have to be a member for years. There is a vast range of responsibilities that a new person can take on from organising a workplace sale to using social media to publicise the branch and inform members, to helping improve our leaflets. Let new people take on such jobs and then allow them to move into other positions.

## Branch meetings

The pressures of heavy involvement in trade union work, student activity and campaigns could make it seem that we need worry less about our SWP branch meetings. This would be a serious error. Our weekly meetings need to provide comrades with ideological ammunition, argue out our interventions, share experience and analysis, and organise.

Think of how a number of difficult political issues have emerged recently such as the Syrian revolution, or Scottish independence, or Julian Assange and the rape charges. These are issues we need taken up in branch meetings to give confidence to our members and to provide the basis for intervention. Think of how much detail work was needed around building for 20 October. No branch meeting, no effective intervention politically or organisationally.

We will not have comrades enthusiastically building for Unite the Resistance unless they understand the perspective on which it is based. That can partly be done through national initiatives, but is also needs local discussion.

The branches are organising centres for the fightback, and they should meet each week.

Our meetings should continue to have a first half which deals in a relevant way with the major political issues of the day or an aspect of our theoretical tradition. It is perfectly possible to blend history, theory and today's politics in a powerful way.

Over the last year a number of branches have taken the initiative of pushing out round certain issues.

For example at the start of 2012 the issue of Stephen Lawrence was front page news. We held branch meetings on: "Stephen Lawrence: why did it take 19 years to get justice?" Branches pulled some impressive numbers at very short notice, for example 43 at the Hackney East branch, over 35 in Brixton, 35 in Lewisham, and over 50 in total at the two branch meetings in Glasgow while Manchester City Centre branch hosted

a meeting that attracted over 70 people.

Similarly many branches held meetings a year on from the riots – where these were well advertised and built in local areas they again attracted a wide layer of people including over 30 in Tottenham.

Newham branch in East London regularly have over 20 at their meetings. 35 came to their meeting on Stephen Lawrence, followed a few weeks later with 30 coming to discuss "What do we mean by "alienation"?"

Our SWP branches also have to be places where we come together to debate, argue and disagree in a fraternal manner but most importantly to act. They have to be places where we plan our interventions.

The process of building branches has been uneven and we still have a long way to go. But there have been successes; established branches have grown and been transformed in many areas by the involvement of new members, many of these regularly have 15 to 20 at their meetings. Meanwhile a number of new branches have been set up and are helping us push into new areas. These include:

There are currently two new branches and one re-launched one in **Kent**:

- **Canterbury** has been weekly branch meetings of between 5-12 people. They have several new members and have 4 students at the University of Kent who have set up SWSS meetings.
- **Medway/Gravesend** meet weekly and alternate between Medway and Gravesend. Gravesend now has a regular venue and from August has had its meetings advertised in Socialist Worker. They average 5-6 people at their meetings with a couple of new members and 1-2 non members.
- **Thanet** advertised their first meeting in August and have fortnightly branch meetings. They have between 7-9 at their branch meetings with several new members and 1-2 non members at meetings.

**Ipswich** advertised their first branch meeting on Thu 27 Sep and are having fortnightly branch meetings. They have had between 6-8 at their meetings with a couple of new members and 2-3 non members.

**Taunton** had their first branch meeting on Wed 19 Sep which was the first meeting of the left of the Labour Party for over 20 years in Taunton! They are meeting fortnightly. They have had between 6-8 at their meetings with a new member who used to be in the Spanish Communist Party and said that the SWP were the only serious force on the far left. They also have 1-2 non members at their meetings.

**Croydon** branch is the newest branch in London and they are meeting fortnightly. They advertised their first meeting in the paper on Thu 30 August. They have several new members.

**Leytonstone** branch is the second newest branch in London. They have weekly branch meetings and have recruited many young members. They average between 7-9 people at their meetings with 3-4 new members and 1-2 non members.

**Stoke** are meeting weekly and have arranged a room at the University of Staffs. Their largest meeting was in February with 20 people. From September to October they are having meetings of 6-7 people with 1-2 non members.

**Luton** advertised their first branch meeting on Wed 29 August and have had meetings of between 6-13 people. 3 young black people have joined recently. They average getting a couple of new members and non-members along to their weekly meetings.

**Rotherham** advertised their first branch meeting on Wed 25 July. They average between 5-9 people at their meetings and have just moved to weekly meetings. They have a couple of new members and 1-2 non members at their meetings.

**Bath** is in the early stages of becoming a branch and have not advertised in the paper yet. However they are having monthly meeting with between 8-13 people at them with 5-6 young people attending.

**Lancaster** branch has been having weekly branch meeting with between 5-13 in attendance. They have had several non members attending their meetings.

**Newport** branch had its first meeting in August and are meeting monthly. They have had between 9-18 people at their branch meetings. Roughly half the people in their meetings are non-members and they have sold several books from their bookstall.

And these branches are still developing: Look at John's article in this bulletin on Ipswich branch. A few days after he sent that article he emailed in, "If I were religious I would be putting the following down to a minor miracle. We have gone from four members to sixteen in five weeks. Two joined as new members (one was in fact a comrade 18 years ago), eight were on the old registered membership list and (most) have recently got back to us to say they want to still be members and two were on the unregistered list who have got back to say they want to rejoin."

This is one example of how we can find new people and also reinvigorate those who dropped out at some point (which might even have been our fault!)

More branches are also having regular meetings. If you look at page 12 of Socialist Worker you can see that it is barely able to contain the details of all our branch meetings. That wasn't true a few years ago.

Most of the successes we outline above

are branches in new areas. We need the same pioneering spirit wherever we are. We should not rest on our laurels and think that there are “enough” branches in our city. And we should think about how to make branch organisation more effective.

Essex branches now schedule a public meeting every month to bring them together and to make sure there is a good-sized meeting they can regularly build for. We’re doing the same in Lancashire. Of course not every branch has expanded or feels that it is seeing more involvement by members. But the general trend is improvement.

Too many branches still do not have a physical list of who they know in their area, who can be approached around campaigns, who they are trying to get to meetings and who they want to recruit.

Such a list needs to be constantly updated. But it needs to exist. Otherwise every campaign and meeting begins with the search for names, contact details etc. And if this periphery exists only in the minds, memories and address books of a few members then it is not the property of the branch as a whole.

Equally branches need to develop a sense of place. What are the local workplaces, are they unionised and by which union, do we know a rep, who runs the local tenants’ organisation, who led that campaign last year for better nursery facilities, what about that big FE college where one member goes to but we haven’t done much around, where do our members live in case a local campaign breaks out, and where do they work. Such questions (and many others) cannot be addressed overnight. But every branch should seek to know the answers and to become part of their area.

We should also discuss the branch meeting topics with members. Of course we can’t simply be driven by the whims and particular interests of individuals, and the meetings’ organiser needs to have a plan. But that plan should be discussed with the branch. We should have direct members’ input into the titles.

We have updated our national speakers’ list but we would like comrades to continue to update it and add names to it – either their own, or people they recommend.

## Socialist Worker

Socialist Worker is central to our political engagement and intervention. Public sales on streets and outside workplaces are very important. But we also want our members to be selling the paper in their workplace. Each branch must use the paper to build up a periphery of people they relate to in their local area and we need to ensure that every member of the SWP has copies of SW to sell. We want to use SW to help root us more deeply in the working class.

Selling Socialist Worker can help locate the best militants, those people who want to fight and are most sympathetic to our arguments. Reading Socialist Worker regu-

larly can help draw many more people into a closer relationship with the SWP.

Of course, the role of the internet has massively increased. The key thing is that it doesn’t negate the need for a physical paper that can be taken and sold not only on demonstrations and public sales but by all our members individually.

The paper brings issues physically together, links organising to analysis, history to the present day and identifies militants both when they buy and sell it.

## Public meetings and rallies

SWP districts should hold regular public meetings - about every five weeks. And twice a year we should hold a rally. A public meeting is not a branch meeting without a second half, a rally is not a public meeting with some posters. We should produce good publicity a month before a public meeting and draw up serious plans about who we want to get there. We want rallies to be our flagship events in the area, and a big pull for the whole of the left, campaigners etc. This means long-term planning and rigorous attention to detail.

We want our regular attenders there, new people, and those who have perhaps taken a backseat recently but are enthused by the new spirit of struggle.

Building the meeting should involve both mass publicity and posters so that no one can miss the fact this meeting is taking place in your town plus an attention to detail around who we can bring from the periphery of your branch.

In the last year the SWP have hosted some fantastic public meetings. In February we held meetings on “A year on from the fall of Mubarak: where next for the Egyptian revolution?” 350 plus people packed into the London wide meeting held in ULU to hear Gigi Ibrahim and Judith Orr. At the same time over 80 went to the meeting in Manchester and 60 to Portsmouth’s public meeting with John Molyneux on Egypt.

A few weeks later in early March we hosted meetings across the country to celebrate International Womens’ Day (see separate IB piece) which again drew large numbers. Over 200 came to the central London event and 90 in Glasgow.

Very often we run a series of public meetings but districts have also organised their own events based on what is relevant for their area. For example in June East London district hosted an SWP public meeting on police racism. Over 70 people came to hear Brian Richardson and Alfie Meadows speak. Similarly Barnsley held an event on a Saturday afternoon for the anniversary of Saltley Gate and the defeat of the Tories which over 30 people came along to.

All of these give a glimpse of the potential audience there for our ideas. Each area should plan a series of public meetings and also think through what initiatives may work well in your particular area.

## Branch and district committees

Every branch must have an organising team – a branch committee (BC).

Every branch needs, as a minimum, a secretary who takes an overall view of the branch’s work, a paper organiser, a speakers’/meetings’ organiser, and a membership organiser. If possible branches should also have a publications and industrial organiser. We will also need, from time to time, jobs such as Unite the Resistance organiser, Marxism organiser, and appeal organiser.

We cannot have a separation either in our BC or our branches between party building and those that work in the united fronts. Our BC and branches must be the places where the two come together and work together as one. While we have to have some specialisation it is vital that significant political problems and tactical discussions are brought back into the branch. At the same time we need a division of labour with at least one comrade responsible for a particular area of our work to maintain continuity at all time.

Most districts now have a District Committee (DC). Its role is to an overall strategic vision of the district, to provide coordination and to plan work that goes beyond the confines of a branch.

## Building in the colleges

Students are a central part of our work. The revolt in 2010 left behind a large number of people asking questions about capitalism, how to organise, the revolutionary tradition and how our side can win.

The continuing crisis of capitalism, the resistance, the Arab revolutions, the Occupy movement and other factors have deepened this layer. We both have to lead ideologically and also head up resistance wherever possible. We need to be the clearest about the Syrian revolution or Assange and rape but also organise and agitate around cuts and the 21 November demonstration.

There have been real successes: our SWSS meetings this year have been bigger than for a long time, we recruited more than last year at freshers’ fairs, and we have more groups. Our students have also played an important role in activities such as solidarity with the constructions workers’ dispute.

Young people are the lifeblood of the party. The universities and colleges are a vital area to engage with young people and to draw them into the party.

Students cannot be used to do all the work of the branches. But every student should be encouraged to attend SWP branch meetings, and do an industrial and Saturday sale.

Every branch and district should carefully consider work around FE colleges as well as universities. Here we will find young people who are angry about the government, strongly anti-racist and inspired by resistance across the globe. We can often do sales

at FE colleges which fit in with working comrades

SWSS groups should include wider layers beyond those who agree with the full politics of the SWP. (There will be a full document about building among students in IB3).

## Marxism 2012

Marxism this year was a big success. There were 3,999 advance bookings, 50 up on last year. The “on the door” ticket sales were excellent taking the total registered to 4,885. That was made up of 1,822 members and 3,063 members. The quality of the meetings and discussions was high and it shows how we can attract a broad range of people to our politics. Some 130 people joined the SWP and we sold 2,000 copies of *Socialist Worker*. Bookmarks sold over £50,000 of books and other material.

The party should be aware that due to the re-development of Friends Meeting House and other factors we will be unable to hold the event in the same venues in 2013.

## Looking to the future

This is a remarkable time, but there are no shortcuts to a bigger and more influential revolutionary left. We have to push out but also put a high premium on political clarity. We need a rigorous routine but also must be open and ready to consider every new possibility.

There are key challenges facing our class as the crisis and the resistance grow. The SWP aims to be the socialist spine of the resistance. It needs to be large enough to play this role.

### Central Committee

## INDUSTRIAL PERSPECTIVES

The 20 October TUC demonstrations revealed a deep contradiction at the heart of the working class movement in Britain.

The 200,000-strong protest in London exceeded in its size and militancy the expectations of many of those who mobilised for it. In addition 15,000 marched in Glasgow and 10,000 in Belfast. The number of union banners on the London demo was almost as great as on the previous mass demonstration on 26 March 2011. A number of union general secretaries—Mark Serwotka (PCS), Len McCluskey (Unite), and Bob Crow (RMT)—raised support for a general strike at the rally. This followed the extraordinary decision of the TUC in September, which voted—by four to one—to consider the practicalities of a general strike for only

the second time in its history. Even David Prentis, the leader of Unison, responded to heckling on 20 October by saying that his union had voted for a general strike.

Mark Serwotka, as in 2011 best expressed what the activists were feeling.

He argued that the working class was in a worse position 18 months on from the demonstration of 26 March 2011. He argued that ordinary members needed to organise to pressure those at the top of the unions (including himself) to lead a fight.

We also saw Ed Miliband roundly booed (according to Polly Toynbee, by the SWP) for his assurance that in office Labour would make tough choices—cuts. In the short-term it may seem a “realistic” strategy to wait for Labour, but for tens of thousands of activists Miliband doesn’t offer the way forward.

The 20 October demos were a sign of the potential for struggle. But it is far from simply onwards and upwards. The debacle of the sell-out of the public sector pensions struggle and the lack of action over the course of the autumn made it harder for activists to mobilise those around them.

This contradiction between the desire of large numbers of workers to fight and the unwillingness of the union leaders to lead such a struggle has become a burning question for our movement. It is not enough for the SWP to reflect the frustration and demoralisation of many union activists. We have to both explain the problems and, critically, argue for a way forward.

## The rising tide

The bitterness is all the more intense because of the sudden leap forwards in strike action in 2011. The 26 March 2011 demonstration came near the beginning of an upward curve of struggle. The march itself came two days after the first national strike under the Coalition—government—by the UCU lecturers’ union—and followed the militant mobilisations by students over tuition fees and the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance.

Running through the demonstration was the argument, “We’ve marched together, now let’s strike together.” That is what 750,000 workers in the teachers’ NUT and ATL, the civil service workers’ PCS and the UCU unions did on 30 June 2011. A coalition of medium-sized, non-Labour affiliated unions, in some cases with a significant left presence, had taken the initiative.

This paved the way for the magnificent strike of 2.5 million workers on 30 November 2011, accompanied by protests of half a million people across the country, according to the TUC’s estimates. The protests and picket lines were young and vibrant with women and black workers at the forefront. On 30 November the big battalions of the union movement in the public sector joined the action. The capacity of such strike action to transform the situation was clear. Unison recruited 137,000 new

members in 2011, many of them in October and November. UCU recruited 2,500 in November, the GMB union 12,000.

The basic point, that when unions fight they recruit members, was proved once again. It’s an organising strategy, not credit cards and insurance offers that make people join trade unions in large numbers. Simply merging unions to “manage decline” is not the answer. Fighting back is.

Beyond the unions themselves, activists from UK Uncut, the student movement and DPAC (Disabled People Against the Cuts) attended picket lines. The strike confirmed what the SWP has been almost alone in arguing on the British left: that, whatever the structural changes inside the working class, the unions still have the power to transform the political situation.

A growing wave of strike action, even if concentrated on the public sector, could have broken the government and opened up a period of mass struggle, just as the 1995 strikes in France began a new phase in the political life of that country. A victory in the public sector would have made it easier for workers across the economy to argue for unionisation and for strike action.

## The struggle betrayed

Yet it was not to be. In December key union leaders, led by the TUC’s Brendan Barber, Unison’s Dave Prentis and Paul Kenny of the GMB, signed up to the government’s “heads of agreement”, outlining a pensions deal essentially unchanged from the one the unions had struck against. The process of medium-sized unions with a strong left presence putting pressure on the bigger ones to fight in early 2011 now went into reverse.

Two important gatherings of activists, one called by the PCS United Left, the other by Unite the Resistance, debated the way forwards, but were not sufficiently powerful to stop the retreat.

Possible national action by the PCS, NUT and UCU on 28 March 2012 was reduced to a London strike by the NUT and UCU. This led to big rows inside the PCS and cries of “Why just us?” in the UCU and NUT.

The NUT claimed that the London strike would be just the start of “rolling action”, but the promised “Mexican wave” of action, region by region, came to a halt that day. Again in May a national strike by PCS, UCU and Unite in health saw the NUT sit things out. In the UCU the failure of the NUT to strike led to increasing attacks by the right on the strategy of coordinated action. In Unite, despite the best efforts of key activists in health and the MoD, the strike was patchy.

The NUT’s national conference at Easter 2012 voted down action in May in favour of action in June. But strikes in June were shelved as the NUT made its “historic deal” with the Nasuwt that has seen action short of strikes over workload but still no

national strikes. The Nasuwt was one of the few unions to oppose the general strike motion at the TUC and at present there is little sign of the union agreeing to joint national strikes.

The slogan “strike together” was transformed from a call for united action into one that said nobody could move without the others.

The present workload action in schools is winning some notable victories and opens up the possibility of improving reps’ organisation. But workload action without the underpinning of national strikes is unlikely to make gains for teachers across the board. Many schools and associations have voted for national strikes this term, and two left conferences are planned for this term to discuss the “way forward”.

In the PCS there is a realisation that we can’t wait for ever with at least some sectional action planned before Christmas.

For the last year we have battled to get the strike movement back on track. But the bureaucracy has frequently blocked us.

The UCU, a union that saw the left take the initiative in the pensions fight, has seen its leadership set its face against almost any action. In the pre-92 universities, action on pensions was finally called off as the right won a vote at a special conference to end the dispute. The effect on morale in the union became evident when the recent HE pensions ballot was narrowly lost. The loss of the ballot flowed from general secretary Sally Hunt increasingly attacking the union’s involvement in action and red-baiting during the process. This has clearly demoralised some UCU branches.

In Unison there was fight to get a special conference on pensions in local government and a battle to stop the abandonment of the fight on pensions in health. In Unite health and the MoD activists fought to turn resolutions into more action. In the NUT, PCS and Unite there has been an ongoing row, sometimes with close allies of ours about how to get the movement back on track. “Broad Lefts” have been split over what happens now. In Unite our comrades have been involved in hard fights to get action back on track sometimes in the face of the United Left general secretary Len McCluskey.

## Fighting for action

We have to be prepared to have arguments with even our closest comrades about shifting this situation. And we have to be part of a systematic agitation to get the action back on. That means in unions such as the NUT getting thousands of teachers involved in the process of passing motions and signing petitions to strike with the Nasuwt if possible, but without them if necessary—and that we want action now not at some hazy time in the future.

It means throughout the movement turning the TUC “consultation” into a possible general strike into a campaign to name

the day that involves every branch, every workplace, every region passing motions to add strength to the call. It means systematic use of the Unite the Resistance petition on the general strike.

We have to be the people calling to turn the words about strikes into action.

But there is a more important strategic goal. We have to help create a “middle cog” inside the working class that is capable of putting real pressure on both the right and the left of the trade union bureaucracy and if possible to act independently when necessary.

## Two sides of the bureaucracy

As we have argued many times before, the union bureaucracy, the officials who run unions, constitute a distinct social layer subject to contradictory forces. They are not part of the workforce subject to the pressures this involves. Their basic social function is to negotiate between workers and employers. Their inherent tendency to compromise is reinforced by their relationship to the Labour Party, which often leads to explicit arguments by the unions leaders to prioritise the election of a Labour government over the pursuit of class struggle.

Given this contradictory position, there are two traps we can fall into when assessing the role of the bureaucracy. The first would be to put our faith in this layer, to rely on them to lead the struggle. This is clearly untenable. If we want most effectively to be able to push forwards struggle we require a rank and file movement—networks of shop stewards and union reps, and their fellow workers, organised independently of the union bureaucracy. Though such a force does not exist at present, and can only be forged in struggle, we aspire to create it.

The second trap would be to assume that the bureaucracy can never lead struggles. The reality is that there can be pressure on the bureaucracy to fight, even in conditions like the present when no active rank and file movement exists. The pressure takes various forms: particularly important at present is the sheer level of the attacks being driven through by the coalition government which threaten to undermine the base of the unions in key areas of the public sector, removing from the bureaucracy its capacity to negotiate from a position of power.

Recognising the potential for bureaucratically-led strikes to develop is important because even this kind of struggle can help to develop rank and file networks that increase our capacity to go beyond these limited forms of strike action.

We should be highly critical of the union leaders who have sold short the struggle, but we cannot rule out the possibility of future action at a national level. At present there is a great deal of talk about mass strikes over pay in spring 2013, although Unison has recently held out the prospect of being

able to win a pay claim that breaks the government’s pay freeze (with concessions on conditions!) without having to strike.

The tension between rank and file and bureaucracy does not simply involve a struggle against the right-wing leaders of the big unions. It also involves conflict with left-wing union leaders and lower level officials who we have often worked closely with in the past. We have been critical at points of Mark Serwotka, the best left leader.

We will continue to work “with and against” the union leaders. We are with them they lead struggle, but always seek to build the rank and file

Take the case of the NUT, which because of its size and level of organisation has often played a crucial role in shaping the overall trajectory of the struggle. Leading members of left groups in the NUT such as the Socialist Teachers Alliance (which we are part of) and the softer left Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union believe that talk of striking with non-teaching unions or even alone is adventurism.

Even those at the centre of the LANAC (Local Associations Network) that grew out of rows at the NUT conference have balked at arguing for the NUT to “name a day” for action or to seek strikes with unions such as the PCS. We won precisely two votes for this position at the NUT executive pre-meeting with the left—those of our two comrades.

Being able to work with sections of the bureaucracy when they are proposing action, but break with them and argue against them when they oppose it, is easy to say, hard to do.

Even our members on the national executives of unions are subject to the pressure to go along with the rest of the left and to accept “realistic” options. Given the relative weakness of the rank and file, it is important that we have strong union fractions and a strong SWP in order to hold those members most susceptible to this pressure to account, while recognising that no organisational trick can entirely insulate members from this pressure.

## Skirmishes in the private sector

The big public sector strikes have been the central issue that we have had to grapple with in the class struggle over the past year. But we should also recognise the emergence of some significant struggles in the private sector and over specific issues in sections of the public sector.

The electricians’ dispute and their victory over the proposed Besna agreement that the large construction firms sought to impose was the most stunning sign of what is possible. The struggle was organised by rank and file electricians, and socialists, but even here, relied on some level of official support, for instance the official day of action in November 2011 and a ballot at Balfour Beatty that helped to open the door

to unofficial action.

Strikes at Coryton, Unilever, Eddie Stobart in Doncaster, in Sheffield's recycling service, on the London buses, and at Remploy, are further signs of a mood to fight among some groups of workers. Yet here too there are problems. At the Remploy factories that employ disabled workers there was huge political potential for action during the Paralympics. But the national action was intermittent, and was eventually called off by the GMB and Unite unions in favour of a "new approach" that saw factories close.

There is enormous anger and bitterness across the class. We don't know if this will at some point explode, escaping the vicious cycle of declining confidence, dependence on the officials and compromises and sell-outs that further undermine confidence. But we are not simply passive observers hoping for a breakthrough. We have to try to make it happen.

## The way forwards

The most basic thing we have to do is to organise in our own workplaces and unions. Every member who is in a workplace should be urged to join and build a trade union, and run for a rep's position. We want to be at the heart of strong, fighting, democratic trade union branches. Paul McGarr's pamphlet: "Organising at Work" is an important tool, but of course comrades should also ask their branch, union fraction or the industrial department for advice on building the unions. We have a wealth of experience from both young and older comrades in the party that we can all draw on.

In addition, as well as fighting over "bread and butter" issues, we want to take our politics into the unions—urging fights over racism, sexism, anti-fascism, homophobia, anti-imperialism, climate change and taking up the wider issues that union members want to discuss. In the public sector this includes the arguments about the way that the education system or healthcare should be run.

We should make sure that we sell Socialist Worker in both union meetings and in the workplace more generally, and we should ask people to join the party. We need the party to be the home for newly radicalising workers who want to fight. In some areas we are now running Socialist Worker readers' meetings to help build our presence and strength in particular workplaces.

In important workplaces where we don't currently have a presence, we have to organise Socialist Worker sales and leafleting in order to try to obtain contacts, paper readers and members. And whenever there is a strike in a locality, we have to make sure we support it, talk to the workers involved and bring solidarity from other workplaces and unions.

This is all essential, but it is not enough.

We also have to be involved in the structures of our unions—going to branch

meetings, standing for branch committees, getting elected to regional and national committees and conference, and, in consultation with the industrial department, standing for positions such as union national executives. We should be at the centre of winning motions calling on the TUC to "name the day" for a general strike.

There are pressures involved in all this. There is the pressure to do endless case-work, for example. It is important that comrades discuss their tactics and how they can develop their union work in a serious way without dropping their politics. The question of facility time (in which union reps pursue union matters during working hours without loss of pay) is also important. While facility time can be useful, and we defend it against the bosses and the government, any job with facility time can remove the union rep from their fellow workers. Therefore any comrade thinking of standing for a post that involves facility time needs to do so in discussion with the industrial department.

We also have to be involved in the "broad lefts" within unions. Even the best of these are, in essence, electoral machines that promote the election of left-wing officials. But they are also places where we can raise arguments for strike action and for solidarity with other struggles. This is not always easy. While in the UCU the UCU Left has been united in favour of coordinated strike action, as has the United Left in Unison, in the PCS, NUT and Unite there have been major rows in the broad lefts themselves. It is important that our membership of these organisations does not prevent us raising criticisms of the union leaders, even left leaders, when they betray their members.

## Unite the Resistance

We need a broad movement in the unions, a "middle cog" between socialists and the whole working class that can pull together the many thousands who want action. Unite the Resistance (UtR) is our answer to this.

We want it to be a home for those who want to debate how we turn the talk of a general strike into reality, for those who want to deliver solidarity with other groups of workers who are fighting and for those who want to see strikes over pay, pensions and attacks on public services.

Precisely because a militant rank and file movement does not exist, UtR must also reach out to those left wing officials prepared to call for and support action. This is not simple, because even the best officials will vacillate. Nonetheless, if we are to give UtR the breadth and implantation it requires in the working class we need to bring on board those figures in the unions who can give confidence to wider layers of union members to fight. That's why it is right that figures such as Mark Serwotka or Kevin Courtney of the NUT have spoken at and been involved in building UtR.

Although UtR is open to all those who

want to see a fight over austerity, it is not one more "anti-cuts campaign". It is focused on the organised working class, and those workers who aspire to be organised, because we see these as the most powerful force for change. And we hope that UtR becomes a movement out of which the beginnings of a militant rank and file movement can be created. This means that there must be debate and discussion about the way forwards within the organisation itself—something that is not possible if it simply consists of the SWP and a few fellow travellers.

Debates inside UtR have to take up the thorny issue of the trade union bureaucracy—something groups such as the Coalition of Resistance avoid. Unite the Resistance is an attempt to create a genuine network of working class militants, not a "party front". The Socialist Party forced independent elements out of its National Shop Stewards Network.

The key date for UtR is 17 November, when the next national conference will be held. We want to sign up every militant and campaigner we know, and win the maximum possible support from trade union branches for this conference. In the wake of it, we want to roll out UtR groups regionally that can begin to play a similar role in localities—organising meetings and debates, providing solidarity for those in struggle and drawing together workers and others who want to fight.

## Central Committee

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## WOMEN AND THE FIGHT FOR LIBERATION

The last year has seen increasing attacks on all fronts over women's rights, whether it is abortion access, arguments about rape, austerity cuts or the continuing culture of sexist images on student campuses.

This has thrown up ideological arguments about the nature of women's oppression and how to fight it but also opportunities to organise activity and protests.

Debates about women's equality and liberation raise issues of what the roots of oppression are, and what a Marxist understanding of oppression has to offer.

Old arguments, for example do men benefit from women's oppression and notions of "privilege", are reappearing as various forms of feminism are often the first political port of call for young people angry at the impact of sexism. This is shown by the popularity of the various feminist authors and bloggers.

These feminist ideas have now started

to take more organisational form in the case of local groups and or nationally UK Feminista.

We have argued before in these bulletins the importance of engaging and working with such activists who are getting politicised by the experience of sexism. These are people who are angry about capitalism, inequality and oppression. They are a part of our audience and are often open to socialist ideas.

We should use every opportunity to work alongside such people while fighting to win them to a socialist analysis of the roots of oppression and how to fight it. If we don't attempt to shape these new forces we will miseducate an emerging generation of activists.

Every attack on women's rights is accompanied by an ideological onslaught. We have to be able to offer political clarity as well as organise protests and activity.

## Sexual abuse

The Jimmy Savile revelations expose a horrific history of sexual abuse that goes to the heart of the British establishment. The level of collusion and cover up that went on at the BBC and in other institutions shows how the rich and powerful in the ruling class can protect one of its own. It also shows the utter contempt that people in power had for the young people in the institutions where he abused so many.

Clearly there is still much more to be revealed and it is not just 1970s pop stars who are under the spotlight. The Jimmy Savile case will be a watershed in the recognition of the danger and suffering of child abuse.

The shocking revelations have also led to explosion of debate about women's oppression. The spotlight has also been shone on issues such as sexual harassment at work and questions about what has changed in the years since the big influx of women into the workforce in post war Britain.

The media have become fixated on Newsnight pulling its investigative report into Savile, but the much bigger question remains. What sort of culture allowed such systematic abuse of young girls, and in some cases boys, to go on for decades unpunished? This is not solely about the cult of celebrity. It shines a light on the running of institutions including hospitals, psychiatric clinic and children's homes.

The state and the media have also been exposed as complicit.

Some commentators have blamed the 1960s opening up of attitudes to sex that created a sense of "anything goes". But child abuse is not a product of the 1960s. Even the Savile cases now appear to go back to the 1950s, but evidence of abuse in another of society's institutions—the Catholic church—goes back even further.

In fact the opening up of repressive views about sexuality, and women's sexuality in particular has overtime made it

easier to challenge oppressive behaviour.

But when women report rape to the police today they still face hurdles. The recent grooming cases in Rotherham and Rochdale showed this.

When a group of young vulnerable women was found to have been abused over a number of years the media made much of the fact that all but one of the perpetrators was Pakistani. They claimed the crimes were not investigated because of over sensitivity about race.

In fact the prejudice that did hold back a proper investigation was over the young women and whether they would make credible witnesses in court, a common issue in such cases. This did not stop the racist English Defence League and other racist and fascist groups trying to mobilise around the cases.

Even the specialist Met police unit, Sapphire, set up to investigate sex crimes has been exposed as not taking women's allegations seriously. It is being overhauled after officers were found guilty of not following up rape cases and lying to women.

## Assange

The debate that erupted over the nature of rape around the case of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange showed views on the issue still need challenged, even on the left.

Assange is under threat of extradition to the US for exposing war crimes. His website delivered a powerful blow to US imperialism in showing the truth of the US's international role.

Assange also faces allegations of rape and assault from two Swedish women and is resisting going to Sweden to answer these charges in case Sweden extradites him to the US.

Socialist Worker argued that the US shouldn't be allowed to capture and punish him for showing the reality of US imperialism. We don't want to hand a victory to the most powerful imperialism and see another whistleblower locked up like Bradley Manning has suffered.

But we also argued that such an anti-imperialist position did not mean trampling on women's rights. We believe Assange should face a proper investigation of the women's allegations. We pointed to ways the Swedish could do this, by coming to London to question him, or by making the commitment that they would not extradite Assange to the US if he returned to Sweden for questioning.

But in defence of Assange, Respect MP George Galloway among others trivialised the women's allegations as merely a question of "sexual etiquette". He then went on to generalise and make dismissive comments about the nature of rape. Socialist Worker denounced these offensive remarks.

Several leading members resigned from the Respect Party in protest including its leader Salma Yacoob and Kate Hudson, the

prospective Respect parliamentary candidate in Manchester.

Galloway's remarks also led to him being "no platformed" by first the NUS LGBT committee and then the NUS executive. Socialist Worker supporters on the committees opposed this use of the no platform tactic which is specifically reserved for tackling the danger of the threat of the Nazis.

They pointed out that fascism is unlike any other movement or set of ideas. It presents a fundamental and often violent challenge to any form of democracy and free speech. It will not be beaten by well formed argument and debate. History shows if we are to stop fascists gaining a hold we have to deny them a platform.

But this is not a method to be used against anyone you disagree with, this is not the way to rid society of general rotten ideas. We need to confront and challenge sexist, racist and homophobic ideas wherever they raise their head in debate and activity and win people to overcoming such divisions.

This is why SWSS members led an initiative to talk to Tony Benn when he was "no platformed" by the LGBT committee at the same time. This was also for dismissive remarks made about the Assange rape allegations last year. They argued that he should withdraw his comments. As a result he apologised and made a statement recommitting himself to supporting women's rights.

This was a good outcome that would not have come about had he simply be denounced as if he was the equivalent to a fascist.

The fight against sexism on college campuses is a serious one—the mainstreaming of sexism on student campuses is more extreme than in most workplaces. Freshers fairs, club nights and student unions are awash with sexist images. Comedy nights feature "rape banter", lads magazines are displayed in student shops and lap dancing clubs offer student discounts.

SWSS has led the way in confronting the dominance of raunch culture in many student campuses. Sometimes feminist societies and women's groups have invited SWP speakers or we have organised joint meetings and debates about women's liberation.

SWSS groups should take up specific issues around sexual harassment, abortions rights, equal pay in their colleges. For example SWSS helped organise a protest of 200 students at Cambridge against Dominique Strauss Kahn, which forced him to exit through a back door. At Sussex a march of 200 staff and students was organised in response to sexual assaults and attempts by police and management to cover up.

Everything from flash protests, graffitiing sexist images as well as teach ins, debates and meetings on women's liberation will put us at the centre of the fight for women's rights.

The Slutwalk this year was a good deal smaller than the first (1,000 marched in London) but it is something that SWSS groups should mobilise for if it continues as an annual event. It brought together a wide range of people, a few radical feminists who were hostile to Socialist Worker but mainly young women and men who were open to buying the paper and our other publications.

Comrades found the same at the 500 strong UK Feminista lobby of parliament in October, in the few minutes there was to sell we sold as many Sexism and System books as papers.

## Abortion

Tory ministers have declared war on abortion rights. Jeremy Hunt used one of his first interviews as Heath Secretary to declare he supported cutting the abortion time limit in half to 12 weeks. He was followed by Tory minister Maria Millar, part of whose portfolio is equalities, to say she too wanted to see a cut, to 20 weeks.

The cabinet now has a majority for cutting the time limit. This form of attack is the preferred option for anti abortion campaigners as they know they would not win an outright campaign to recriminalise abortions.

Clinics offering abortion services have faced new attacks with US style confrontational pickets by anti abortion campaigners, particularly in London and Brighton. These have been met with counter protests by pro choice activists, culminating in a fantastic 2,000 strong angry protest against anti abortion bigots outside a British Pregnancy advisory service clinic in Bedford Square, central London in March.

The government has also gone on the offensive. It announced emergency spot checks on hundreds of clinics in a wave of investigations after allegations that clinics were breaking the law. The exercise found no evidence of law breaking and cost £1 million but succeeded in feeding Tory propaganda that abortion access today is too liberal.

Though David Cameron maintains there are no plans to change the law we have to be vigilant. They are preparing the ideological ground so the danger of a private member's bill being used to pose a cut in time limit is real. We will need to be ready to mobilise through the Abortion Rights campaign in the trade union and student movement to oppose any attack.

## Austerity

The attacks on the public sector jobs, workers' pay and cuts to welfare benefits disproportionately affect women, working class women. Women are a majority of the jobs in the public sector so suffer the brunt of pay freezes and attacks on pensions. Women also rely most on the welfare benefits that are being slashed by the Tories.

This brings the importance of the role of the family under capitalism to the fore.

The Tories like to portray themselves as the party of the family but they spend their time attacking poor and working class families as feckless and immoral. If you are rich you live how you like. If not then they want to penalise you financially for have what they deem "extra" children. They want to blame what they call "troubled" families for being poor.

The propaganda on the centrality of the family suits them. If your child doesn't get A levels, a college place or a job then it's your fault not society's. As pay freezes and rising prices kick in then individual families must cut corners or risk being labeled a "scrounger".

When people with disabilities lose benefits or old people's homes close, or hospitals kick patients out early, the family is expected to carry the extra burden that cuts to the welfare state create. For the family read women, working class women as wealthy women can always pay for help.

This goes to the heart of explaining why women's oppression is shaped by women's role within the family. Even though the actual families people grow up and live in are very different to 50 or 100 years ago the ideology is still potent and the economic burden still critical.

Equal pay between men and women is still an illusion and as part time jobs increase low and unequal pay affects more and more people.

## Resistance

But there is a danger, which many succumb to, which is to see women simply as passive victims of oppression. Anyone who went round picket lines on 30 November 2011 strike, the biggest ever strike of women workers in Britain, or went on the TUC demo in October saw something different. Women were organised and angry and were up for a fight.

In 2011 there was a higher union density among women workers—28.75 percent—than men—23.4 percent—for the tenth year running. Women join unions at a faster rate than men. The resurgence of struggle in the public sector over the last 18 months has made activists of millions of women. The sell outs and retreats by the union leaders have let them and all workers down. But the potential for new battles still exists.

But the last two years have shown that internationally when struggles reach revolutionary levels women have been at their centre. The sight of ordinary women taking to the streets to fight against dictatorships and oppression in the revolutions across the Middle East and North Africa has inspired millions across the globe. They give us a glimpse of what is at stake, and what is possible.

## SWP

We have to ensure the SWP intervenes and attempts to shape the many struggles and debates over women's oppression and liberation.

We also have to fight to develop a women cadre within the organisation. This means understanding how women's oppression can mean that women may be less willing or confident to take a lead.

As well as responding to attacks on women's rights and attempts to roll the clock back, the SWP has also been at the forefront of taking up the broader ideological questions about women's oppression and theorising, for example around the issue of raunch culture.

Over the last few years this has been done through a range of articles in our publications, meetings on women's liberation and debates, particularly at universities and student unions. At the same time as taking up these new (and often old) arguments there has been conscious thought to the development of women comrades.

As reported in bulletins in previous years Women's Dayschools were held in spring 2010. In the run up to the "slutwalk" protests in 2011 meet ups and caucuses for comrades going were held in order to discuss and clarify our position, and therefore plan our intervention.

To build on this work a range of initiatives were planned at the start of 2012. These included SWP dayschools on "Revolutionaries and the fight for women's liberation", and a London wide initiative for International Women's Day as well as meetings across the country.

In order to plan for these events and involve more comrades in the process, caucuses were held in London, Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield and Glasgow in early 2012.

## SWP dayschools on women's liberation

These were held in the North and South of the country. They were planned on a much bigger scale than any held previously.

This meant we could cover more political ground through a wide range of workshops but also involve more women in actually doing the meetings as well as attending and building the event. The aim was also to encourage more women comrades to do similar meetings after the event as we rolled out the titles in branches across the country.

140 comrades came to the dayschool in London and 80 to the Northern one held in Leeds. This was twice the total that had attended in 2010. The workshops included: The roots of women's oppression; Do men benefit from women's oppression? The Bolshevik tradition and the fight for women's liberation; The new sexism; what's behind the backlash and how do we fight it? Engels for today: capitalism and the

family; Where do sexist ideas come from? Socialism and feminism: lessons from the women's movement last time; Rape, pornography and sexual violence: what do socialists say?

The plenaries were, Marxism: fighting oppression and exploitation and Fighting for women's liberation and the revolutionary tradition.

A detailed reading list for each session, ranging from short articles to books was prepared in advance. Many of the women who attended the dayschool went on to do branch meetings on similar and related topics.

It's an important element of Marxism every year that there is a free crèche provided so that everyone can attend meetings. Obviously this won't be practical for every local meeting but branches and districts should help to provide financial or practical help with childcare where possible for people with children who need it.

## International Women's Day

"Raunch Culture . . . old school sexism . . . Tory assault: Why we won't "calm down dear!" Celebrating the real tradition of International Women's Day

200 people attended the London meeting to celebrate the socialist tradition of International Women's Day. Speakers from Greece, Egypt, Palestine as well as a striker from UCU and Socialist Worker editor Judith Orr meant we had a vibrant international platform.

This was our largest event held for International Women's Day for some years. It is also worth noting that it was one of the only political events to be held by any organisation in London for IWD. Having a wide range of comrades involved meant there were some fantastic visual displays and the women's group from LSE also attended.

On the same night over 90 people came to a similar event held in an art centre in Glasgow with Esme Choonara and other speakers. Across the country meetings for IWD were held by every district or branch involving a wider layer of women comrades speaking.

Following on from these events most of branches have had at least one meeting this year on some aspect of women's liberation and the revolutionary tradition.

However, part of the aim was not only to get more women comrades speaking on these topics but on a range of issues. One of the ways the National Office has helped support this process is with a speakers list.

This has been developed over the last few years and is constantly updated and sent out to branch meeting organisers. The national office actively encourages branches, districts and student groups to let us know of new people to add.

In addition, in the run up to Marxism, the National Office contacted all those women speaking at Marxism for the first

time to see if they would like to be booked in for a branch.

## What next

- Among ideas for new publications we will be publishing urgently a new pamphlet on abortion rights to take into account how the arguments have moved on.

- We should be ready to counter anti abortion pickets and protests and raise the issue of abortion rights in trade union and student meetings and argue for affiliation to the Abortion Rights campaign. We should prepare to launch a national campaign to defend women's rights to abortion if the Tories move against it.

- Women comrades in trade unions should stand for and take part in women's conferences.

- The International Women's Day events should be a central part of every district's work in March. They are an opportunity to put together a special platform of speakers who both address the concrete issues women face today as well as a theoretical explanation for oppression and how to fight for liberation.

- The success of the days schools show the thirst among members new and old for a greater understanding of Marxism and the fight for women's liberation. We should continue to organise such schools not just aimed at new members but also need to provide an opportunity for more experienced cadre to develop and debate our tradition.

- This leads to more women contributing in and doing meetings as well as writing in the party publications. Fighting for women to have the confidence to write and speak is a constant process in the party.

Its positive results can be seen at Marxism, at branch meetings across the country and in all our publications, there are a number of forthcoming articles in the ISJ on issues of the family and women's oppression. Also now half the journalists Socialist Worker are women.

- Comrades who work on the publications at the centre don't know everyone. If you have someone join your branch who says they'd like to write something, or disagree with something they've read etc, make sure they get in touch, write in etc.

Every district committee should make up a hit list of women members that could write up reports of local events/strikes etc for the paper, write reviews and articles and do branch and SWSS meetings.

- It's important to think in advance if you want to encourage any new or unconfident members to take a lead in the branch or district. Giving new comrades plenty of warning if you want to get them to write

a report or introduce a topic at a meeting is vital.

- We need to target recruitment and the political development of women cadre both through our student work but also our work in the unions when so many women workers are getting active.

- Our aim is to have a party of leaders. This means comrades who lead in the party in local branches and districts but also in the party nationally.

- But most importantly of all we want comrades, women and men, who lead in the class and shape the struggles that challenge the system whether on the streets, in the workplaces or in the colleges.

## Central Committee

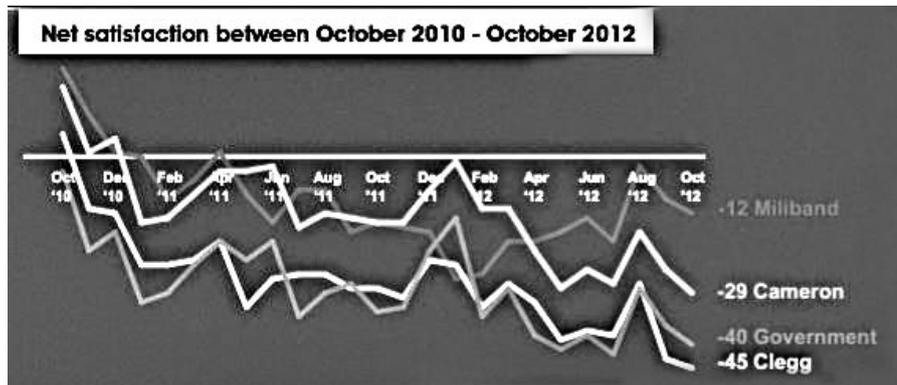
# SOCIALISTS AND ELECTIONS

As we noted in IB1, one of the striking features of the present situation in many parts of Europe is the growth of electoral formations to the left of mainstream social democracy. Forces like Syriza and Front de Gauche have become the focus of wide-ranging debate on the left about how socialists should relate to such formations.

In Britain, however, there is no powerful national electoral force to the left of Labour. There is not because workers are wholly happy with Labour, let alone the Tories or the Lib Dems. Satisfaction with *all* the party leaders has fallen since 2010. (See graph right)

The Tories are ripping up lives, but Labour offers only timid opposition or even agrees with the thrust of the attacks. The booing of parts of Ed Miliband's speech in Hyde Park on 20 October is proof of how deep the anger goes against Labour's leaders. In Scotland we have seen how on occasion the SNP can take some Labour votes – and how angry many people were at Labour leader Johann Lamont's call for means-testing and more cuts than the SNP proposes.

The disillusion with Labour is intensified by its elected representatives meekly implementing cuts. It is possible in just a few sentences to describe the entire record of Labour councillors refusing to push through austerity. Southampton Labour councillors Keith Morrell and Don Thomas honoured an election pledge and refused to vote for the closure of a local swimming pool. They were suspended for three months by their Labour colleagues. Morrell and Thomas have now formed a new group on the council – Labour Councillors Against The Cuts.



In Lambeth, south London, councillor Kingsley Abrams abstained in a vote of cuts and was suspended from Labour indefinitely. In York, Labour councillor Lynn Jeffries left the group. She said its decision to cut community social care for vulnerable residents had been the “final straw”.

George Barratt is an independent socialist councillor in Barking and Dagenham after being expelled from Labour for refusing to vote for cuts.

These scattered instances represent the total known rebellions by Labour councillors against the cuts! Of course we welcome every case where councillors say they will not implement the cuts. But it is a very thin set of examples. Compare, for example, the 1985-6 ratecapping revolt against the Tories which initially saw 15 entire councils defy Thatcher!

Labour’s performance has created space for a left of Labour coalition or party. We would welcome such a force. Elections are not at all the main field of struggle, but they certainly matter. Furthermore a stronger electoral left, with a more powerful voice in the media and elected bodies could boost the struggle in the workplaces, colleges, streets and communities. One would feed into the other.

If we had more councillors and MPs speaking out for strikes, protests and a socialist alternative to austerity then workers might feel more confident to fight. Those struggles would in turn develop the electoral arm.

But nothing of this sort has yet emerged in Britain, despite occasional signs of the potential. There are many interconnected reasons for this including the very limited history of left of Labour electoral successes in the past (unlike France, Greece etc where the Communist Parties have a long history of big votes), the electoral system, the unwillingness of lefts inside Labour to contemplate a break, the main union leaders’ support for Labour and the recent history of initiatives such as Respect and the Scottish Socialist Party. This does not mean we give up!

We recognise that we live in a very volatile world where the scale of the crisis and the resistance means that political developments can happen much more swiftly than in “normal” times. Pasok, Greece’s Labour-type party, slumped from 43 percent of the vote in 2009, to 12 percent in June 2012.

The radical Syriza rocketed from 5 percent to 27 percent over the same period.

In March we saw George Galloway’s stunning victory for Respect in the Bradford West by-election - even more remarkable and more decisive than his 2005 success in Bethnal Green and Bow. This was potent evidence of the potential for an anti-austerity, anti-racist, anti-war party *to win mass support*.

The SWP backed Galloway in Bradford West and rightly recognised the significance of his win. While remaining part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), we argued to support Respect candidates in some forthcoming elections rather than running a TUSC candidate. We hoped this could help the growth of the left in general.

Yet by mid-October, after Galloway’s appalling comments on rape, Respect was in tatters with the majority of its leading figures, including Salma Yaqoob and Kate Hudson, feeling forced to leave the party. Respect may still be capable of good results in a limited number of instances. But it will not act as a rallying point for the wider left.

In May, a number of SWP members stood in local council elections. We saw some excellent results, most notably Michael Lavalette’s win in Preston, but also others including Dave Gibson’s 17 percent in Barnsley, Maxine Bowler’s 14 percent in Sheffield, Tom Woodcock’s 19 percent in Cambridge and Mark Krantz’s 9 percent in Manchester on the back of a really vibrant campaign. We were pleased with those results but we recognise they are modest on a national scale.

Since his election Michael has done important work - dealing with his constituent’s problems, holding “roadside surgeries”, holding a very successful meeting of Preston Independent Socialists over fracking which may lead to a change in the council’s policy, visiting picket lines, preparing to challenge any cuts in the next budget, and visiting Palestine. We also have an SWP branch in Palestine.

Unfortunately the majority of TUSC results were far short of what had been hoped for. We believe May’s elections vindicated our position that it is better at this stage to win credible votes in a few places that to scatter out forces and collect a large number of lower votes.

We support TUSC standing in by-elections where we have a credible base and candidate, and we also back standing in council elections. We back widening TUSC and seeking to work with other left forces to the benefit of all. We recognise that the issue of working class political representation is still far from settled. It remains part of the debate inside the wider working class and inside the unions.

The Unite union has launched a big push to win its members to join Labour and change it from within. But the scant evidence of any possibility of “reclaiming the party” has led some unions to back the idea of an organised political alternative.

This summer the RMT conference passed a resolution which said, “All the main political parties in Britain advocate austerity policies, differing only over what timescale and with what severity cuts should be made to force workers and our communities to pay for a crisis caused by the banks. ... The development of a new political force that advances the ideas of trade unionism and socialism would give confidence to workers and help to create a viable political alternative to austerity.... TUSC provides a nucleus of such a new political force.... RMT should continue to support TUSC candidates in local and parliamentary elections.”

And in a ballot held by the PCS union, 79 percent voted to clear the way to the union backing candidates in national elections. The union said its support “could include:

- In a parliamentary by-election, where unions and other groups have campaigned against the closure of local public services, which none of the candidates from the major political parties is opposing, we might decide to swing behind a local anti-cuts candidate
- Working with other union members and community groups, we could consider supporting or standing an anti-cuts candidate in a general election against a prominent government minister, if none of the candidates from the main parties opposes cuts the minister is responsible for making.”

This represents a real step forward for our argument, although it falls short of launching a national initiative. We are for continuing the argument in the unions and, for example, raising the PCS position inside unions such as the NUT and the UCU.

It remains important to be open to any opportunities for wider electoral work. It may well be that in the absence of a genuinely national formation that we will see more “single issue” candidates - in defence of the NHS for example, or against local cuts. Such candidates can become a focus for anger against the coalition (and disillusion with Labour).

Some people will remember Dr Richard Taylor who, standing as an Independent

Kidderminster Hospital and Health Concern candidate, became an MP at the 2001 general election largely on the issue of restoring the A & E department of Kidderminster Hospital. It had been closed due to (Labour) NHS cuts. Taylor won with a majority of 18,000. Of course “single issue” candidates have the drawback that their wider politics may be very mixed or reactionary (Taylor, for example, was for renationalising the railways but also supported the homophobic Section 28 legislation). And a number of people standing on a variety of issues is not the same as a coherent left voice.

None of this should be a cue for despair. We believe the left can and must, do better than its present performance. We are open to work with others.

In May 2013 there will be elections covering 27 county councils and a handful of other councils, such as Bristol. These are not the easiest territory, although we should look for possibilities. The elections in London, the big cities, Scotland and Wales take place in 2014, where there will be many more chances to stand. In the meantime by-elections offer a chance to raise the socialist message.

We should look to how we can offer different politics to the main parties, but also a different way of electioneering – linked to struggle, strikes, direct action and defiance. We want irreverent, exciting campaigns, not men in suits. Elections are not at the centre of our work, but they cannot be ignored.

#### Central Committee

## THE FIGHT FOR LGBT LIBERATION

### Political polarisation

LGBT politics continue to be characterised by the growth of radical politics on the one hand, and right-wing and racist ideas on the other.

The extent of the radicalisation, and the opportunities it opens up for socialists, is made plain by a statement made by Queer Resistance. This is an active group of mostly young people, with the anti-capitalist politics typical of UK Uncut, and influenced by autonomism and very active in Occupy at its height last year. Their call for participation in the LGBT “Pink and Black Block” on 20 October was headlined: “Queer struggle is class struggle: workers and queers, unite and fight!” It went on to pledge the group’s determination to fight every cut, and also rejected the logic of neo-liberalism and “the essential nature of the capitalist system itself”.

The politics of such activists are not those of the SWP: they reflect an eclectic and sometimes incoherent mixture of

ideas, but a key part of that mix is that the struggles against capitalism and for sexual liberation are one and the same.

The past few months have also seen, however, evidence of the equally powerful trend towards right-wing, business-oriented LGBT politics. Brighton Pride is now run by local businesses: participants must pay £17 to enter the event at the end of the march, and groups must pay to take part in the march itself.

London- and Brighton- based group Queers Against the Cuts faced serious harassment on the march from both organisers and police: their delegation was sent to the back; people were prevented from joining it; they were surrounded by police during the whole march. The organisers clearly felt that protest had no part in a Pride event.

We continue to see the growth of a self-confident, right-wing LGBT middle class. This is the result, ironically, of the success of LGBT campaigning. Only fifteen years ago it was impossible to be out as an LGBT person and a member of the armed forces, a police officer or a senior private sector executive. By contrast, exhibitors at Stonewall’s Diversity Careers Show for 2012 include the army, navy and air force, the Met Police, the Royal Bank of Scotland, Ernst & Young and BP.

### London Pride crisis

The clash between such different political trends and class interests came to the fore sharply around London Pride which was plunged into crisis by a combination of financial mismanagement and what appear to be politically motivated demands made by Boris Johnson, Westminster Council and the Metropolitan police.

It exposed the failure of a Pride model increasingly removed from its radical roots and provoked widespread anger amongst many people, particularly student and trade union activists who have in recent years been demanding a return to Pride as a protest and have had some degree of success asserting the need for a more radical set of politics. Notably in Pride 2011 when the NUT/LMHH float led Pride and wider agitation against the Tories and in support of the pensions strike ran through the march. (see note on Pride for more detail)

### Identity politics v class politics

The growth of both radical and conservative currents has led to changes in ideas around identity politics. We have long rejected the common sense of much LGBT politics that only those who experience LGBT oppression can really know how to fight it, so that straight people can, at best, play a supportive role in LGBT campaigning. While such ideas continue to have a strong influence amongst layers of LGBT activists, they are starting to fragment in the face of a class and

political polarisation which undermines the idea of a united LGBT “community”.

In this situation, middle-class LGBT people are more likely to see their oppression as an isolated problem in a capitalist society which is otherwise working for them: a problem to be addressed through law reform and campaigning focussed solely on LGBT issues.

The wider context of the last decade; low levels of class struggle but significant reforms favourable to LGBT rights - most notably under the New Labour government - have reinforced a situation in which these concerns tend to dominate the political agenda of “official” LGBT politics.

However there is a growing gap between official LGBT politics as articulated by the mainstream parties, gay business and professional bodies and many working class LGBT people who are also active in their unions, on campus and in the wider struggles developing in Britain.

For millions of LGBT workers and students facing cuts and attacks, LGBT oppression is only one example of the need for wider social change. Those struggles require workers, oppressed groups and campaigners to build united campaigns – and, in any case, since Seattle there has been a mood for unity and a rejection of the narrow identity politics of the 1980s.

Queer Resistance’s approach is that the only people excluded from their meetings are straight homophobes. No to Pinkwashing is a new group working as part of the Palestinian struggle by opposing Israel’s attempts to gain credibility by presenting itself as LGBT-friendly: it also does not limit membership to LGBT people. These are symptomatic of a wider shift towards LGBT and straight people working together against homophobia and transphobia, as black and white people work together against racism and fascism.

### Crisis, cuts and scapegoating

Deepening recession increases LGBT oppression through cuts and the risk that LGBT people will be scapegoated. Bitterness and anger resulting from social crisis can find expression in horrifying acts of homophobic violence, as in October 2011 in Ayrshire, when gay barman Stuart Walker was beaten and burned to death while tied to a lamp post.

The most significant political trend in legitimising homophobia is the current development of right-wing Tory campaigning against gay marriage. Cameron’s rhetoric in favour of marriage equality is one marker of the real shift that has been achieved through LGBT campaigning. Yet for all that rhetoric, Tory cuts are having a serious impact on LGBT workers and students. Many community organisations have faced funding cuts, and rises in student fees will hit particularly hard those students who

cannot rely on family for support – a situation that applies disproportionately to LGBT people. Cuts in Housing Benefit – which the Tories are threatening to cut completely for under-25s – will force more young LGBT people back into their parents' homes and make it harder for them to live their own lives. LGBT people make up 30% of the young urban homeless.

Economic and political crisis provide fertile ground for the growth of fascist organisations. In Greece, members of the fascist group Golden Dawn including MPs have attacked a gaytheatre performance and beaten up a journalist while the police looked on. In Britain the BNP continues to be an openly homophobic organisation. In 2009, following Nick Griffin's homophobic remarks on the BBC's Question Time, there was a spate of nasty homophobic attacks. The EDL's pretence at being LGBT-friendly has been exposed: in July, the EDL organised a demo to coincide with Bristol Pride, where its members attacked a gay man.

Both the BNP and EDL are in decline, and the Tory right remains isolated in its homophobia. A "gay-friendly" image is a key element of Cameron's strategy of "detoxifying" the Tory Party, which has been central to his party leadership. The LGBT middle classes we describe above will put pressure on any Tory leader against moving towards homophobia. Yet economic crisis can cause sharp shifts in the political climate. Just as we have seen attacks in the last year on immigrants and disabled people, we cannot be complacent and assume that LGBT people will never face the same thing.

## Equalities under attack in the workplace

Austerity and the broader ideological arguments being made for the cuts also threatens to push back important gains for equality in the workplace. A recent survey at Kings College showed that LGBT staff were much less likely to be out to management than to fellow their colleagues. In schools teachers are far more reluctant to be out to students than to staff. In a climate where job cuts and performance reviews/pay are on the increase, it is easy to see how people will feel less confident to be out at work for fear of discrimination.

Equality provisions in the workplace are also coming under attack by employers seeking to make cuts. The Tories, having forced through drastic cuts on the EHRC, are now attacking equality legislation including removing employer responsibility to prevent harassment and bullying; using the rhetoric about clearing away the 'red tape' and restrictions which are perceived as fetters on the profit making potential of business and commerce.

These issues combine with the way wider attacks on workers impact on LGBT people. During the pensions dispute trade unionists at London Pride chanted "we're

here, we're queer and we're fighting for out pensions"; LGBT pensioners are already twice as likely to work beyond 70, suffer from fuel poverty and rely on various forms of social care in the absence of partners and family support.

## Struggle in the trade unions

At the same time we have also seen equalities come under attack inside the trade unions: in the FBU where voting rights were removed from equality reps on the NEC at national conference and the NUT which cancelled their LGBT national conference in late 2012.

The development of equality structures/agendas in the unions represents an important advance in the working class movement over the last few decades. LGBT rights in the workplace, as well as other equal rights, have progressed very significantly since the 1970s, driven by the campaigning work of out LGBT activists in the unions amongst others, many of them socialists.

However the same tensions evident in society more widely also exist within the trade union movement. Some LGBT union activists are comfortable within the legislative and policy framework which has been achieved so far and believe that individual casework is the way to address issues around LGBT equal rights at work whereas others, increasingly those at the sharp end of cuts and austerity and the differential impact of these at work, recognise the need for collective responses and campaigns. Many such workers will be attracted to a strategy of LGBT liberation rather than accommodation and relating to them can be part of how we build a wider network of activists and stronger organisation in the workplace.

At recent Northwest LGBT NUT training day for example attracted 19 people- many new to the union who wanted to get more active. This contrasts with with the national conferences where good policy gets passed, but is rarely combined with resources and support for activists who want to put them into practice on the ground. LGBT history month, for example, an important opportunity to both take on homophobia/transphobia in schools and assert our vision of education, is only organised by a small minority of teachers.

The problems and limitations of equalities structures and strategies inside the unions makes them vulnerable to attack especially at a time when many unions are revising their structures. Membership of many unions has continued to fall in recent years. The reaction from most union leaderships to this has not been that they need to step up the campaigning and resistance to the cuts (people join unions when they see them fighting back and relevant) but rather to look to retrenchment, mergers, and cost-cutting measures. Such pessimistic strategies do not bode well for equality structures and representation within trade unions. They threaten and undermine dedicated equality representation and can

marginalise union equality agendas using spurious arguments about the need for cost cutting, prioritisation, the claimed need to concentrate on protecting jobs and conditions, or even that 'equal rights at work have largely been achieved now'.

## Tribunes of the oppressed

Our response in the trade union movement therefore demands not only a robust defence of the equality agenda and union equality structures but requires a sharpening up of how we integrate the fight against inequalities and oppression into our wider industrial perspective and makes it an issue for our class. In the NUT, for example, we have responded by combining a call for the LGBT conference to be reconvened with a wider argument about the kind of strategy we need to challenge homophobia and discrimination in education in the context of cuts, privatisation and the wider ideological assault on our schools.

We also need to generalise the good experiences we have had of organising around these issues at a work place level, such as LGBT history month where comrades have been involved in some excellent initiatives.

## Love Music Hate Homophobia

Following the successful intervention in East London last year where we stopped the EDL's "Pride Rally" in Tower Hamlets and involved LGBT activists in building the successful wider mobilisation against the EDL and a Pride against bigotry march -we have made further inroads against the EDL's attempts to build on Islamophobia amongst LGBT people - notably in Brighton and at Bristol Pride.

Love Music Hate Homophobia (LMHH) has been important in this; as well as helping to deliver a strong contingent of marchers around anti-Islamophobia/homophobia at London and other Prides. These kinds of initiatives have been met with enthusiasm by activists and there is potentially a lot of scope for using LMHH to involve a wider network of activists in anti-fascist/anti-racist struggle.

## Building roots, building the Party

In the last year we have continued to work as part of broader left groupings, such as Queers Against the Cuts and No to Pinkwashing in London, and Pride organising committees elsewhere. We have become "part of the furniture" among the LGBT left in London, and were invited to the TUC to discuss building an LGBT presence on 20 October where we proposed the Out Against Austerity material and demonstration block.

We were able to use those roots when Pride London collapsed: we initiated a petition calling for Pride to be an accountable, community-led event which was signed by a layer of trade unionists but also some prominent LGBT campaigners: we took an active part in meetings organised by the TUC to discuss Pride London's future. We also took the initiative in Birmingham, where we organised a successful protest outside a rally against gay marriage held at the same time as Tory conference, supported by an impressive range of trade union and community groups.

Through this we have continued to develop and promote the party's politics, most notably Marxism, where we held a successful rally with Owen Jones, as well as the first ever meeting at Marxism on trans oppression and liberation. These meetings attracted a significant layer of young LGBT activists outside the party, and in the course of Marxism and Pride we recruited a layer of new LGBT activists.

100 people attended an SWP day school on sexual liberation. This included theoretical meetings on the roots of LGBT oppression, revolutionaries and sexual liberation in Russia and Germany, internationalism and the struggle for LGBT liberation, trans history and resistance, Queer politics and the LGBT movement post Stonewall and Fascism, racism and LGBT oppression from the Nazis to the EDL.

There were also short organising sessions on our work in the workplace, on campus and around Pride plus plenaries on the fight for LGBT liberation today and the revolutionary party and LGBT struggle.

Our work has also borne fruit in the universities where several LGBT student officers as well as other key activists are members of the SWP. We have had a strong and effective SWP presence and intervention at London Pride and many Prides around the country.

The period is opening up new struggles over oppression and a real opportunity to win people to our tradition. But experience tells us if we don't seize the opportunity, people can be pulled to other ideas and traditions, so we need to continue to develop our analysis and strategy for fighting win people to the revolutionary tradition and the SWP.

Two initiatives include a conference on LGBT and sexual liberation in LGBT history month February 2013 which will be centred on the party's politics but open to people outside of the party, plus an article on trans history and resistance which will be forthcoming in the journal - an important step in contributing to a marxist analysis and debate about trans, gender and sexuality.

## What next?

In the next year we need to

1. Continue to deepen our roots in campaign groups, unions and the student movement.

2. Have a greater level of co-ordination and discussion of our LGBT work in the trade unions/workplace. This will require more discussion in the LGBT fraction and inside our union fractions.

3. Put what pressure we can on the new London Pride committee to stick to their commitments to inclusivity and openness at the same time as recognising there remains a real danger that this committee will not bring about any significant break from the business oriented model of Pride and there could be pressures to charge for the event.

This means we need to continue to work with the networks we have developed around us to build for a militant and campaigning presence at next year's Pride under the banner Pride is a Protest.

We also need to generalise from our best experiences at the local Prides in terms of SWP and wider interventions (LMHH)

4. Play a role in developing initiatives and networks around Love Music Hate Homophobia.

5. Argue for a Marxist understanding of LGBT oppression: we are beginning to plan a half-day conference open to all on this theme for February, LGBT History Month and there will also be an article on trans history and resistance forthcoming in the journal.

**Sara (Cambridge), Hannah Dee (Central Committee), Mike (North London), Geoff (Birmingham) Steve (West London), Laura (Leeds & West Yorkshire), Nick (Norwich), Viv (Hackney), Colin (Hackney & LGBT fraction convenor)**

**Supported by the Central Committee**

## PROPOSED CENTRAL COMMITTEE

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

Weyman Bennett  
Mark Bergfeld  
Michael Bradley  
Alex Callinicos  
Esme Choonara  
Joseph Choonara  
Hannah Dee  
Charlie Kimber  
Amy Leather  
Ray Marral  
Judith Orr  
Mark Thomas

This is the group of comrades elected at the last conference except for Martin Smith, who has decided to stand down after over 20 years working for the party in various roles, and Dan who has decided he wants to leave the CC.

### Central Committee

## OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL ACTION

I aim to formulate a perspective nurturing a productive tension around from the party's wider industrial work with specific attention being paid to the contradiction between official and unofficial action.

In order to elaborate on this tension I will explore the question of the legal repression of trade union activity, and the use of the ideology of 'unity' mobilized by the trade union bureaucracies to postpone the development of a national strike movement. Both of these problems are understood to be products of the defeats inflicted on the class during Margaret Thatcher's time as Prime Minister. Accounting for the current way in which the legacy of these defeats plays out is also a political task involving how the current shifts in the balance of class forces necessitates a shift in the perspective of the party on the continuing concrete impact of this legacy.

Our comrades have waged an inspiring fight in their trade unions to deliver consistently strong 'Yes' votes for action - for example, our teacher comrades winning a 92% vote for strikes over pensions in 2011, and leading that resilience into a

82.5% ballot result for strikes over pay in 2012 despite procrastinating bureaucrats and the sell-outs in other sections.

We have also seen our comrades playing a leading role in the Electrician's dispute, providing a serious political intervention that resulted in some of the world's most powerful construction companies backtracking on the tearing-up of nationally agreed pay-rates. Our comrades have also fought successfully to build wider forces within the trade union movement – including our comrades in UCU Left successfully winning over the annual conference, and defeating motions that the Right bureaucracy wanted to use to solidify their gains made during the leadership elections.

Our comrades have also been instrumental over the last year in organizing against the continuing violence perpetrated by the various sections of the UK police force. We've led on the Left on the question of blaming the state not the poor for the riots against the police violence that erupted last summer. We have been an active part of the defence campaigns for families who were victims of resulting collective punishment by the state, or who have lost family members to police violence. We've also led on fighting against the punitive sentencing dealt out to the students after the anti-fees protests – much of this work being done through the Defend the Right to Protest united front.

The following piece is meant to initiate an internal debate about how to develop party activity around the question of fusing the work being done to agitate against state repression, and the work comrades are doing in developing the industrial fightback. My analysis and suggestions are aimed at developing an agenda for party members and structures that both compliments and enables a political tension with the work being achieved by comrades in the official trade union structures, the wider working class, and other movements of the oppressed.

To explain my first concern, that of the legal repression of trade unionism, I will begin by drawing upon a piece written in the Guardian response to the TUC conference approving a motion 'exploring' the legal status of a general strike in the UK called "The TUC's legal case for an anti-austerity general strike" by John Hendy and Keith Ewing. The article in question states:

*"The United Kingdom is a party to an international treaty on freedom of association, referred to by lawyers as ILO convention 87. This treaty has been said by both the judicial and non-judicial bodies responsible for its supervision to include the right to strike, including the right to strike in protest at government policies that damage the social and economic interests of workers" (Hendy and Ewing, 2012)*

Furthermore, they argue:

*"It is our contention that the right of workers to strike as a form of political protest is protected by the ECHR and as a result the Human Rights Act 1998 must protect it in UK law. Faced with an application for an injunction by an employer to stop any such action, our courts would be bound by the Human Rights Act to interpret UK law consistently with the (ILO and ECHR) convention rights of British workers" (Hendy and Ewing, 2012)*

The implication of this outline is that it muddies-the-waters of a long-held belief on the Left and amongst trade unionists – namely that Thatcher's repressive trade union laws are an insurmountable barrier to effective and combative industrial struggle. According to Hendy and Ewing the legal status of political strike action, and secondary action, is at least becoming ambiguous rather than strictly outlawed.

This presents revolutionaries with a scenario of increasing complexity. How we use the legacy of defeat and anger resulting from Thatcherism for political purposes in the here-and-now becomes open to re-evaluation. The power of the anti-trade union laws creates an ideological pressure on revolutionaries into accepting the demoralizing legacy of defeat, as well as a structural pressure involving real legal impediments.

The presence of repressive legislation is undoubtedly a hindrance to the building of confidence amongst rank-and-file workers, but Thatcher's legacy in law is also manifest in the acceptance that these laws are effectively unchallengeable outside of re-legislation by a sympathetic government, or a movement by the class on such a scale it could be pre-revolutionary in character. On the very terms of the processes of bourgeois law restrictions on trade unionism are open to contestation meaning that revolutionaries could be thinking in terms of how to challenge them in practice.

Thatcher's laws can become an ideological totem, reinforcing the return of workers to the parliamentary road in the majority, whilst isolating the advanced minority in the thankless task of waiting for the masses to break from Labourism.

Trade Union bureaucrats collude with this double pressure by defining one set of prospects for the organized forces of the class as greater and more accurate parliamentary representation – ostensibly to overturn the limitations imposed by law on trade union activity.

Laws which we have thus seen represent a somewhat self-imposed ideology of defeatism, inasmuch as they are the result of concrete defeats enshrined in law.

As Pashukanis, the soviet legal theorist put it "law represents the mystified form of a specific social relation" (Pashukanis, 1929: 79). In the anti-trade union laws, we

see the history of defeat and shifts in the balance of class forces, but it is a mystified representation that functions as a fetish as it does a real hindrance.

As the vehicle to achieve the bureaucrats' ambitions, the Labour Party is likely to always fail to reverse the laws with new legislation. This can then result in the strengthening of the 'reclaim the Labour Party' agenda during period of rising class struggle.

The growth of a fractious working class can embolden the principle of radical reformism. As in Europe, where we have seen the electoral emergence of equivalent Left-of-Labour forces, the UK version might be the regrowth of a serious and organized Left aiming to influence Labour from within.

The result would be a sublimation of the activity of the bureaucrats and activists into trying to increase their influence on the Labour Party's policies in order to get it favour the trade union movement.

The risk is that Labour then fails to do so, so the argument to reclaim the Labour Party hardens, the bureaucrats try to claw back more influence, and the attempt fails, and so on, and so on.

The call made by the bureaucrats of the trade union movement for 'unity' is also another product of the legacy of the defeat of organized workers under Thatcher.

The lesson resulting from the defeat of the miners by Thatcher is widely understood to have been the lack of solidarity and concrete industrial struggle by other sections of the organized workers movement.

For trade unionists today, the necessary step to defeating the Tories is to organize an industrial fightback involving the widest number of forces. This is the correct ambition, but it risks being incorrectly implemented.

It is always the case that we want rank-and-file unity from below, whereas the unity from above of the bureaucrats is only in our favour if the most militant sections are leading.

What can be observed in the concrete application of the simplistic call for 'unity' is that it is shifting towards being a conservative demand from the more reluctant sections of the trade union movement, used to hold back the more militant sections.

Thus, in the struggle to get national strike action in schools, it is the pressure exerted by the more conservative union NASUWT on the NUT, articulated as the call for 'unity', which is breaking the momentum towards further strike action.

Thus, 'unity' in practice means the holding back of sectional struggles in the face of attacks on terms and conditions and job losses, in favour of a pace of struggle determined by the conservative and least likely to strike sections of organized labour. What is happening in this situation is that 'unity' is the official unity of the bureaucrats over the independent unity of the rank-and-file workers.

It is in this context that we must be cautious about the current 'explorations' of the possibility of a General Strike. Whilst we must relentlessly agitate for a concrete realization of the call for a General Strike, we should not neglect local, regional, sectional or national struggles, or other forms of political struggle, where these tip the balance in favour of the independent activity of the rank-and-file.

If the lead up to a General Strike involves an accumulation of local, regional, sectional and national struggles in various parts of the workers movement, the General Strike will be less of a pressure valve and will rather indicate a qualitative shift in the character of struggle in the UK. We must also remember, as in 1926, even after the concrete unity of the General Strike, when the balance of power favours the bureaucracy the result can be long-lasting demoralisation.

What is important in developing the struggle against austerity is not only putting pressure for the greatest possible unity, but also on exploiting productive tensions and contradictions in the organized sections of the class.

Within our industrial work the primary practical contradiction is between the bureaucracy and the rank-and-file not between the Left and Right. The contradiction between Left and Right is a consequence of the bureaucratic structures having a concrete impact on struggle.

The very existence of the bureaucracy raises the question of whether to unseat them from the Left, or move independently of them, and then how to balance the emphasis on either tactic at particular points in time.

Whilst the contradiction between the bureaucracy and the rank-and-file in the unions produces the tactic of the Broad Left, it is only the independent activity of the rank-and-file that can overcome the contradiction. The Broad Left, or the Left bureaucrat, is useful to the revolutionary so long as they advance the cause of an independent rank-and-file. This is because, as Cliff and Gluckstein argue

*"The fundamental fact, however, overriding all differences between bureaucrats is that they belong to a conservative social stratum, which, especially at times of radical crisis - as in the 1926 General Strike - makes the difference between Left and Right-wing bureaucrats secondary. At such times all sections of the bureaucracy seek to curb and control workers militancy" (Cliff and Gluckstein, 1986, 28)*

I here return us to the question of official and unofficial action and some of the consequences of the defeats under Thatcher, and practical corrections we can take to work against them.

Firstly, the conflict between official and unofficial action takes on a sharper charac-

ter because the law now appears to robustly police unofficial action making it also gain the character of illegal action. If we as revolutionaries are going to rebuild a robust rank-and-file capable of taking independent action, it will probably also have to be able to undertake illegal action.

This means that we as a party are going to have to be able to advance the rank-and-file side of the industrial struggle in order to avoid all party industrial work becoming liquidated into legal work permanently entangled in internecine battles with bureaucrats.

The tension between legal/official and illegal/unofficial industrial struggle casts a shadow over the effectiveness of the union bureaucracies for leading independent rank-and-file activity. The contradiction between rank-and-file and bureaucracy takes place in the official structures, where militant action is vulnerable to becoming hamstrung by the power of the state to decide when and where an action is 'official'. We have seen the power of the law to do this on numerous occasions over the last few years, from the BA fightback, to public transport fights.

Party activity around galvanizing the forces of the organized sections of the class into winning official consent for action is a contingent tactic. Its success is measured against the ultimate aim of revolutionaries to shorten of the gap between rank-and-file consent for official action and rank-and-file participation in unofficial (and therefore currently illegal) action.

When the Prison Officers Association engaged in mass unofficial action, we provided a necessarily complex critique of the oppressive role of prisons as a function of the state. What we need to also understand is why the POA were confident enough to act against the law.

The closing of this gap, and resolving the contradiction between bureaucracy/rank-and-file and legal/unofficial, is not only a task for propaganda, i.e. winning sections to an analysis of the role of Trade Union bureaucracies and the law, but is also an organizational task - meaning the party must innovate a practical method for securing collective action of the necessary type.

This means exploring a variety of forums (some legal, some national, some unofficial, etc.) for strengthening the horizontal connections between workplace militants from a variety of workplaces as well as sharpening the conflict between the vertical lines of connection between rank-and-file workers and the bureaucrats.

The task of revolutionaries is not to assume that the current level of class struggle is transitional, thereby endorsing the idea that class struggle works in stages. Rather, as revolutionaries we understand that the current quality of class struggle is contingent therefore prone to leaps, mutations and downfalls.

The likelihood of a leap rather than

downfall relies to some extent on the activity of socialists to intervene in the struggle, not just to ride sentiments of the masses as if they were a natural tide. We not only brace ourselves for further combativity emerging as a product of current struggles but also seize on any and all instance of struggle of a qualitatively different (unofficial/illegal) character and work to generalize it.

Through the setting up of our united front Defend the Right to Protest, we were able to deepen the radicalisation of students by moving on from the question of the betrayal by the Liberal Democrats and the demoralizing defeat on the fees vote to wider questions of political repression, police violence and the role of the state in defending class privilege.

This campaign has also created links with the community campaigns that emerged in response to the racist violence of the police, linking our party with other sections of the oppressed. Right to Work has shifted focus from seeking to create a single national anti-cuts movement, to targeted campaigns around forging links with anti-workfare groups, disability rights activists and unemployed workers activism.

Both of these united fronts have shifted the political direction of wider party work, either to deepen the radicalisation amongst sections of the class, or to forge links with the diverse movements resulting from the fragmentation of the anti-cuts campaigns as they emerge in response to particular forms of cuts.

Unite the Resistance has focused on the necessary task of rebuilding a consensus amongst the majority of the national organized battalions of the class to restart the momentum that led to the November 30th strikes, and our party work needs to be organised to compliment and push at the radical edge of the industrial work currently taking place.

I believe that because of our current united fronts (like Unite the Resistance, Right to Work, Unite Against Fascism and the Education Activist Network) and our role in official trade union work, we as a party are well placed to lead a resurgent rank-and-file movement, and to weave our politics as a red thread through the tapestry of working class history.

### Some practical suggestions:

- A Weekly SW column written by a worker, detailing the tasks and steps taken whilst building for a dispute. This could be a national, local, current or past dispute, with the emphasis on the practical activity, hurdles and joys the worker encountered. The goal is to spread the experiences and lessons of struggle at the point of production across the readership of the paper.

- Local party industrial caucuses involving all industrially placed comrades in the district. These will focus on mapping and

developing the local tactics for intervening in disputes across sectional lines which can then be pushed through the branch structures. This is meant as a means for shifting the internal balance within the party towards the pace of industrial work.

- To initiate the development of workplace political reading groups, SW reader meetings, or industrial branches, etc. to provide a corrective to the pressures of official trade union work amongst our industrial members. It can also feed into the overall project of rebuilding a rank-and-file. The Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE) was able to successfully build momentum within the Chicago Teachers Union for a large-scale shutdown of schools across the city. CORE began as a reading group for teachers.

- Republish 'Marxism and Trade Union Struggle' with an updated introduction placing the book in a historical context and outlining how the experiences of the last few years relate to the insights of the book. Publicise the republishing with a series of articles in the SW on the analysis and role of the trade union bureaucracy. Our analysis on this issue is a significant part of what sets us out from the rest of the Left as the defenders of socialism-from below.

- Initiate a long-term series of weekly articles in the SW under a specific banner of 'Fighting the Law' (or something similar). These pieces would detail the histories of working class disputes, or movements of the oppressed, that broke or defied the law and were successful in achieving their aims (For example, the Poll Tax movement of the 90s, the Suffragettes, the Underground Railroad in the fight against slavery, Pentonville Five etc.)

The point is to stress that there is a middle point between legal struggles and full scale insurrection. Workers and the oppressed have broken the law in the pursuit of immediate non-revolutionary aims and have been successful.

- To develop and promote a series of meetings dealing with the theoretical and practical question of the law. The first of these meetings would be a revolutionaries analysis of the role of the law in class society, another would be a broad and longer term account of numerous historical moments where workers have confronted the law and won, and the last would be a detailed and focused meeting on one successful industrial battle involving action against the law (i.e. Pentonville Five).

**Luke (South East London)**

## REPORTS FOR SOCIALIST WORKER

We need more comrades (and non-members) writing reports for Socialist Worker and to improve the quality of the reports the paper carries.

What follows is a draft guide that I submitted to the paper in July with the suggestion that it could be put on the Socialist Worker web site with a link from the page where people submit reports.

I hope comrades find it useful.

### Draft guide to writing reports for Socialist Worker

We need more people writing reports for the paper. Not only would this mean the paper can carry reports from more places and campaigns, it is also important for strengthening the relationship between the paper and its readers - making it "their" paper and more likely to read it, sell it and discuss it with other people.

It is far easier to go back to a group of strikers or campaigners and sell them the paper if it carries a good report on their action.

Many people won't feel confident to write a report for a newspaper. This guide is intended to give people confidence and to help improve the quality of reports.

### Facts!

Many people are rightly suspicious of the media. They won't automatically understand that Socialist Worker is different from the millionaire press - we need to earn their trust.

We want workers to have confidence that if they read something in Socialist Worker it is true and accurate. This can be rapidly undermined if we make mistakes like getting names or places wrong or misspelling them so it's really important to *check your facts* with those involved and write them down at the time rather than relying on your memory. If possible, ask someone involved to help you write the report.

These questions should help you gather the key facts:

- **What:** What has happened? What is going to happen?

- **Who:** Who is involved? Which union(s)? How many people? Is the mix of people unusual - gender/race/age etc? Is it a group experienced in struggle or new to it? What are the names of any key figures on both sides e.g. union reps, officials, managers? What can you find out about the people the campaign is against (e.g. company profits, directors' pay, other disputes)? Are there

other groups who could be drawn into the fight?

- **When:** When did things happen and what is the timeline for what will happen next?

- **Where:** Where is it? Is it just one group or are there others elsewhere in the country?

- **Why:** What has led to the action? What has motivated people get involved?

- **How:** How have they organised so far? How do they plan to win? How are they deciding what to do (e.g. mass meetings, officials deciding for them)? How can someone get more information, leaflets, collection sheets etc (e.g. web site, phone number of union rep or official)?

### Photos and quotes

Photos and quotes from people involved make a report much more interesting. *Always* check with an individual before quoting them by name. The only exception to this should be people who cannot be victimised for their words (e.g. union full time officers, MPs) and generally only then if you are quoting a public speech. It's still important to get the quote accurate.

### Audiences, arguments and action

There are several different audiences for a Socialist Worker report, and they need different things from it:

- **Those directly involved.** We want them to see that Socialist Worker takes their campaign seriously and reports it positively and accurately. We DON'T want to leak confidential campaign plans that the other side is unaware of! As well as supporting them, the SWP should be arguing with those involved about what to do next - this argument should be in the report - reports in Socialist Worker should be political not just good journalism.

- **Others who could support the campaign.** For a strike, they need to know where to send messages of support, where to send money (include both who to make cheques payable to AND the address to send them to). If there's further action or events, make sure you include the date, time and place. Get full addresses - if people aren't confident of finding an event they are less likely to come.

- **Others who could learn from the campaign.** What lessons can people learn? Has it shown the strength or weakness of some particular action or tactic? Have those involved organised in a way others should copy? Are they grappling with a problem that others might also face? Are there wider political points?

Socialist Worker has limited space, so reports may be edited, so the more you are focussed on what the different audiences need from the article, the easier it is to keep your report short and to the point.

## Other input

If your report is on a major dispute, you may need to discuss what the report should argue for with the SWP industrial department (020 7819 1175). Otherwise, think about whether there are other comrades who might have views you should consider. If there's a dispute in your area, there should be discussion at your branch meeting about what we're arguing with those involved.

## Submitting your report

Reports can be sent to [reports@socialist-worker.co.uk](mailto:reports@socialist-worker.co.uk) or phoned to 020 7819 1180 or submitted via the web at <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/report.php>.

For legal reasons, you must provide a name and contact details, but your report need not have your name on when printed. Reports normally need to be received by noon on Monday to make the print edition.

Ian (Manchester)

# DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In the current period, the party has to carry out a complicated strategy, working with trade union bureaucrats while trying to build up rank-and-file confidence in the working class, in the face of a vicious coalition government, a reluctant TUC and a deepening crisis of capitalism.

As the crisis gets worse, our strategy will only become more complex, and more difficult to carry out – whether or not there is an upsurge in working class struggle – precisely because the deepening crisis means the stakes will keep getting higher and the ruling class more vicious.

In this context it is vital that our party is capable of vigorous debate and decisive action, swift changes of tack and honest analysis of our successes and failures.

We need to have an absolute clarity of our perspective, all the way through our organisation, from the branches, the fractions, the elected leadership and the full-time apparatus.

Every member needs to be convinced of the correctness of the strategy, and grasp its nuances, in order to be able to apply

it in practice to their local situation. And because of the fluidity of the situation, we need to be capable of constant reflection and analysis of how effective the strategy is, in order to correct it swiftly if it is wrong or generalise from successes.

All this means we need three things: maximum debate and discussion, all the time, at all levels of the party; a high level of theoretical clarity and confidence in all members; and unity in action guaranteed by accountability of all members, whether in elected positions or not. In practice this means providing forums for debate and encouraging discussion about our theory and strategy in our publications, our internal bulletins, our branches, districts and fractions. It means the leadership, especially – but not restricted to – the CC, carrying an argument through the organisation in order to make sure that all members are convinced, willing and able to put the perspective into practice.

It means the members being trained and encouraged not just to put the strategy into practice but to reflect on it and criticise or feedback to the leadership if it isn't working or doesn't meet the needs of the circumstances we find ourselves in. In other words, it means making sure our party reflects the aspiration that every member should be a leader.

## Discipline

Having such a complicated and flexible strategy is only possible on the basis of discipline and accountability. Discipline results from accountability – in other words, if there is not pressure on members to explain themselves, and to argue and win other comrades to their position, there is always a danger that they will be pulled in different directions.

This is most obviously the case for our members operating within the trade union bureaucracy, but it is the case for all members, including the full-time apparatus and the CC, comrades who are running local or national united fronts, and so on. This is not to make an analogy with the trade union bureaucracy versus the rank and file – the point is that all members face the pressure to capitulate to the right or take organisational short-cuts rather than continually make the hard and sharp arguments we need in this period.

Discipline is therefore essential, and is not merely achieved through rules and regulations. Rather, it is enforced by members having to argue through their positions with their comrades, and admit mistakes or even be removed from leading positions if they are not effectively leading.

This has to be a continual process – it is not a matter of catching comrades out, but of continually reflecting on our successes and failures in an honest and open way. Hiding mistakes from the rest of the party, or failing to analyse what went wrong and why, can only lead to even bigger errors.

In this spirit, we have to acknowledge that the party has taken significant steps forwards in the last few years in terms of raising the level of political openness and discussion.

This is the result of a number of factors: firstly, the general acknowledgement that there was a culture of top-down leadership and quelling of debate, which gave way to a period of reflection and discussion, culminating in the Democracy Commission.

Secondly, there has been a sustained attempt to build a new cadre of younger members in the party, led by our student work and initiatives like the party educational series, and an attempt to get new writers for our publications.

This has been uneven, which was reflected in the debates last year about the lack of women writing in the ISJ, but has generally been moving in the right direction. This is always going to be an unfinished process as the party continually renews itself and attracts new members.

However, unless we also have effective organisational means of holding comrades to account, there is a danger that our leadership takes a mechanical approach to winning political arguments. This danger has arisen out of the period of top-down leadership, and has not been sufficiently dealt with.

As Chris Harman argued before the Democracy Commission was set up, "there is a vicious circle of comrades leaving all decisions to the CC, and the CC feeling that only they are capable of making decisions".

If the CC isn't forced to argue through their positions politically, it is easy in this situation to end up with a mechanical, one-size-fits-all approach which doesn't work. This is exemplified by Unite the Resistance – the CC and centre are pushing a strategy, but not effectively winning over large sections of the membership, so we end up with the party neither applying it whole-heartedly, nor raising any serious alternative to it.

This danger is most prevalent in the CC and the full-time apparatus of the party, as they are the most disconnected from the day to day arguments in the working class, no matter how talented they are. If you are not constantly having to argue with people to your right, it is easy to become complacent in arguing with comrades, especially comrades who are not used to questioning the leadership.

This is not an abstract question or opposition for its own sake – it is vital to get this right because we are trying to make a sharp turn towards orienting ourselves on the organised working class, after a period of concentrating most of our energies on broad movements.

This means we have to deal with the betrayals and vacillations of the trade union leaders, the ups and downs of disputes, and the frustration of the weakness of the rank and file. In many branches this

turn has been executed slowly and in a confused and messy way – comrades have been unclear on how to relate to community based anti-cuts campaigns, whether to try and subsume them in initiatives like Right to Work and now Unite the Resistance, whether to aim to take leading roles in them or prioritise industrial work, and so on.

There has not been a sharp and clear argument from the leadership that has equipped our members with the necessary clarity to decide how best to implement the national perspective to their local situation.

But as well as being unused to being held to account by the party through sharp debates, the CC in particular are unused to being held to account through elections.

The last challenge to the CC slate was in 2005 when John M proposed himself (precisely in order to raise the question of CC accountability). The slate system, which was questioned at the time of the Democracy Commission, discourages members from challenging the leadership in elections because any challenger has to take on the entire CC, rather than just one member of it, and the CC have almost always presented a united front to conference even when there are disagreements within it.

The case for the slate system rests on the argument that the CC has to be able to work together, and that slates ensure that a well-balanced team is picked.

But there were serious divisions on the CC in the recent past, which culminated in four of them leaving the party. The evidence suggests that, far from preventing disagreements that could paralyse us, the slate system just serves to hide these disagreements from the rest of the membership, because of the fear that any serious disagreement could damage the party. As pointed out in the most recent ISJ (136, p.159), Paul Levi argued:

*“It’s a completely false attitude that Communists can sort out their mistakes in a quiet little room. The errors and mistakes of Communists are just as much a component of the political experience of the proletariat as their achievements. Neither the one nor the other should be withheld from the masses. If they made mistakes, they did not make these for the party, and even if the party collapses as a result – if this is the only way in which the proletariat can draw the lessons from experience – then it has to be so, as the party exists for the sake of the proletariat and not the other way round.”*

The slate system has also been defended by the argument that individual elections would become a ‘popularity contest’ – but this is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it implies that the membership is incapable of deciding who is best for the job. This attitude only serves to promote the feeling among some of our newer members that

the CC is out of touch and has no faith in the membership. Secondly, if an open election is a popularity contest in which the membership takes part, the slate system is a popularity contest in which only the current CC takes part. It is contradictory in the extreme to argue that limiting the number of people who take part in a decision makes it more democratic.

The final argument in favour of this system is that the CC are best placed to spot new talent and bring them on to the CC. But in practice many of the new CC members in recent years have come from the full-time apparatus, and are not necessarily any more fresh from the struggle than the existing members. Changing the election system does not prevent the CC from suggesting and supporting new candidates, but it also gives more room for other members to do so – the CC is not uniquely placed to recognise new talent.

The proposal to replace the slate system with individual elections for the CC was raised by the Democracy Commission two years ago and was lost at conference by 130 to 88 votes (60% to 40%). I accept that it is frustrating to raise the same argument again, but feel that it is necessary, because the political context has changed.

Last time the question at stake was a serious disagreement about the party’s perspectives, and the emphasis was on how to build a new layer of cadre capable debating the party’s strategy. Today, we have a more complicated strategy and need to be confident that each member of the CC is accountable to the membership.

The slate system makes it very difficult to hold any one member of the CC to account. Any party member can move an alternative slate – but presumably all candidates on a slate have to agree to be on it. This means it is impossible for anyone to propose a slate that contains any existing CC member unless that person agrees to stand against the rest of the CC.

It is entirely possible for members to feel that one person should be removed from the CC, because they are not the best person for the job, or a new person put on, without disagreeing completely with the perspective and general direction of the party. If people really have a serious disagreement, then proposing an alternative slate and forming a faction is still the most appropriate course. This is about accountability of individual comrades, not challenging our overall strategy.

## Organisation, not navel-gazing

Discussing our formal structures is not abstract, as they exist to facilitate the political tasks at hand. In this period, it is imperative that we have maximum flexibility of tactics, and that means changing our structures to suit.

The full-time apparatus is very large and

operates in an unnecessarily substitutionist way. There are 50 full-time party workers, which seems far too large for an organisation of our size.

In the period when the branches were not really operating, this was essential for the party to function – but now we need to re-emphasise building up local and workplace organisation, and such a large apparatus can become a fetter on this process. Many of the tasks that are done at the centre could be done in a much more politically useful way by the branches – for example, contacting new members when they join, signing up members to Marxism, or keeping track of and analysing paper sales.

In addition to replicating the (tendency towards a) mechanical approach discussed above, the centre is organised in an overly bureaucratic way that encourages departments to compete against each other for their immediate priorities, rather than winning the membership to an overall strategy and helping local branches to apply that strategy themselves.

None of this is an argument against having a full-time apparatus, or blindness to the need for some routine and admin.

Of course we need some admin roles and they are always going to be tedious. But we have to acknowledge that all routine tends towards conservatism, and a blurring of the boundaries between political tasks and the purely administrative.

The full-time apparatus should be confident political organisers, and working for the party – although it should not be an easy job – should be politically challenging and develop comrades’ politics.

It does this to some extent, but only up to a point because of the bureaucratic way the centre and the CC are organised. This means that party workers can find themselves struggling to keep their job political, despite the routine nature of day to day tasks, and can end up frustrated with the membership – for not grasping the importance of their departmental priorities – and slipping into moralism.

The danger of leaving these tendencies unchecked is that members become disillusioned about the extent to which they can play an active role in formulating the party’s strategy.

This was illustrated last year at conference, when a number of mostly younger comrades raised arguments about the party’s internet work and the development of women in the party. These debates were a big step forwards in that comrades felt confident enough to challenge or question the party’s leadership on issues that, although not central to our immediate strategy, are very important to our overall politics.

Instead of their contributions being welcomed and a serious discussion taking place, the debates were dismissed and comrades were given the impression that their opinions were less valid than those of the CC.

After the debate about women, those who took part were accused of being 'soft on feminism' and the attitude taken by the leadership was that this was a dangerous current that needed to be smashed.

One member was called a disgrace for questioning the role of Socialist Review, and full-time party workers were reprimanded for taking part in the debate. If a debate about childcare in meetings is handled in this way, it does not encourage new members to take part in the big strategic discussions we need about Unite the Resistance and the trade unions, or the ideological questions about the nature and effects of the crisis of capitalism.

Therefore, we need to be willing to adapt our organisational structure, and sharpen up our debates, to ensure:

- Maximum freedom of debate and discussion
- Adaptability of our strategy on the basis of honest and open reflection on our successes and failures
- Discipline of all comrades through continual debate and accountability to the membership
- Political leadership on the basis of winning arguments, rather than mechanical imposition of decisions on the membership

I therefore propose the following to be put forward as motions to conference, provided they gain the support of one (or preferably more!) of the branches, districts or fractions:

1. Individual election of CC members, as suggested by Ian in IB1.
2. Fractions and districts to elect NC members accountable to that fraction or district.
3. That we clarify and affirm the rights of party workers to participate in the party's democratic processes, submit articles to the internal bulletins, and argue for motions or positions critical of the CC or the perspective.
4. That the CC has a division of labour and clear areas of responsibility but is organised less rigidly along departmental lines, as it has a shared responsibility for winning the party to the whole of our perspective.
5. That the full-time apparatus be reorganised in the same way, as much as is reasonably feasible given the need for some routine and division of labour, and that the number of full-time party workers be reduced to minimise substitutionism.
6. To open a party-wide discussion, facilitated by the CC and given proper forums in every district for comrades to take part and submit suggestions, on the relationship between our current strategy and the party's publications, including their relationship to our internet work.

We need a thorough discussion of the content, organisational role and readership of our publications, including an honest appraisal of the circulation figures. Suggestions that come out of this process should be discussed and voted on at Conference next year.

**Ruth (South London)**

## POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND PARTY DEMOCRACY

It is fair to say the task facing our party over the next period is by any standards immense. The responsibility of relating to, building and leading the growing movement against austerity would be a heavy burden for an organisation 10 times our size.

As Ian A illustrated in his piece in IB 1 ('Raising the political level of the party'), the difficulty of this is intensified by both the low ideological level and the weak organisational strength of the traditional workers organisations.

For this reason, the lead the party gives both strategically and tactically on a local and national level is of the utmost importance. Though we must be realistic about the extent to which we can shape the resistance to austerity within Britain, we never the less must be aware of the important role we will play within the struggle.

Our ability to formulate a coherent strategy, both capable of pulling the most militant around us while shaping the movement more generally, will in the first instance be shaped by our rootedness and having a cadre centrally involved in struggle. Any organisation that accepts the centrality of the working class, while at the same time being peripheral to that class's struggles and organisations can only be an abstract, propagandist sect.

Equally as important, however, is that those same militants have an organisation in which their experiences and views are brought together collectively, assessed, and acted upon.

In this sense the democratic aspect of a revolutionary party is not an added extra, but an absolutely integral element; not only in attempting to apply the correct approach the first time round, but in also correcting the errors that will inevitably be made along the way. The complete freedom of exchange of ideas and criticism in the first instance, and the absolute unity in action once a decision has been reached, remains the clearest and best way of organising a revolutionary working class organisation.

This, in a sense, is quite a formulaic

way of approaching the question. No party seriously engaged in struggle can ever hope to secure for itself a perfect way of organising.

At different times it is obvious that organisational or political necessity will take precedent over democratic process. It is also clearly the case that not every issue by necessity needs a referendum of the opinions of the whole party before it can act. Never the less, a revolutionary organisation should always take seriously its own democratic structures and ensure that to the best of its ability it is functioning as best as it can.

Within our own party, this has been the subject of debate for quite some time. From the 'Democracy Commission' onwards, it has generally been recognised that there are improvements to be made, and in part there has been. The worst elements of previous bad practice have been left behind; certainly the party feels more open than it once did.

However, for the large part many of the same problems persist, and not enough has been done to seriously tackle them. While a change of personnel on the Central Committee has improved things slightly, it has done little to change the political culture within the organisation.

Substitutionism is still rife within the party, both politically and organisationally. In most areas the political leadership is in the hands of a small number of comrades and full timers, with the larger membership passive.

This passivity has in most places led to a complete disengagement with the party's strategy and its democratic structures, and is having an extremely damaging effect within the organisation. Further compounding this problem is the lack of *critical* engagement from the active core of the party; where it does exist, it is often dropped, for fear of alienating less experienced members or seeming disloyal.

This also is clearly a hangover from the last 20 years, where political disagreement was dealt with through suppression of ideas and people being shouted down. Never the less, it still exists throughout the party.

On a national level this trend is intensified ten-fold. The party strategy is driven entirely from the centre, with the experiences and views of the majority of comrades given little consideration, and differences of opinion given little time.

Taken overall, far from the organisation being one of controversy and debate, most comrades are politically under-confident to raise criticism, unused to the rigour of constructive debate and argument, and the overall political level remains very low. Even more worrying than this however is the deep cynicism that exists within the organisation towards different areas of our work. There are three areas in particular I would point to which I think are symptomatic of this problem.

Firstly, the membership lists. Consider-

ing the central importance of maintaining a reliable membership list within a revolutionary organisation, it is terrifying how few comrades trust them.

It is well known that the majority of people on the lists are not members (many never were), and that it is easier to squeeze blood from a stone than getting people taken off. These lists are then used as a basis for an assessment of our organisations size, which is clearly going to be completely distorted.

I was told recently that Leeds had 153 members. If this is the case, the district must have ten more branches that I'm not aware of (maybe I've just stumbled across our underground membership?), or we are employing the age old method of kidology.

Keeping accurate records is often difficult, and the famous story of Sverdlov miscalculating the Bolsheviks numbers attests to that. But if we get our numbers wrong by a few thousand, we are in danger of quadrupling the actual size of the party.

What is most worrying about this situation is that very few comrades are actual willing to raise this with the centre, despite it being the consensus in branches and districts. For most it is considered not worth the hassle of the argument which ultimately is considered fruitless, which anybody that has ever broached the subject with the office will attest to. The fact that this situation is allowed to continue is highly indicative of the problems within the party.

The second issue is that of Party Council. Despite Party Council being one of the most important democratic institutions our party has, engagement with it is at an all-time low. Many comrades have come to see it as dull, unimportant and a rubber stamp for the Central Committee.

In 10 years in the party I have never known a branch vote on its delegates and arguments tend to revolve around why people shouldn't have to go, rather than why they should. It's clear to see why; the first session of the last Party Council was dominated (numerically and politically) by full-timers and observers from the National Committee, with little input from actual delegates.

Despite there being differences within the party over a number of aspects within our industrial work and perspectives, not a single one was raised within the session.

Instead it followed a similar formula to most other Party Councils which did little but raise awareness of the next important protest/conference. The one time a comrade did raise a disagreement with the CC, she was cut off (despite CC members going well over their time) and the CC member summing up spent ten of his fifteen minutes responding to her point. This being the case it is little wonder that comrades are not engaged with the party's democracy.

Thirdly, and certainly the most worrying, concerns the party's national strategy. It is clear that many comrades have com-

pletely switched off from the party's national work, many not attempting to follow the latest twist or turn.

It is doubtful how many comrades could give you a meaningful explanation as to the difference between Right to Work and Unite the Resistance; it is even more doubtful how many could explain why one was all but dropped from the party's activities.

At the heart of this is a cynicism rooted in a membership seldom consulted, rarely influencing the party's policy, and considered conservative when they fail to adequately "bend the stick".

As is often the case, a lack of democratic debate and engagement doesn't lead to greater unity in action; it instead leads to dissatisfaction which has no outlet but through passivity. It is in this area that we have the most work to do and which is of the greatest urgency.

To address these problems the party must begin to take seriously its democratic process and the raising of the political level. We must also change the way we operate to facilitate greater involvement and engagement with the party's structures and procedures. I believe Ian's proposals in IB1 would be a good starting point for that, and would like to propose the following motions for further consideration.

## Motions

### 1) Debate in the Paper

We re-affirm our commitment to last year's motion, noting that on the occasions the paper ran debates it was an extremely useful tool and definitely worth continuing.

*"Socialist Worker should frequently carry features on the theme "debates in the movement" which help readers to understand those debates and the SWP's position within them by giving space to a range of opinions. When such debates are also reflected within the party and united action is not immediately required on the issue, the features can also be used to air debates between SWP comrades in order to raise the level of clarity and assist debate in party branches and fractions."*

### 2) Party Council Internal Bulletin

The creation of a Party Internal Bulletin prior to each Party Council. Open for any comrade, or group of comrades, to contribute to, but with space provided for branch, district and fraction reports.

The Internal Bulletins offer a unique opportunity for comrades to discuss, debate and report, whilst also using them as a tool to greater understand the current political situation, and the party's strategy.

The creation of an internal bulletin prior to each Party Council would not only enable comrades the opportunity share or debate ideas more frequently, it would also give far greater direction to Party Council itself. The encouragement of comrades to

contribute would also increase the engagement in the party's democratic structures.

### 3) National Committee

A commission to be elected to oversee the change in the composition of National Committee, with the aim being to create greater regional and fraction involvement.

This would attempt to solve the anomaly of large areas of the country being absented from important national discussions, whilst also allowing for those at the fore of struggle to have an input into important political decisions. It would also greatly increase the active interest and participation in one of the party's most important democratic institutions.

### 4) Central Committee Elections

The removal of the "slate system" as it is currently practiced. The right of comrades to propose slates should remain, but the election of comrades to the Central Committee should be on an individual basis.

The monolithic style of leadership advocated and practised by Rees/German, while possibly serving a purpose in a period of working class defeat, has no place in a revolutionary party with the class in ascendancy. Political difference should be openly acknowledged, with the debates open to the party. Different political tendencies should be represented on the CC, not suppressed behind a veil of "unity". This would be an important step to fostering a culture of open and honest debate within the party.

### Paris (Leeds & West Yorkshire)

## OPPOSITION TO BUREAUCRATIC CENTRALISM

Three years back, when I joined the Socialist Workers Party, I had no idea that to: disagree, question, or think differently would be counted as a disciplinary offence. Nor did I expect to see the central committee attempt to intimidate, bully, exclude and silence me.

Using the excuse that I voted the 'wrong' way at a routine Unite branch meeting I find myself reduced to being a 'national' member of the party. I am barred from attending Cambridge branch meetings. Indeed, national secretary, Charlie Kimber actually wrote to me urging me to resign from the SWP. Instead of offering political solutions to political problems, almost instinctively, he turned to organisational (bureaucratic) methods.

Clearly, there are bigger issues involved. What seems to be intolerable is the well-

known fact that I have some important differences with the current line of the central committee.

Anyhow, let me present my main areas of disagreement:

1. As I wrote in my *Internal Bulletin 3* article last year, the SWP ought to equip itself with a fully developed Marxist programme that would really be in keeping with the “revolutionary communist tradition of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.”

Shunning that elementary task opens the door to all manner of opportunist blunders, the disastrous Respect popular front being a prime example. Without a programme, the organisation lacks not only a grand strategy, but also a binding commitment to basic Marxist principles. The central committee is left free to pursue almost any will-of-the-wisp policies. Certainly, the members have no commonly agreed point of reference with which to judge, assess and hold the leadership to account.

2. We should be fighting for a mass, working class party solidly based on Marxism. As a first step the much-divided Marxist left needs to be united into a single organisation. Given our weight, connections, history, etc, the SWP can play a pivotal role here.

True, without full rights for the factions, even that unity would be impossible to achieve. So, I believe that we should immediately drop the ban on “permanent factions” (constitution point 10). Though, of course, I accept the ban, I am convinced that it is nothing but a crude bureaucratic device that owes everything to Stalinism and social democracy, and nothing to the “revolutionary communist tradition of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.”

In effect, the central committee constitutes itself as a permanent faction and the only tolerated one! No wonder at a rank and file level there is so much passivity, demoralisation and cynicism.

3. The stipulation that to be a party member one must “agree” with the ‘Where we stand’ column must be struck out (constitution point 2). Even as things stand today, this “agree” stipulation is just one step removed from madness.

After all, our last conference in January 2012 reformulated the column (carried each week in *Socialist Worker*). Does that mean that the majority of conference delegates would have failed our test? It would seem so.

Incidentally, after thinking things through, I have come to the conclusion that there are many things wrong with the ‘Where we stand’ column. The formulations on wealth, nature and religion, (no demand for the separation of church and state) Russia and Eastern Europe being ‘state capitalist’, are, I believe, un-Marxist. That aside, when it comes to programme – even in the famished form of ‘What we

stand for’ – follow Lenin and the Bolsheviks and replace ‘agree’ with ‘accept’, I would suggest.

4. A mass working class Marxist party should not only require members to carry out basic duties (paying dues, attending branch meetings, etc), but also, members should have rights too!

Complementing the duty to unite in *agreed* actions, there must be the constitutionally enshrined right to *openly* disagree. From my recent studies, I find that none other than Lenin himself defended this principle. In 1906 he refused to go along with the Menshevik attempt to impose a ban on anything other than internal criticism. Lenin insisted on his rights, and those of his co-thinkers, to openly fight against wrong positions, even if those positions had been agreed by a properly constituted RSDLP congress!<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, I will add that I think it is improper to allow CC interference with the Disputes Committee. I believe *no* CC member should sit on a committee. *All* DC members should be elected by conference.

**Justin (Cambridge)**

## BUILDING THE PARTY AT UEL

When the first term started in 2011, the UEL SWSS group was a very small group composed of a handful of serious activists. It had gone through a year of the upturn in the student struggle, mass demonstrations from the student demonstrations of 2010 to the March 26th TUC demo, two occupations, and then a downturn in the student revolt. Although the wider organisation and the student office had a consistent analysis on the nature of student struggles, the lack of a strategy around our Education Activist Network last year nationally, and the inability of UEL comrades to adapt to this led to an isolated, insular and at times, ultra-left viewpoint of how we looked at, and related to the local and wider forces.

However, coming out of the national student demonstration on November 9th and the public sector general strike on November 30th, and despite our inability to make massive contributions to these mobilisations locally, we were able to build out of these events by recruiting the few activists that were around us at the time. The energies of the November 30th mass strike also gave our SWSS group a boost in which we were able to come out of the demoralisation felt before, witnessing firsthand our politics and the centrality of the

working-class. Coming towards the end of the first term, we managed to recruit a layer of 4 or 5 serious activists who almost immediately underwent a process of becoming consistent cadre.

Out of this development, we managed to adapt to, and sustain, a systematic strategy of having at least three stalls and sales a week in order to build for our SWSS meetings, in which we were beginning to get a regular turn out of around 20 people a week. With the combinations of our stalls, trying to create a constant dialogue and debate between the SWSS group and a wider layer of particularly conscious students in the second term, we were able to recruit around 20 more people throughout the term, many of whom would go on to become serious cadre who now take on leadership roles within our SWSS group. Another significant part of the process of developing and building cadre was rooting our SWSS comrades in the local SWP Newham branch in which the level of politics and debate there amongst our Newham comrades helped us to mature politically sharpening our political focus and understanding in regards to the centrality of the working class. These positives weren’t one-way either; our weekly attendance to branch meetings gave the comrades in Newham a huge morale and political boost and really strengthened the branch and its ability to reach out with sales and wider interventions.

Despite the fantastic pace at which we were able to build the branch at UEL, the legacies of a once insular perspective on the national student situation and our inability to deliver a coherent strategy of fighting back against privatisations and the trebling of tuition fees meant we were still quite narrow in the way we grew, and therefore we found it very hard to have a serious and precise intervention around the particular disputes on our campus. For example, when the catering and security staff were privatized, although we were able to display some acts of solidarity through marches and rallies, we were unable to offer some coherent or solid way of fighting back, or uniting those struggles with the emerging attacks on the lecturers pay and working conditions.

EAN could have offered a focus for organising and uniting these struggles, but our narrow focus on building our SWSS meetings and in the process, the party, didn’t allow for this to materialise in practice. Although we started the academic year with a 50-plus strong EAN meeting, these numbers never did develop into a serious united front or mobilizing force on the ground, and throughout the year, EAN became a tool we would disparately use to mobilize around specific demonstrations, strikes and issues on campus.

The limitations of how we were operating on campus were put to their ultimate test towards the end of the last term when we had to run in our student union

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/may/20c.htm>

elections. After many hard, but necessary arguments amongst ourselves, with autonomists, and others on the left, we managed to break from what had been a very isolated way forward into an emerging understanding of the importance of the united front, our analysis of elections and how we use them and the way in which we relate to other forces on campus. These developments resulted in the building of a broad left electoral slate in which we managed to win five of the 12 positions we contested, which considering we were the far-left option running against a bureaucratic left-posing slate and several other populist slates, was a really good result. Furthermore it has – and is continuing to – open up a space at the university in which other political forces could emerge and create a space in which the democracy of our student union could develop.

Coming out of the recent fresher's fair into the new term, UEL SWSS is in a much stronger position and has the strength in numbers and political influence in the struggles we face over the next term. Now that we are going through the process of building for our SWSS meetings, building the party as a result, and using these tools to be the dominant force in building for the mass demonstrations that we now face with October 20th and particularly our central focus; November 21s. we have to be able to fill the current gap in our SWSS group between recruitment and retention and further our past successes, channelling them into a wider intervention around the lecturers strike that will be taking place on the 2nd and the 3rd of October, the students union and the emerging protests around cuts and privatisations. We are currently seeing these patterns strengthen and our Fresher's fair was a testament to that, in how we managed to operate a successful SWSS operation of recruiting over 5 people, having over 150 people join the SWSS society, and 36 people coming to our first SWSS meeting. These successes are repeated in our united front with over 200 people signed up to both our EAN and UAF society, as well having numerous sign-ups to DtRtP and the DtRtP conference.

As long as we continue to maintain this systematic strategy and delegate roles to the growing number of comrades in our group, our SWSS group will be able to intervene around the coming local struggles, the two upcoming mass demonstrations and depending on how the struggle goes locally, we could be able to create an example of victory against management in which the student office and EAN will be able to generalize from nationally.

**Jonas, Moses, Arnie and Tom (UEL)**

## BUILDING A BRANCH FROM SCRATCH

Ipswich is a traditional blue collar town that has seen its blue collar industries decline and to a certain limited extent replaced with white collar jobs - in particular insurance, with leading insurance companies dotted all around central Ipswich. Ipswich, despite being the administrative capital, is also the poor relation to the rest of Suffolk - a solid Labour town to a largely (Lowestoft is the exception) Blue rural county.

With brief and partial exceptions there has been no consistent SWP presence in Ipswich for a decade. Yet things have begun to change and the change is clearly built on small but solid foundations. This submission is really intended for those areas with only a few comrades who may find it a daunting prospect to building a branch literally from scratch.

On the 1st of September I predicted "in a year's time we will have a branch in Ipswich". By the 30th of September ( and 3 Saturday sales later) we had that branch! The reason is simple: not that we are paper selling versions of Muhammed Ali ( though some think they are) but the political period we are in - workers are much more open to socialist politics than in previous periods.

Ipswich branch started with 4 members ( one who lives in Ipswich, 2 from outside Ipswich and a student who joined at this year's Marxism).

Firstly we set up a Saturday high street sale. Ipswich is a tough nut to crack in terms of a high volume of sales - in part it is a magnet for well off middle class types who come in from rural areas to do their shopping and partly from alienation of local workers brought on by a long, slow decline of employment, housing and services.

And yet we have started to change and challenge the political outlook in Ipswich. From a very frosty reception ( where we still managed to sell 37 papers on the first sale and where we netted a long term Chilean socialist contact) to a dismal second sale of 25 ( with a new member recruited on £5DD) to a third sale of 38 (with 2 new members on dd including a Portuguese socialist) we have firmly established ourselves.

This also shows the importance of Saturday sales as a big advertising event for the party reaching workers who we otherwise would never have met. The other sale we have tried to establish and have failed miserably is the college sale - due to a lack of available members to do it it has become a rather hit and miss affair.

We also have difficulties in meeting more than once a month - our monthly meeting room costs £15. There is a dearth of places to meet and a dearth of cheap/

free ones! To counter this we have a mini-branch after sales where we discuss Marxist theory over a tea.

We have also established an interesting periphery – we have 4/5 ex IS/SWP members who come to meetings. While only one is likely to rejoin at some point they have helped to ensure Ipswich SWP is the place to go for political debate - we even have a very friendly ex-WRP member who comes along. There are also networks of people around from StWC and anti-fascist campaigns who we work with as and when. Finally, due to 125 hours being put in on picket line delegation work during the 2007 and 2009 national postal disputes a number of reps and post workers buy the paper regularly and we can expect a couple of them at our next branch meeting. Without doubt, the SWP continues to be held in high regard by post workers.

At the time of writing we have had one branch meeting ( 6 people; half non members) with a second one planned for mid October on "The Politics of the SWP". This is expected to pull in 6-8 non members in addition to the 7 party members.

Having even a small branch has enabled us to have an intervention around the anti-austerity movement. Our work around Unite the Resistance has begun to shake up the entire left in Ipswich. For decades the Socialist Party have dominated the left primarily through its control of the Trades Council which has acted as its de facto industrial arm. For the last 10 years they have been chewing the fat of their accumulated work by living on their past reputations - there is no SP branch in Ipswich or visible presence. The two members (now one as one died) never get their paper out at any meeting and all their work is done through the TU movement or Trades Council. Outside these structures they are a dead force but a living, breathing obstacle within them.

Concerned at the continued influence of the SP and their sectarian friends in the Trades Council's own anti cuts campaign ( there is an almost patriarchal attitude from the still heavily SP influenced Trades Council that every TU issue or anti cuts campaign has to be led by them) we decided to move fast and build for a UTR meeting for four days after the 20th October. In 3 days we booked a room, designed and had delivered 1000 leaflets and arranged for a broad platform of speakers - leader of the Labour Group on Suffolk Council, a Labour Ipswich Borough councillor (and in Ipswich the Labour council build council houses), the CWU's Eastern Regional secretary, Ipswich NUT President and a PCS member (only the last is a comrade)! Disgracefully, the Trades Council refused to back the UTR meeting ( our allies and comrade on the TC were away at the last TC meeting) after a nasty ex- IMG member, working in cahoots with the SP, denounced UTR as an SWP front.

The SWP is pushing at an open door in

Ipswich. In just one month we have established regular Saturday sales, a monthly branch meeting that acts as a focal point for socialist politics beyond the membership and rattled the cages of an old, decaying but still dangerous sectarian left. If we continue as we have started there are no reasons for thinking that Ipswich SWP will fail in firmly implanting itself amongst the working class.

**John (East Anglia & Norwich)**

## RURAL ORGANISING

Left political organisation in the UK is almost exclusively rooted in areas of extensive urbanisation, with a disproportionate concentration in London. There are clear and obvious reasons for this. It is much harder, though still important, to organise in the sparser working classes of rural areas, in this case, Dorset.

Though the Dorset rural peasantry has been utterly proletarianised, and then mechanised almost out of existence, pockets of working class exist, mainly based either in small-to-medium sized urban centres or in relatively small business parks located either in the outskirts of small towns or in completely rural settings (often agricultural small-to-medium enterprises, supporting animal feed, tractor maintenance, rural transport etc.) drawing their workforce from villages in a large catchment area.

The exception is the one large town (the Christchurch/Bournemouth/ Poole conurbation, which nurtures a large number of big financial and IT sector companies, predominantly unorganised). As an example of the rural SME, most of the specialist hospital beds in the UK are made by a company called Irecroft based on the outskirts of Sturminster Newton – a small town of 3,000 or so with a further 6,000 in surrounding villages: places like Stourpayne and East Stour, whose main claim to fame was their participation in the Swing Riots in the 1830's!

Small business parks exist in places like East Peckham which barely register on Ordnance Survey. Unsurprisingly most of these factories are unorganised (the Sturminster one actually is organised, by UNITE) and where they are, the political culture is at a fairly low level. Workplaces that are organised are often branches of larger national companies with established union recognition deals, like New Look, in Weymouth the public sector (or ex-public sector).

The long-term decline of traditional rural employment in farming has created some areas with a disproportionate level of public sector workers. Dorchester (the County Town) for example, boasts the

County Council HQ (3,000 workers), the County's major hospital, a (very militant) prison, the integrated administrations of both West Dorset and Weymouth and Portland District Councils and the offices of the Town Council, Trades Council research last year indicated that 57% of the employment in West Dorset was public sector, second only to Newcastle.

This gives rise to two complementary tendencies:

1. A very high level of rural public sector (or privatised ex-public sector) trade unionism – predominantly UNISON, NUT, NAS/UWT, UNITE, GMB with pockets of PCS.

2. A very low political culture producing a string of right-wing Tory council administrations, in office for decades with larger than usual levels of corruption. This allows local Labour Parties the privilege of rhetoric without responsibility.

Taken together, this can give rise to quite savage attacks and bitter class resistance. It also means that the character of single-issue campaigns is far more "working class" than might originally appear: e.g. Land grabs by companies building high-cost housing reveals the close ties they have with local councillors and forms a component of the hatred felt by dog-walkers and ramblers who are working class and therefore more receptive to working class forms of protest action, like demos and blockades.

The low population density and its non-homogenous nature makes it largely a matter of luck whether socialists are in the right place at the right time (if at all) let alone in the "right" organisation!. In such an area, most serious socialists would be in the Labour Party simply in the absence on anything else.

This began to be challenged in Dorset with the advent of Respect, precisely at the same time as a prominent local Labour trade unionist left Labour over the Iraq war, and an active SWP member moved to the area. Dorset Respect rapidly swelled to 30 members and a contact list up to 50 at the time of the split, which neither side desired.

Dorset Socialists was founded 3 years ago predominantly to overcome this split and, more distantly, to form a non-sectarian united front capable of relating to an audience of left activists which we knew was there, in other organisations or none, to maximise the united impact of a small organised left spread over 70 linear miles of Dorset coast from Lyme Regis to Christchurch.

From an initial meeting of 7 in 2009, DS has swollen to 37 mostly active members with a contact list of 50. Dorset Respect affiliated in the first year: this was so unexpected that no affiliations procedure actually existed and had to be retro-fitted at the AGM!

Since then Dorset SWP and Dorset Respect have been joined as affiliates by Dorset Branch of the Communist Party of Britain. DS includes in its membership several left Labour Party members, and Respect

and CPB delegates have joined as individual members too]. A high proportion of members are union stewards or Trades Council delegates and officers.

The success of DS has been its ability to straddle the diversity of the working class opposition, its activity in putting concrete demands on the TU movement (UAF affiliation of 2 union branches and the Trades Council in Dorchester is directly down to its activists) and the clear anti-sectarian atmosphere, which facilitates fraternal debate.

This, combined with an activist website combining news, reports, meetings and video archives, We see it as a local tribune. DS clearly fills a "gap in the market" for socialists seeking common ground for struggle against a highly local and national elite and a unified approach across trade unions. It is a useful vehicle to maximise scarce resources and concentrate on the 90% of shared issues, whilst raising the political level through regular meetings. We feel it is worth studying by socialists active in rural areas.

**Tim (Devon & Cornwall)**

## READING, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: THE ROLE OF THE BOOKSHOP

Having a revolutionary bookshop with the status, influence and reach of Bookmarks is not just a nice thing to have. It is something that comrades have fought to set up, maintain and expand over the last 40 years. And it is maintained for a reason: if we want to influence the struggle, we need our ideas and perspective to reach as wide an audience as possible. We also need to be sharp on arguments as they arise in order to be effective leaders in the class and win and retain new layers around us. This will only come through a combination of theory and practice. Here I want to set out why the bookshop is so important at this point in time, the key role it has to play in retention and how Bookmarks can play a role in building a bigger, stronger party.

Currently Bookmarks has a network of regular customers, with around 300 account holders (many of them non-SWP), and a small number of SWP districts and branches who are in regular contact about their bookstalls. However the reality is that the bookshop isn't effectively used by the majority of comrades, SWP and trade union branches.

This results in three things: the financial viability of the shop is weakened; we lose

an avenue for the party to get its ideas into the class, and; our ability to strengthen new cadre is hampered.

Every comrade can benefit from opening an account and ensuring they are up to date with new titles, hence our recent accounts drive. But we also need closer working with branches, student groups and those of you operating in trade unions in order to expand the reach of the ideas of the party and our tradition. Below I detail some specific ways in which Bookmarks will support you in this, and ask something of you as a comrade and a branch. But it needs to be emphasised that the most effective means of exploiting the resources we have is to ensure regular two-way channels of communication.

## The ideological struggle

The outpouring of anger and dissent over the last few years has put two questions firmly back in the political discourse: *what kind of society do we want? and how can we achieve it?* Neither of these arguments have been won, but there exists a real openness to socialist solutions. The small renaissance of radical bookshops continued this year, with new shops opening in Glasgow and Bath.

The popular success of books such as *Chavs* and *The Spirit Level* demonstrates an appetite among people to understand the class nature of society and a search for arguments that give expression to their own sense of gross injustice. It is notable that one of the bestselling titles on the Bookmarks stall at the 20 October TUC march was our own *Alienation: an introduction to Marx's theory*. We have also just seen massive orders from a major distributor for the recently published Bookmarks titles, *The Point is to Change It!* and *The Vote*.

The party needs to make full use of the bookshop and its range of titles to ensure that we have the sharpest arguments and understand the nature, dynamics and possible trajectories of the class struggle. To draw in the best militants around us we need to demonstrate that we are not only the best activists, but that our strategy and tactics are based on a wealth of experience and understanding.

## Extending our reach

The quality of and demand for our ideas has meant Bookmarks publications have found a global audience well beyond the reach of SWP or IS branches. Take Chris Harman's *People's History of the World* – originally a Bookmarks book written by a CC member, it has been taken on by Verso and is now being read by thousands of students and activists every year across the globe. John Newsinger's *The Blood Never Dried* has been published in several languages and sold over a 1,100 copies in Sweden last year!

Hassan Mahamdallie's pamphlet, *Black*

*British Rebels*, has struck a nerve in post-riots Britain with the author being invited to speak at all kinds of events and festivals. In the spring we will be publishing an important new book on racism, which we will launch at a series of events around the country. We also have books in the pipeline on class, sexuality and revolution, sport and politics, Latin America, China, as well as more little books on aspects of Marxist theory, pamphlets and new Redwords titles.

From January 2013 all our new titles will be released in e-book formats as well as printed. We will also gradually make our backlist available in this way, with the aim of reaching new layers of people who we have not yet had contact with.

## Set up an account

A valuable resource such as a bookshop does come at a price. Keeping competitive in a world of anti-union, tax-avoiding multinationals such as Amazon is difficult. What Bookmarks needs is your support all year round. True, we can't always match the big shops on price, but they exist to make a profit by squeezing smaller competitors out. We exist to raise the consciousness of the class, intervene in the struggle and keep alive the memory and tradition of the party – and we need your support to do that. Start up an account and order your books through us – pay in at least £10 per month and spend it whenever you like. You'll get a 10% discount or free postage anywhere in the UK. We'll get a guaranteed income to help us cover rent and costs, buy books and plan our publishing schedule.

### SWP branches and SWSS groups

When I joined the party in Leicester I was encouraged to read by knowledgeable comrades. This gave me a very real understanding of why the party operated in the way that it did, kept me going when I was knackered, and later gave me the ammunition to win people around me as a union rep and activist. Getting new members to read increases retention. It grounds activity in a theoretical framework, demonstrates how it is informed by the successes and failures of the past and draws out debate on strategy and tactics. It helps give new members the confidence to win arguments and give a lead.

Having a functioning bookstall should not be seen as something that only big, established branches can do. Try to identify someone in your branch who could take on the role of bookstall organiser – someone who regularly attends meetings, is well read and can advise others. The branch bookstalls don't have to be a cumbersome affair. The key is to have an up to date and relevant selection of books – both Marxist classics and new pamphlets, and both Bookmarks titles and others such as *Chavs*.

Many SWSS groups have been buy-

ing up our massively discounted student packs, but student bookstalls shouldn't end there – have you got Marx's *Capital*? Alain Badiou on the riots? Manning Marable on Malcolm X? Debates on campuses are reaching a great ideological depth, and we need to show that we are prepared for all serious current arguments.

## What we are offering for branches and SWSS groups

Bookmarks will now offer as standard a 10% discount on non-Bookmarks books and 20% on all Bookmarks publications (15% by mailorder to cover postage). This applies to branch orders, not individual sales. This means that as well as having a good selection of books on your stalls and at meetings, you can make some money to reinvest in more books.

Your branch can pay for orders as they need to, or set up a regular payment from branch funds. To help you get started, branches that can raise a local levy and set up standing orders of £20 or more per month can have an extra £20 credit to spend on Bookmarks publications on their initial order.

## Movement events

The shop and the publications we produce have the ability to reach and influence layers of trade unionists and activists in all the major unions and social movements in the country.

It is important that we take our bookstall to TUC, PCS, Unite and all the major trade union conferences (except Unison currently). The range of radical books we sell would simply not be prioritised by any other bookseller. You will also see us at movement events such as the Tolpuddle festival and demonstrations. Bookmarks has gained a reputation as a bookshop of the left – on the day of the TUC demo we not only sold shedloads of books in Hyde Park, we also took up to three times our usual Saturday takings in the shop, with trade unionists from around the country popping in for a chat and a browse or to meet up with others.

But if we are going to intervene effectively we can't rely on the movement coming to us. Bookmarks staff is limited and can't be at every movement event – especially outside of London. If there is an event or a public meeting in your area get in touch. We can help you set up a stall that can spark off a discussion and begin to draw wider layers around you.

## Join our Publishing Club

Bookmarks has always relied on investments from comrades and supporters helping us to publish around 12 new titles per year. If you can invest £250 or more in the Publishing Club you will receive free

copies of Bookmarks and Redwords publications as they come out – and your money is repayable on demand after 10 years. Call the shop or see the website for details.

## In conclusion

Bookmarks exists to arm you and the movement with the ideas and arguments that advance the class struggle. But in order to do that Bookmarks needs your support and your input – if you spot new books we should stock, if you have ideas about what we should publish, contact us. The bookshop needs to be part and parcel of what the party does on a daily basis; of how we relate to the class.

**Alex (Bookmarks)**

## DEVOLUTION, NATIONALISM AND AUSTERITY IN WALES

In the following I have attempted to draw some broad conclusions about some aspects of our work in Wales, but there are some very important things I have had to omit. Although our ability to take forward the struggle against austerity is utterly predicated on our ability to defeat the fascists, I have not looked at Unite Against Fascism. It deserves an article to itself. Neither have I looked at our trade union work. What I have done is try to provide a political overview of certain aspects of Welsh Labour and the nationalists Plaid Cymru, and at how the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and the pressures of devolution affect our anti-cuts and anti-austerity work.

However, I have not attempted to look in detail at the Welsh language question: that too would require a different article. Neither do I pretend to say much about our work in Cardiff – I am based in Swansea and whatever errors and omissions there are derive from this fact.

## The situation in Wales

In the coming period it is the capacity of the trade unions, campaigning groups like Unite the Resistance and other anti-cuts organisations to build mass action to resist government attacks which will be the key factor. But industrial struggle occurs within, and reacts to, a political and social landscape. In Wales devolution, although more tentative than in Scotland, has, by decentralising certain aspects of government, altered the dynamics of intervention and protest.

The WAG has created a situation in which nationalist solutions can seem to make sense. Devolved government can seem to provide a protection against cuts and against the imposition of the neoliberal model: Welsh Labour and Plaid can point to the absence of many of the worst aspects of neoliberalism in the public sector.

In Wales, building a party to the left of Labour is complicated both by Welsh Labour's ability to present a 'left face' and by the existence of Plaid Cymru (The Party of Wales – often referred to simply as 'Plaid'), which positions itself slightly to the left of Labour.

## Welsh Labour

Welsh Labour's ability to garner votes in May 2012 is the product of a shared industrial history and demonstrates the extent to which people continue to identify Labour with the working class.

In addition, people in Wales gain materially from the fact that there are no prescription charges and that charging for hospital parking was abolished early.

In the public sector there are no academies or free schools, no SATs, league tables (although controversial 'banding' of schools fulfils the same function) or foundation hospitals and considerably less PFI schemes than in the rest of the UK.

In a sense, as Neil Davidson says in relation to the SNP, it is what Welsh Labour, in coalition with Plaid has not done, that has gained them support. They have simply refused to carry through the counter-reforms of New Labour and the Con-Dem coalition.

## Plaid Cymru

Plaid, despite its rhetoric, in no way represents a socialist alternative to Labour. Charlie Kimber's assessment in the 1999 pamphlet *Wales, Class Struggle and Socialism* is true today (even if the 'Tiger' economies have been discredited):

*"(Plaid) believes in building up Welsh capitalism, not taking power away from the capitalists altogether. Its model is the Irish 'Celtic Tiger' economy...if it ever gets close to any sort of power then, just like the Scottish National Party, it will intensify its campaign to woo business and show that it is market friendly...there is no way forward through nationalist politics."*

Plaid recognises however that to go forward it must reach out to workers in the urban centres of the south. George Monbiot calls Leanne Wood, Plaid's new leader 'the Caroline Lucas of Wales'. She describes herself as a socialist, republican and feminist. Chair of the Public & Commercial Services (PCS) union in the Assembly, she was also chair of Cardiff Stop the War Coalition from 2003-4, and in 2007 was

arrested during an anti-Trident protest at Faslane.

She represents a serious attempt by Plaid to appeal to a wider, more left-leaning, more urban, even anglicised base. As Welsh Labour councils push through cuts, a radical, campaigning Plaid could attract support.

But not everybody in Plaid supports Wood's vision of Wales as a 'socialist republic'. In 2004 the Plaid peer Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas ordered her to leave the Assembly for referring to the queen as 'Mrs Windsor,' and stood against her in this year's leadership election.

The issue of nuclear power has also come to the fore recently, as Wood appears to have softened the party's non-nuclear stance over the question of the replacement of a nuclear power station on Anglesey. The 'two faces' of Plaid – rural and conservative, and leftist and urban – may increasingly come into conflict as the party tries to find an answer to the deepening crisis.

The experience of Thatcher fed the idea that people were being attacked by a remote government based in Westminster which had no understanding of people's experiences in Wales, led by a Tory party which had little support here.

This led to renewed calls for a separate Welsh Assembly. This could not become a realistic possibility until the Tories were out of national government, with the 1997 general election. Despite the votes in favour of the Welsh Assembly Government, there is little popular enthusiasm for it, perhaps because people implicitly understand Neil Davidson's point:

*"The more politics is emptied of content, the more social neoliberal regimes need to prove that democracy is still meaningful – not, of course, by extending the areas of social life under democratic control, but by multiplying the opportunities for citizen-consumers to take part in elections for local councillors, mayors, members of the Welsh and London Assemblies, and the Scottish, British and European parliaments."*

## The politics of devolution

As a competitor for its electoral base in the south, Welsh Labour loses no opportunity to disparage Plaid's alleged 'extremism'. In September 2012, for instance, it 'challenged' Leanne Wood to condemn the Plaid president MEP Jill Evans for speaking at a rally where the flag of the illegal organization the Free Wales Army was displayed, saying the party should come clean with the electorate about links with 'extreme right wing nationalists'.

At the same time Labour is busy positioning itself as a 'protection' for Welsh workers. First Minister Carwyn Jones said at Labour Party conference in Manchester in

October that Labour in Wales had “worked to protect the people of Wales from the worst excesses of Tory and Lib Dem devastation.” The furore about GCSEs continues, and will surely be the first of other such disputes.

The issue of devolution has traditionally divided Welsh Labour. Most of those who opposed it were so signed up to the idea of an ‘United Kingdom’ and the unity of the British state that they could not conceive of its break up, although in the 1970s some on the left, including the then left-winger Neil Kinnock, couched this in the language of socialist internationalism.

Why are the issues of devolution and independence increasingly seen as an option in various countries: Spain, Belgium and Italy as well as Scotland and Wales? In Catalonia, the process is being driven by the economic crisis, the belief that the region possesses sufficient wealth to do better as an independent state.

As capitalism fails to deliver for working people, with any return to conditions of boom seeming remote, and increasing numbers believing their children will be worse off than they were, devolution and independence can seem attractive to workers.

But devolution also has the attraction for national ruling classes of deflecting discontent by seeming to meet popular aspirations without threatening the economic order. In the words of Tancredi in Lampedusa’s *The Leopard*, “For things to remain the same, everything must change”. Also, as far as the multinational corporations are concerned, the opening up of a global market together with new communication technology has meant that they can benefit from being spread over wider geographic areas, obviating the necessity to be linked with a specific nation-state, although it is important not to make too much of this: MacDonaldis still needs McDonnell Douglas.

There are other attractions. As Neil Davidson says about Scotland, provided the essential integrity of the British state were maintained on a military-diplomatic level, a greater level of devolution would be acceptable to the Tories as it would place the responsibility for raising taxation and cutting expenditure on the regional government.

Tories such as Tim Montgomerie argue that this is precisely what Cameron should do, and reconstruct the British constitution on a federal basis, already Lib Dem policy. After the Cameron-Salmond agreement for a straight ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to Scottish independence on the referendum ballot paper, Menzies Campbell is proposing a new federal UK.

Devolution is also useful to the Tories as a way of further implanting social neoliberalism, a strategy of delegation in which the responsibility for “implementing anti-reforms is spread beyond governing parties and central state appa-

ratues to elected bodies whose policy options are severely restricted both by statute and – as in the case of local councils – reliance on the Treasury for most of their funding” (Davidson).

In addition, decentralisation and localism have benefits for the right because they can help fragment governmental bodies, which can then be privatised. The contradictory process – an apparently enhanced democracy on a decentered model, which conceals a heightened centralisation, especially of control of funding – is what has been behind the restructuring of, for example, secondary education since the 1980s.

Individual schools are now theoretically all-powerful (‘free’), while actually having less autonomy than at any time in living memory, increasingly controlled by a horrible combination of central government ‘guidelines’, testing, assessment and market forces.

Although they would disagree, this neoliberal model actually fits with Plaid’s version of ‘decentralised socialism’ and independent cooperatives, moving in the opposite direction to a nationalised model.

Of course, the move to a regional government would also make it easier to implement such things as regional pay. In the same way as workplace or plant pay bargaining is portrayed as democratisation while actually weakening industrial muscle, so can the centrifugal pressures involved in devolution be used to undermine collective agreements reached in the previous period.

This sort of fragmentation plays well with the desire of the right to ‘shrink the state’ in the interests of the freedom to exploit.

As a small economy, doubt has been cast about whether Wales (unlike Scotland, without oil) would be a viable independent entity without subsidies from Westminster, especially given the destruction of mining, steel and manufacturing under Thatcher. However, with Wales already valued at only 74% of the UK per capita average, a cutting of public sector wages of 18% through regional pay, plus year on year budget and benefit cuts might well create a situation where greater devolution or even independence might seem a better option than the status quo. Apart from the economy itself, much will be determined by what happens in Scotland.

As mentioned earlier, the Cameron-Salmond referendum agreement for Scotland 2014 will not include the ‘devo max’ option. Although a vote for an independent Scotland is unlikely, Menzies Campbell’s eight-member commission is already arguing for a raft of constitutional changes, the most radical involving the scrapping of the Act of Union of 1707, to be replaced by a new ‘declaration of federal union’ for all parts of the UK.

Although the precise detail of such an arrangement would depend on the weight of the pro-devolution votes in 2014, it

seems that devolutionary pressures in both Scotland and Wales are not about to disappear, regardless of the result of the referendum.

## Resisting the ‘anti-reforms’

In a deepening economic crisis nationalist solutions can be the other face of reformism. Where traditional social democracy fails, secession and political and economic independence can be seen as an alternative.

A federal structure has certain attractions for the ruling class. Loudly blaming cuts on Westminster would be a less and less credible option for local councils or the Welsh Assembly Government in a more highly devolved model.

As regional governments become ‘cost centres’ and responsibility for public sector budgets is delegated so does responsibility for cuts and the fostering of a more ‘free market’ model of delivery, in which cost savings become primary.

In such a scenario, national governments could not only portray themselves as meeting popular aspirations, and do so without changing the fact of exploitation or interfering with capital accumulation or basic defence and diplomatic functions, but they could do it in a way which produces tangible structural benefits for themselves. And once tax-raising powers are granted to regional governments, they then have to shoulder the responsibility for making unpopular cuts.

At the moment, however, there are certain things worth defending in the Welsh system. Free prescriptions, no league tables, no academies, no NHS foundation trusts etc are all things we should be fighting to retain. So the two-pronged resistance we need in Wales will aim both to stop cuts to jobs and services and also to defend those parts of the system which have not suffered ‘anti-reforms’.

## Electoral politics

In their 2009 book *Clear Red Water - Welsh Devolution and Socialist Politics*, Nick Davies and Darren Williams of Welsh Labour Grassroots called for the Labour party to engage more closely with Plaid politically, forming a ‘red-green alliance’.

This followed on from the ‘One Wales’ coalition agreement between Plaid (15 seats) and Labour (26 seats) in the 2007-2011 Welsh Assembly (60 seats total – 30 needed for majority). Davies and Williams argue that such an alliance, between two parties that ‘claim to stand for socialism and equality’, could isolate the Tories and set a ‘progressive, left-of-centre agenda in Welsh politics’.

They visualise a situation where a broader alliance could be constructed, involving the Greens, socialist organisations, campaigning groups and the trade unions.

Since then, the deepening of the crisis

has in a sense relegated questions about electoral regrouping to a back seat and made resistance to the cuts the most urgent issue and focus for the left.

The situation will become more complicated as Welsh Labour attempts to perform the task of simultaneously imposing and seeming to oppose the most severe cuts to welfare and the public sector in living memory.

Whether any Labour councillors will find themselves able to register some sort of protest must be seen in the context of how they have behaved in the past: the omens are not good. However, the more vibrant and powerful an anti-austerity movement we build, the more likely we are to pull some Welsh Labour lefts with us.

The Trade Union & Socialist Coalition (TUSC) feels very much to me like a grouping in transition. It cannot remain as it is – to have a future it needs to develop, involving other forces, other trade unions for a start.

But union leaders are not going to get involved and are not going to split from Labour unless they see social and industrial forces moving which can compete with Labour. It is out of this that an electoral alternative can emerge. A party to the left of the old-style social democratic parties will only really begin to make sense to millions of people in a situation of widespread and profound social struggle.

This is the lesson of Syriza in Greece, which moved into a different league electorally because there was a powerful mass movement on the ground, involving workers, trade unions and community groups. Syriza itself developed as a coalition, and left electoral groupings in Britain will have to go the same route.

Although there were serious defects with Respect, not least of which with Galloway himself, not everything it did was wrong: it recognised that a new party of the left needed an actual material base, in this case the mass anti-war movement, and it tried, with some limited success, to give expression to that. It also attempted, spectacularly unsuccessfully, to be a 'Unity Coalition'. It recognised that in left electoral terms what was necessary was to bring different groups together under a single flag.

Respect singularly failed to do that. In the long term, such a project is still necessary. The main task right now, however, is in building, through united front work, a mass movement in resistance to austerity. It is out of such social and industrial struggle that electoral forces will emerge.

If anybody would like the fuller version of this article, please mail me at tim.l.evans@btinternet.com

**Tim (Swansea)**

## THE PARTY AND DISABILITY

Disabled people have been one of the key targets of the Tory Con/Dem government's austerity programme. 2010-11 saw a campaign in the Tory press to brand disabled people as benefits scroungers and cheats with stories of wheelchair users getting out of their chairs and walking, being involved in sports activities deemed to be unsuitable or beyond the ability of disabled people.

According to some disability groups and the lived experience of DPAC members this has led to an increase in disability hate crime in which disabled people have been targeted as 'benefits scroungers'.

The propaganda offensive was, of course, merely the softening up exercise preceding major attacks on disability benefits and services which are a key aspect of the government's plan to dismantle the welfare state.

The Con/Dems have employed the private company ATOS to assess all disabled people for continuing receipt of disability benefits. ATOS has administered the increasingly notorious 'work capability assessment' (WCA) which the British Medical Association branded as 'unfit for purpose' and demanding that it should be immediately scrapped.

According to figures published in the Daily Mirror for one 8 month period last year an average of 32 disabled people a week had died after being kicked off disability benefits by ATOS.

In a substantial number of these cases losing benefit was mentioned as a contributory cause of death by the coroner, it appears from recent figures that numbers dying in these circumstances are increasing significantly.

Next year ATOS is to be let lose on Disability Living Allowance, the government has already set a target of a 20% reduction in DLA – this will have a further, dramatic and damaging effect on the lives of millions of disabled people. The government is also planning to close the Independent Living Fund that allows many severely disabled people to live independently by 2015, many face the prospect of being forced back into institutions.

A recent report into a Commission led by the former Paralympic athlete Tanny Gray Thompson estimates that 450,000 disabled people will lose a substantial part of their income with the introduction of Universal Benefit, the report further estimates that 10% of all families with disabled children fear they will lose their homes as a result.

The government estimates that 20% of the entire population is disabled and that around one third of the population is directly affected by disability issues. All of this has resulted in a significant upsurge in active opposition from disabled people, on

June 20th this year John McDonnell commented in parliament that 'we are seeing a disability movement the likes of which we have never seen before'.

He was right in two ways. First the sheer size and anger of the disabled people's movement is unlike anything we have seen before. In the past the 'disabled people's movement' has been limited to a minority of key activists many of whom found their way into the local and national 'Disabled People's Organisations' that grew up in the 80s and 90s.

The establishment of Disabled People Against the Cuts in 2010 marked a fundamental break with the past in two important ways. Firstly in that DPAC is very much a 'grass roots' organisation involving large numbers of 'ordinary' disabled people rather than the 'disability professionals' who dominate the earlier movement.

In the weeks following the recent ATOS week of action during the first week of the Paralympics a number of new local groups sprang up around the UK.

Since the Paralympics interest in DPAC and its sister organisation Black Triangle has mushroomed, activists are being flooded with requests to speak at meetings, rallies and conferences around the country.

Secondly unlike its predecessor the new disabled people's movement, at least in its DPAC and Black Triangle manifestations, sees itself as firmly rooted in a larger 'movement against austerity'.

DPAC was born out of a group of disabled activists joining a leading the protest at the 2010 Tory Party conference in Birmingham. This new movement also sees itself as allied to the trade union movement, leading DPAC activists recently met with the leadership of the PCS to discuss joint working.

DPAC members have also been invited to speak at a number of Trade Union sponsored conferences including by the GMB., RMT and TSSA. DPAC played an important role in the recent Remploy dispute in pushing for an occupation of one of the key factory sites in London, something the union leadership unfortunately managed to prevent but only by the skin of their teeth. Many DPAC activists are won the strategy of working alongside the trade unions as well as within them where possible.

The SWP has played a central role in building and supporting this new movement, SWP members play a leading role at a national level in DPAC and many party branches have been directly involved in supporting DPAC and Black Triangle activities.

As a result the party has recruited some of the key activists from the new movement. Coverage of the disability movement in SWP has been excellent, one key activist who is not an SWP member regularly posts articles from SW on his 'Black Triangle' blog-one of the most popular on disability issues in the UK.)

However if we are to maintain and develop our influence within this new and important movement we need to sort out some key issues.

Firstly, we believe that there is a lack of clarity in the party's current analysis of disability as a form of oppression. There are debates and arguments to be had concerning the difference between disability and impairment, the extent to which the party's current analysis reflects the medical model and how impairment will be experienced in a socialist society.

The pre-conference bulletin is not the place to raise these arguments in detail. We believe that the differences could best be argued through at a day school on disability and then in a further article in the ISJ.

We would also like to raise a number of additional, related, points. Firstly although a pamphlet on disability is now in the process of production disability is not included as a form of oppression within the party's publications on oppression, we feel that this must change.

If we are to continue to recruit, develop and thus retain disabled activists then we need to take access issues very seriously. Although the party has made some serious steps forwards, producing 'easy to read' materials for example, there remains a tendency to view these as a primarily financial problem. This cannot continue to be the case. In our workplaces, colleges and schools we would not tolerate the exclusion of disabled people, we need to have the same attitude towards the party in all of its manifestations.

Lack of access results from both material issues such as access to buildings and publications but can often result from lack of thought, something which is relatively easily resolved.

We therefore suggest that:

- i) All disabled party members who are union members should be urged to become involved in their trade union disabled members organisations
- ii) We should urge all disabled members to become involved in their local DPAC and Black Triangle organisations where they exist
- iii) Local branches should seek involvement in activities organised by DPAC/Black Triangle and other disabled groups
- iv) The party should organise a day school on disability in the near future open to all members with an interest in the questions it raises
- v) That following this day school the ISJ should publish a new article on disability and oppression
- vi) That the CC should consult disabled members on the production of a basic guide to disabled access for publication on the party website.

We are sure that we have omitted important issues and hope that comrades will take these up in subsequent bulletins.

**Rob (North London) and Ellen (Home Counties)**

## WHEN THE EDL CAME TO BRISTOL

The EDL have been pushed into disarray by a succession of counter-mobilisation successes which began in Tower Hamlets and then carried through to Brighton, Bristol and Walthamstow. One significant aspect of these successful mobilisations was the unity between ourselves and forces either side of the political spectrum, in the latter cases under a 'We Are' umbrella as an adjunct to the UAF. Trade union and Labour Party representatives, in varying degrees, committed themselves to the principle of a counter-demonstration to be held on the streets.

They were joined by groups marginal to the labour movement tradition, such as anarchists, who were also kept on board by the prospect of direct action against the EDL, if necessary under the protection of mass numbers on a more formal counter-demonstration. In this contribution I want to offer some explanation of the 'We Are' formula, why it was used, and offer some lessons learnt from the Bristol experience.

Over the last two elections in Bristol (council and General) a serious campaign under the banner of UAF was developed in those wards and constituencies where the BNP were standing. Bristol is like a political doughnut, with more multicultural and mixed class areas concentrated in the centre encircled by a ring of poorer areas with bad housing stock and with a majority white population.

Some racist attacks had occurred in these areas, in particular in the Southmead and Speedwell parts of the city. The BNP targeted these encircling areas of the city for their campaign, which included car cavalcades (not entering the centre), street leafleting and stickers. No public meetings were held by them.

In developing a counter campaign ward 'convenors' established leafleting rounds of as many houses as possible in the BNP target areas. Appeals were issued to local trade unions to help, and in particular the response from local branches of the NUT was crucial, with many young teachers joining the leafleting sessions. A contact list of 400 emerged from the campaigns.

At the 2010 General Election the BNP received less than 2 per cent of the overall vote in the two seats where they contested, the same as the average percentage for the

BNP across the country, although lower than in cities such as Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield. The containment of their vote was considered a success, in no small way due to the local UAF.

However, the momentum of the UAF in the city was not continued. No serious work was done in maintaining the UAF by the district. The group reduced effectively to just two party members as secretary and chair, and existed in name only.

Then in early March 2012 the EDL announced their plans to march in the city in July, a few weeks after Brighton. The fact that the UAF contact list had not been in operation since 2010, together with the lack of an active and representative UAF in the city, caused us an immediate problem.

We could not easily call upon a range of people beyond our own forces to begin a campaign from scratch under the UAF rubric. The UAF was certainly considered, indeed correctly, by many key trade union and other activists in the city as an SWP front rather than a united front with the SWP as a key independent constituent (this was confirmed in conversations with local CWU representatives).

The result was an initial paralysis in response to the EDL threat. A whole month was lost before party comrades talked openly about the problem, at a lunchtime break with Weyman at a Party Council.

The EDL march had since also been announced by other groups within the city, who were clearly making plans to counter-mobilise, with or without the UAF.

As a result of this impasse late in April 2012 we took the decision, initially in the name of the UAF, to call a first meeting of interested groups and individuals in the city who wished to counter-mobilise against the EDL.

The meeting attracted about 30 people of whom more than 20 were SWP members. There was no trade union representative presence, apart from SWP members as individual trade union members, and a handful of anarchists. So in many ways the initial meeting reflected the reality of a lack of UAF presence and real profile within the city.

Despite this the meeting was very enthusiastic about beginning a campaign, the weaknesses of the UAF in the city were recognised, and a vote was won to begin the campaign under the umbrella name of We Are Bristol, and to begin to collect names supporting a public statement against the EDL presence in the city.

From that small base the campaign developed strongly, the statement was issued a couple of weeks later having secured the initial support of three union branches (where we had SWP members), individual trade union activists as well as a Labour Councillor and CWU rep and a local Labour candidate. Two 'big name' supporters, Owen Jones and Mark Serwotka, were also added.

The initial statement still gave promi-

nence to the UAF as sponsor of 'We Are Bristol'. This caused some contention with anarchist groups in the city (who have a significant presence in terms of numbers and act as a bridge to a wider layer of antifascist support) and so was eventually dropped in favour of a We Are Bristol branding only.

It was obvious there was goodwill towards the initiative and so further support gathered pace, leading to a larger meeting, hosted in a city centre fire station, which was much more representative, including more non-SWP trade unionists and Labour Party activists. The local AntiFa organised a bicycle vigilance group as part of the security operation for the meeting. It seemed that a real alliance had been formed.

The difficulties of negotiation soon became apparent. Direct confrontation was not progressed as a central strategy, as this would have been likely to alienate sections of the trade unions.

Neither was any concession made to the case put forward by others for a ban on the EDL march (promoted by some on the left such as the local Respect branch). Indeed the argument against calling for a ban was particularly important, given that Bristol Pride would be taking place on the same day, and any ban would inevitably be a blanket ban across the city.

Holding the alliance together continued to be difficult. In particular, many individual anti-fascists who came to the We Are Bristol planning meetings, often associated with anarchist groups, stuck to the view that directly confronting the EDL was the most important organising issue.

A process of patient explanation was necessary, highlighting the dual nature of the successful Brighton mobilisation whereby direct confrontation would be possible without mass arrests only if we had mass numbers on our side in the first place.

The key to success was to build a counter-demonstration with trade union and community involvement to the fore, based around a *defence* of multiculturalism, a *rejection* of racism, fascism and bigotry, and a celebration of diversity in the city.

We also continually emphasised that our support was all from within Bristol, whereas the EDL were bringing most of their support from outside (it was to be a national mobilisation for them). The negotiation process included talks with Muslim organisation leaders in an effort to persuade them to join forces. This latter task was more difficult, and certainly in Bristol the objective of persuasion was not achieved. This was because of a strong alliance against We Are Bristol of the city's ruling elite of press editors, police chiefs and Lib Dem ruling councillors. This alliance took the form of a press offensive against the 'disruptive' and 'non-peaceful' intentions of We Are Bristol as well as a publicly funded charm

offensive by the police towards the Muslim leaders, persuading them that the EDL was no real threat, and that they should not let their young people on to the streets to confront them.

The police even facilitated two meetings between the EDL and the Muslim leaders to this end. The lack of any recent relationship between the UAF and Muslim groups in the city cost us dear, and we lost the argument by being perceived as well meaning outsiders who were nevertheless likely to cause trouble.

Two very important aspects of the campaign were the developing relationships with trade unions and press and media work. Consistent approaches were made to trade unions in the city to support the counter-demonstration including speaking visits to a number of union branches from We Are Bristol.

We managed with a lot of hard work to gather support from three national union Presidents based in the city, local MP Kerry McCarthy, an ex Labour MP Roger Berry, two Labour Councillors and the Labour Mayoral candidate, many individual trade union representatives, as well as full time regional secretaries or organisers of the GMB, FBU, PCS, Unite and Unison. Most importantly, the Secretary, Chair and Vice-Chair of the SW TUC supported us and circulated our material.

Financial support was secured from a local NUT branch (up to £2000). This enabled us to afford to distribute more than 20,000 leaflets and postcards throughout the city, focusing on the centre but also including sections of the ring of the 'doughnut'.

The Bristol-based President of the RMT facilitated a meeting with Bristol RMT to work through the practicalities of the union taking 'health and safety' action as EDL supporters arrived at the city's main rail station.

Two successful LMHR gigs were organised which also raised money for the campaign. Community support was also gained from the local CND, the Bristol Anti Cuts Alliance and two LGBT groups. For the media we created regular news releases (every other day) and We Are Bristol rapidly became the reference point for the campaign against the EDL, securing two TV interviews, radio interviews and two reserved feature articles in the local press.

However, the police and local authority offensive against our counter march was clearly stepped up in the weeks leading to the demonstration.

In International Socialism 136 Esme Choonara and Yuri Prasad record the various way the state has sought to contain and control anti EDL marches: 'The state has tried a number of approaches to counter-protests against the EDL-including ignoring them, heavy repression, banning marches, courting, intimidating or pressurising community and mosque leaders

to discipline their young people, and attempting to divide Muslims from the rest of the anti-fascist movement'.

In Bristol the strategy was a mixture of heavy repression against the organisers of the counter-demonstration, combined with courting of mosque and other Muslim leaders.

The ruling Lib Dem councillors refused to countenance any dialogue about the dangers of the EDL, and after the march publicly attacked a Labour Councillor and the Mayoral candidate for supporting us, calling for the resignation of the councillor (ironically) for not representing the people of Bristol.

We immediately launched a protest in agreement with the Labour Councillor concerned, but on this issue the Labour Party as a whole preferred to bury their heads in the sand, hoping the issue would go away.

As for the police they launched a public relations campaign against We Are Bristol, threatening us with restrictions on our planned march, while trying to force Weyman (as national UAF representative) to abandon the march in favour of a single spot demonstration well away from the EDL.

Legal sanctions were issued by the police but we publicly refused to cooperate with these instructions and stated our intention to assemble in the originally advertised meeting point.

Such a police strategy was clearly a product of their perception of the balance of forces and included intimidation on a number of fronts. For example within ten minutes of us issuing a press statement stating we were sticking to our planned assembly point leading trade union supporters in the city were receiving phone calls from the police asking them to disassociate themselves from us.

We strongly suspected that the police were gearing up to attack the counter demonstrators if they could. More than £500,000 was being spent by the police on bringing in reinforcements from as far away as Manchester, and they were clearly wishing for some form of retribution after the recent 'Stokes Croft' riots in the city.

On the day of the march we managed to get 800 at our initial rallying point in defiance of the police directives, including an impressive number of trade union delegations with banners (despite the march being on the same weekend as Tolpuddle).

This was a tense time, as we needed to take a decision as to when and how we would then march through the city to be as close as possible to the EDL, whose 250 marchers were to be contained on a short route round back streets in a small quarter of the city centre. As the SWP we were central to this decision making process, making fine decisions as to the balance of forces and holding our nerve. Police continually tried to move us on and

stepped up intimidation. Horses and riot geared police were prominent, and side streets had been blocked by solid steel barricades.

We managed to hold our position for an hour, although losing Martin S. to police arrest in the process. Once we moved off more than 200 onlookers joined our march and a further 200 fed through on a feeder march.

We then blocked one of the city's main bridges for a further hour before holding a rally and, again against police wishes, marched as one to join Pride. In addition to the numbers on the march there were at least another 1,000 lining the EDL route and confronting the police at key points.

There was some fluidity between the two sets of counter demonstrators, with many staying for a period on the main march and then joining the EDL route, and vice versa. The EDL were eventually escorted out of the city via buses and trains by the police for their own safety. Despite enormous pressure we had secured enough people both to have our march and confront the EDL wherever it was possible. We went home elated as a result.

Some lessons learnt will be apparent in the story presented above. First it is clear that whatever formation or reformation the far right has the continuation of economic crisis and austerity will give them grounds for organising.

No district of the SWP can afford to let UAF fall into the background, and a representative group must be maintained if we are to pursue a successful united front when the time is needed.

In Bristol we lost a month of organising because of our lack of political prioritisation, and in that month we could have organised a demonstration at least twice the size and been much better placed to fend off pressure to downscale our campaign from the police and the city's political elite.

Secondly, trade union and Labour Party support is vital to the united front. This can begin with individuals but can expand to full representation if we understand what we are trying to achieve and are willing to negotiate from a position of political clarity over how to fight fascism. Third we need to be imaginative and open to ideas of how to build the UAF.

In Bristol we wish to move away from the 'We Are' model and back to the UAF by creating a new representative UAF committee built out of the contacts we cultivated in We Are Bristol. We want to launch a creative weekend event which follows the formula of defence of multiculturalism, rejection of racism and fascism, and celebration of diversity.

Such an event should include speakers from UAF as well as a range of groups and organisations linked to the struggle such as trade unions, political parties, community, faith and other local organisations and national organisations such as Defend

the Right to Protest. Films, exhibitions and stalls can add to the events appeal.

United front work is hard work, but the political results can be a leap forward. For Bristol SWP the experience enabled us to change direction and open outwardly not only to trade union activists but to wider community layers in the city.

**Martin (Bristol)**

# 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. 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 8am**

**on Monday 26 November.**

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. 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.

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)