

December 2012 ● Socialist Workers Party pre-conference

BULLETIN 3

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

Dear Comrade,

Welcome to the SWP's Internal Bulletin 3 for our forthcoming conference.

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 or ring 020 7819 1170. Payment needs to be made in advance by card or cheque.

Conference procedures

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

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

It means that the very latest developments and the insights and arguments that appear in the debate can be reflected in the party's decisions. The commissions process enables "emergency" matters to be raised.

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. The final date for the submission of motions was the closing date for IB3 - 8am, Monday 26 November 2012.
- All amendments to motions must be in two weeks before conference - 11am on Friday 21 December 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.

Amendments should be sent to PO Box 42184, London SW8 2WD or emailed to charlie@swp.org.uk. If you do not receive an acknowledgement within three working days, please contact the national office.

- The fact that a branch or district or fraction passes a motion or amendment for debate at conference does not mandate that branch or district or fraction's delegates. Delegates are not mandated and have a free hand as to how they vote.

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 will also deal with objections such as "Fort William branch did not properly discuss this motion that has been submitted in our name" or "Maesteg branch submitted a motion but the national secretary has repressed it because it was critical of him" and report their decisions to conference - which 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 or phone 020 7819 1170 or write to PO Box 42184, London SW8 2WD.

Charlie Kimber, SWP national secretary

NATIONAL COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS

This is the list of the 81 nominations received for the National Committee (50 to be elected). If you put yourself forward, please look at the list (which is ordered alphabetically by first name) and check you are on it! If you put in a nomination and are not on the list, contact Charlie Kimber charlie@swp.org.uk as soon as possible

1. Aamna M (Tower Hamlets)
2. Adam C (Bristol)
3. Alan G (Leicester)
4. Alasdair S (Islington)
5. Alex C (Euston)
6. Alexandra S (Ealing)
7. Amy G (Cambridge SWSS)
8. Mark K (Manchester Chorlton)
9. Anna O (Euston)
10. Arnie J (UEL SWSS)
11. Penny G (Edinburgh)
12. Brian R (Newham)
13. Candy U (Camden)
14. Colin W (Hackney Dalston)
15. Dan S (Norwich)
16. Dave H (Luton)
17. Despina K (Hackney East)
18. Donny G (Edinburgh)
19. Helen S (Birmingham Stirchley)
20. Huw W (Bristol)
21. Ian A (Bury & Prestwich)
22. Ian B (Newham)
23. Ian L (Sussex SWSS and Brighton & Hove)
24. Jamie L (Manchester SWSS)
25. Jamie W (Goldsmiths SWSS)
26. Jelena T (Brighton)
27. Jess E (Lewisham)
28. Jim W (Euston)
29. Jo C (Waltham Forest)
30. John Mc (Tower Hamlets)
31. John R (Hackney)
32. Kate H (Goldsmiths SWSS and Lewisham)
33. Keir Mc (Glasgow)
34. Kieran C (Camden)
35. Laura J (Walthamstow)
36. Laura M (Wakefield)
37. Lovedeep S (Ealing)
38. Sue C (Tottenham)
39. Margaret W (Glasgow North)
40. Margot H (Tooting)
41. Chaz S (Walthamstow)
42. Marianne O (Cardiff)
43. Mark C (Islington)
44. Martin E (Manchester City Centre)
45. Mary P (Southwark)
46. Matt M (Oxford)
47. Maxine B (North Sheffield)
48. Mona D (Brixton)
49. Nahella A (Rusholme)
50. Neil D (Edinburgh)
51. Niaz F (Euston)
52. Nick G (Ealing)
53. Nicolas C (Derby)
54. Paris T (Leeds SWSS and Leeds Central)
55. Paul Mc (Tower Hamlets)
56. Phil T (Rotherham)
57. Rachel H (Tower Hamlets)
58. Regine P (Camden)
59. Rhetta M (Manchester)
60. Richard D (Kingston)
61. Richard Mc (Tower Hamlets)
62. Rob M (Islington)
63. Roddy S (Newham)
64. Ross S (LSE SWSS and Euston)
65. Sabby S (Camden)
66. Sally K (Leeds/Wakefield)
67. Sasha S (Hackney East)
68. Sean V (Islington)
69. Shaun D (Oxford)
70. Sheila Mc (Tower Hamlets)
71. Søren G (Goldsmiths SWSS and Lewisham)
72. Stacey W (Brighton & Hove)
73. Steve H (Tower Hamlets)
74. Geoff D (Birmingham Handsworth)
75. Steve W (East Bristol)
76. Steven E (Brixton)
77. Theo W (KCL SWSS)
78. Tim N (Bristol South)
79. Xanthe W (Brixton)
80. Yunus B (Newcastle)
81. Zak C (Harlow)

DEMOCRACY, INTERVENTION AND THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY: A REPLY TO PARIS AND RUTH

Ruth from South London and Paris from Leeds and West Yorkshire both raise a series of criticisms of the party's "internal regime" in IB2 and make a number of proposals which, they argue, would increase the level of democracy in the party and thus render it more capable of meeting the challenges of the period (in this they echo some of the points made by Ian from Manchester in IB1).

In fact the general direction of many of the arguments and proposals they make are ones that would act to weaken the party's ability to act effectively in the class struggle at a crucial juncture. Indeed, at stake is how we conceive the nature of a revolutionary party itself.

The necessity of a revolutionary party flows from the fact that although the working class must collectively emancipate itself, the ideological domination of the ruling class means there is considerable unevenness within the working class in terms of its confidence, organisation and ideas. The role of a revolutionary party is to draw together the militant minority who understand the need for revolution, not to substitute for the class, but to constantly seek ways to act to increase workers' combativity and confidence and in the process win wider layers of workers to socialist ideas.

How such a party seeks to organise itself can vary considerably over different periods and in the face of different challenges thrown up by the changing nature of the class struggle. A flexible approach to the specific way the party organises itself is required, just as flexibility over the tactics the party pursues in any period is a necessity.

But there are certain essential underlying principles of the way a revolutionary organises that are worth restating.

A revolutionary party must possess a strong ability to be able to act in a collective and cohesive way if it is to be effective in the class struggle. It requires a considerable degree of centralism so that interventions are undertaken with the maximum concentration of resources and clarity, so increasing their impact. A small revolutionary party, if it wants to be more than simply a loose network of activists who largely reflect, rather than seeking to challenge, the prevailing ideas inside the working class and wider movement needs to act in co-ordinated and centralised way.

And centralism, far from being the opposite of democracy, is the necessary outcome of any democratic decision if it is to be meaningful. The prevailing feature of democracy under capitalism is the separation of debate and voting from any mechanism to make the decisions agreed by the majority binding. So we can vote in a general election but we have next to no control over those we elect or the decisions they take. This is reinforced by the way we participate in bourgeois democracy as atomised individuals without the collective capacity to enforce majority decisions as binding. This structure is reproduced inside the Labour Party, for example, where the decisions of the conference of not binding on the parliamentary Labour Party, which is constituted as an independent body.

A revolutionary party needs a much tighter link between words and deeds than that which exists in the structures of bourgeois democracy. Without centralised decision making the accountability to agreed decisions of both the leadership and membership is weakened.

And the existence of a leadership is a necessity. Unevenness in terms of experience, confidence and clarity of ideas exists not just inside the working class as a whole, but also within the revolutionary party. The more roots the party has inside the working class, the more it is able to intervene in the class struggle, the greater this unevenness will be.

Internal democracy within the party isn't simply an abstract virtue in its own right but a necessity that links the party to the concrete experiences of its militants in workplaces, colleges and communities. But it also involves arguments about the way forward, about which experiences should be reflected and so on. A times the leadership can lag behind the experiences of the most advanced sections of the class, especially when sudden leaps in class militancy and consciousness take place.

Famously the Bolshevik leadership lagged behind the mood of the class in September 1917 and Lenin had to fight, in alliance with the most advanced sections of the Bolshevik party rooted in the big factories of St Petersburg in particular, to win the argument for an insurrection to overthrow the Provisional Government and install Soviet power.

At other times it can be sections of the membership of the party that can find themselves trailing behind the mood of sections of the class. So, for example, it would have been a mistake to have simply reflected the demoralisation of a layer of trade union activists in the wake of the sell out of the pensions' dispute over the last year, however understandable this mood may have been.

The SWP's leadership was right to insist that the mood of bitterness inside the class hadn't gone away despite the sell out, that it a number of respects it had hardened and that large numbers of workers still want to

fight even if they aren't on the whole confident to do so without a lead being given by the union leaders. This view was vindicated by the TUC demo on 20 October, which was much larger than many expected (including by some within the party). To lead is not simply to reflect the unevenness within the class and party but to fight for a perspective that takes our intervention forward. To lead is to quarrel, as Tony Cliff, the founder of the SWP, liked to say. The correctness, or otherwise, of an argument has ultimately to be proved in practice.

So the starting point for any evaluation of the party's internal mode of operation – how it organises, debates, elects its leadership and so on – is an assessment of the current balance of class forces and how the party has responded to the major tests it has faced in the recent period.

Unfortunately, neither Ruth nor Paris make any serious attempt to develop such an assessment. Ruth, for example, very briefly notes at the start of her contribution that the period is a complex one involving the need to work with sections of the trade union bureaucracy while attempting to strengthen confidence of the rank and file before moving swiftly on to call for an "honest analysis of our successes and failures". Any such analysis would have to centrally reflect on the two key areas where we have attempted to shape the resistance to austerity on the one hand, and to build an effective challenge to the Nazis on the other, namely through Unite the Resistance (UtR) and Unite Against Fascism (UAF) respectively.

The recent UtR national conference on 17 November was a significant success, with a 1,000 in attendance. UtR remains a work in progress, though one that has just taken an important step forward. But it is clear that UtR has been the only serious attempt to pull together and start to organise those militants and campaigners who want to re-launch the strikes and the fightback against austerity. All this suggests that the leadership has succeeded in winning a significant layer of the party to understanding and building UtR. Contrary to what Ruth argues, not every member must be first completely convinced of a course of action before an attempt to apply in it practice is undertaken. The creation of facts that prove in practice a perspective can often persuade some people where debate alone is insufficient.

The SWP has also been central to building UAF and to a series of very successful mobilisations against the English Defence League in particular over the last year, culminating in the 4,000-strong demonstration in Walthamstow that struck a major blow at the EDL. Britain is starting to look different to the rest of Europe in one crucial regard: the Nazis have been put on the back foot with a real crisis enveloping both the BNP and the EDL.

This is a significant shift from the situation we faced two years ago, when the BNP were looking to take control of its first

council in Barking and the EDL was able to put up to 3,000 onto the streets, as they did in Dudley in 2010. We cannot, of course, be in any way complacent, and we must strongly continue our efforts to isolate and demoralise the Nazis. But nevertheless the SWP has played a major role in pushing back the Nazis and providing a valuable example to anti-fascists across Europe about how rising fascism can be effectively resisted.

None of this means, of course, that the party is getting it all right and that there aren't real problems that we face, but we have passed some key tests. But it does serve to underline the point that the party's key role is to intervene and shape the outside world. Not only is that ultimately the only way the party's political positions be tested, but collective intervention into class struggle is the way that confidence and understanding of every comrade will be strengthened.

So the clear strategy fought for within the party about the priority of mobilising broad but also militant united fronts against the EDL and building rooted UAF groups in every town and city has not only paid off in terms of directing major blows at the Nazis but has also fed into strengthening local SWP branches in Leicester, Norwich, Walthamstow and elsewhere. Far from a centralised leadership being an impediment to developing comrades' confidence and self activity in branches, the two go together.

It also means that the leadership of the party, far from being out of touch with the class, is constantly being very publicly tested through intervention in united fronts, in trade union work, in the arguments it puts in Socialist Worker and our other publications and so on.

Ruth in her document calls for a smaller full time apparatus in the party. But the existence of a number of full timers who help drive forward the agreed perspectives of party serves to increase the effectiveness of our intervention into the class struggle, amplifying the ability of the party to put key arguments and to carry out its perspectives.

And the test of any perspective is not simply how well it can be explained or formal agreement with it but its implementation. Agreement of the need to build the Marxism festival, or sell Socialist Worker at more workplaces or recruit is easy, the test is whether it is done in practice - which means keeping a clear track of how many have signed up to Marxism or how many people a branch or district has recruited etc. Such apparently "tedious" administrative tasks, far from being non-political, are essential for political accountability.

A separation between political ideas and their implementation is misconceived. As Tony Cliff liked to point out for example, Lenin was unique among revolutionary leaders in the careful attention he paid to administrative detail. By contrast, Rosa Luxemburg's biographer described the situation that prevailed in the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland, the party she led:

"To a large extent each member of the [party] elite acted on his own initiative and in accordance with his own predilections and habits. Orders were rare indeed; apart from exceptional cases... this haphazard informality was deliberate and jealously guarded. Some of the leaders very much disliked having to deal with money and organisation routine at all; it kept them from their writing... The same applied even more strongly to Rosa Luxemburg. At some stage a formal party decision was reached that she should not concern herself with organisational matters at all, that she should not participate in any of the official conferences of congresses." (Quoted in J. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg: Volume 1, 1966, pp 263-5*)

Nor was this simply an accidental development. It flowed from Luxemburg's tendency to separate "political leadership" from "technical questions". That is Luxemburg conceived the revolutionary party primarily in terms of the propaganda of ideas rather than intervention into the class struggle, which requires a more balanced relationship between ideas and action.

The hallmark of Lenin's ultimately superior approach was the fight for a party which constantly sought to answer the question of "what is to be done" in a given concrete situation and then act in way that would most effectively develop the fighting capacity and confidence of workers.

And far from working for the party politicising comrades, as Ruth suggests, all the experience is that when comrades stop working for the party, they usually are active in their branches and often become important activists in one or other sector of struggle.

Ruth also raises concerns about "departmentalism" at the centre. But again, a division of labour is a necessity if an agreed perspective is to be implemented. Ensuring that this doesn't translate into fragmentation and competing priorities requires a greater level of cohesive centralised political leadership, not less, something that electing the CC on an individual basis rather than a collective slate is likely to undermine not strengthen.

A leadership elected on an individual basis is one that is more likely to pursue different perspectives rather than collectively agree a coherent and focused strategy which its takes responsibility for, can be tested in practice. It allows the membership to have clear sense of what the leadership's perspective is and thus to be in a much stronger position to be able hold the CC accountable for it.

Paris also calls for more involvement by members in the party. However, it seems this will only apply to some members since he proposes that the way to resolve what he rather insultingly calls the "low political level" of too many members is to conduct a purge of the membership lists.

But proposing to reduce the party to, most likely, those who regularly attend branch meetings and public paper sales is liable not

just to exclude comrades with major family commitments or trade union responsibilities. It also ignores how sudden shifts can take place in comrades' level of activity and involvement, many of who have important roots in workplaces and local communities, as for example the comrade who lives on a Hackney estate that was as key flashpoint with the police during the riots in 2011 and has played a central role in our work defending the rioters in the aftermath, despite not always being able to attend branch meetings on a regular basis.

We need to fight for every member and each branch needs to constantly seek to find ways to develop political relationship with every member and seek to draw them into our collective work wherever possible. In a period marked by a relatively low level of class struggle over the last 25-30 years to reduce to party only to the "most active" etc would be to cut it off from much of its links to the wider working class and risk turning it into a sect existing in a vacuum.

The call for more Internal Bulletins must at least be tempered by a concern to avoid creating an organisation more preoccupied with internal arguments than intervention and where those comrades with the time to write for and read the extra IBs set the agenda for debate, rather than delegate meetings at Party Council and conference. There comrades have to opportunity listen to the totality of experiences and arguments in order to arrive at greater clarity and with greater confidence about the way forward for the party's intervention into the outside world. Such collective discussion is ultimately a higher form of democracy than a series of individual contributions which may only haphazardly reflect the wider overall experiences of comrades.

The general direction of Ruth and Paris' arguments and proposals, if accepted, would be to shift the SWP towards being a much more decentralised and less interventionist party.

This most clearly comes out in the call by Ruth for a National Committee to be elected by fractions and districts, rather than, presumably, party conference as it currently is.

The danger of different districts or union fractions simply pursuing their own perspective, picking and choosing which bits of the national perspective they wished to adopt, would be great. Rather than integrating local or sectional experiences into a national perspective which the whole party then fights in a unified way to implement, the likely outcome would be fragmentation, weakening our ability to intervene successfully. Such a danger is only amplified when combined with proposals to conduct individual elections for the CC and to reduce the size of the full time apparatus.

It would take the SWP back in many ways to where its forerunner, the International Socialists, was at the start of 1968. The IS was then a federal organisation without a strong centralised leadership and was much more suited to propaganda rather than

intervention.

This reflected a situation where the IS was an organisation of a few hundred members with only very limited roots in the working class. But faced with a sharpening in the class struggle and, above all, with the dramatic events of May 1968 in France which put socialist revolution back on the agenda in Western Europe for the first time in decades, Tony Cliff argued hard for a shift to a more centralised organisation capable of effective co-ordination and intervention into a rising level of working class militancy.

In period where there is rising class bitterness and the potential for a renewal of militancy in the face of the biggest attacks on working class living standards in generations is taking place, and where the SWP has modest but important roots inside parts of the working class, to abandon the model of a centralised organisation capable of effective intervention into the class struggle would be a major mistake.

Central Committee

STUDENTS AND THE CRISIS

The consequences of austerity for young people and students are disastrous given their dependence on educational institutions and the welfare state.

In Britain, the Conservative-LibDem coalition has raised tuition fees to £9,000 a year. One million young people under 25 are unemployed. And 50 percent of young black men are unemployed. In Southern Europe youth unemployment exceeds 50percent. The majority of young people in countries such as Greece and Spain have been forced to move back in with their parents. In Britain, the Tories' cuts to housing benefits for those under 30 may have similar consequences.

However young people and students are fighting back. Examples include the British student revolt in 2010, the "Indignados" in Greece and the Spanish state in 2011, the British summer uprisings in 2011 and the Quebec student strike in 2012.

These revolts and movements take place in the context of electoral revolts (Front De Gauche, SYRIZA and even to a geographically limited extent in Bradford, Catalunya and the Basque country) and the return of the mass strike on a European level.

In Spain, the "Indignados" were partially a response to the sell-out by the trade unions in 2010. In turn the square occupations reignited the trade union movement and fed a solidarity movement with the Asturian miners. In Greece, students and young people have been part of transforming one and two-day general strikes into generalised revolts against the system.

Many of these movements have been marked by a strong "anti-political" and "anti-party" element. This is hardly surprising. We have dealt with this in our publications. It is worth re-stating that this element reflects and is amplified by the timidity of the trade union leaders, the social-liberal politics of Social-Democracy and the weakness of the revolutionary and anti-capitalist left.

As the crisis and resistance have deepened, some of these movements have had to develop beyond their initial "anti-political" approach and relate to the mass strikes which have characterised much of the resistance in the last year. Revolutionaries inside universities – where these movements are the strongest – have the opportunity to relate to a much wider layer.

These movements have not reached the same level of mobilisation in Britain, yet the political ramifications are felt on campuses across Britain. The immense ideological radicalisation happens in the context of sporadic strikes and (for the moment) a low level of national strikes. This means that all kinds of radical ideas can exist side by side without having to undergo any direct scrutiny in political praxis.

The Socialist Workers Party has a key role to play inside these movements, agitating and equipping young people with revolutionary socialist strategy, tactics and ideas.

The ideological fallout from student and young people's struggles, and the disillusion with capitalism, provide a chance for us to grow. And we need to provide the socialist solutions to the questions thrown up.

SWSS: winning militants

SWSS aims to win the radicals, anti-capitalists and rebels in the colleges and universities to revolutionary socialism, winning them from the importance of the working class to the centrality of the working class. The three pillars of our political work are:

- building a revolutionary socialist current by holding weekly SWSS forums and paper sales as well as bigger events, teach-ins, local and national debates.
- building the anticapitalist and student movements through our united front work inside of the NUS, Education Activist Network, DTRTP, Unite Against Fascism, Palestine work etc.
- building solidarity with workers in struggle, for example, the sparks' revolt and local UCU strikes.

It is important that SWSS throws itself into building the various movements on campus and nationally. We need to build a party of leaders which can carry arguments inside the movement and also listen and learn from the class's experience. Inside these movements we don't want to be simply the best movement activists but nourish a sense that the revolutionary party and its politics is necessary. Winning young and student members to discuss, and argue with, workers on picket lines is crucial and in winning them over to the centrality of the working class and a

revolutionary perspective for life.

Building solidarity with workers on strike has been one of SWSS's hallmarks. Week in week out, SWSS members turned out to show solidarity with electricians on strike. By forming picket lines, blockading and occupying sites, students built the confidence of rank and file electricians. Inside the universities, our "We support our lecturers" initiatives have consistently strengthened local UCU disputes and become a benchmark among a wider layer of activists inside the NUS.

Over the last twelve months we have gained from our general approach. The number of new SWSS groups - University of East London, Birmingham City, Middlesex, Bournemouth etc. are a product of this; the continuation and strengthening of SWSS groups such as Sussex, Essex, King's College London and rebuilding of groups on campuses such as Glasgow, Newcastle, and LSE show the possibilities for revolutionary organisations inside the universities.

While we recruit large numbers of students and build interventionist groups with roots on campus the question for our student work is whether we can win these SWSS members to become life-long revolutionary socialists.

A revolutionary current

The SWSS forums are the prime vehicle to build a revolutionary socialist current and transmit our ideas on campus. Every group should hold weekly SWSS forums. Rather than having meetings on bread and butter questions such as tuition fees or the NHS we have established four main fields that every SWSS group should cover and orient its meetings around:

- Marxism (Oppression, History, Philosophy, Class, socialism from below, Lenin, Gramsci etc.)
- The nature of the crisis (economic crisis, Keynesianism, crisis of hegemony, fascism)
- The shape of the resistance to austerity (Arab revolutions, Greece etc)
- Anticapitalist thought today (Foucault, Negri, Graeber, Zizek, Badiou etc)

Anti-capitalist sentiments run deep inside of the universities yet socialism is not the obvious answer to a world in crisis. So the freshers' meeting title "Riots, revolts and revolutions: What's the alternative to capitalism?", for example, starts a dialogue with all those who want to discuss the alternative rather than pre-supposing that everyone's conclusion is socialism. In Bournemouth, our one SWSS member got more than 25 students into the room while at UEL we got 40 students to participate in the forum.

We want to take the activists, radicals and anti-capitalists seriously. Titles such as "Why the working class?" do not reflect the experiences of students. Instead we need to conduct the argument of the centrality of the working class by taking up historical examples of working class power – the

Russian Revolution, May 68, etc.

This needs to go further by engaging in a dialogue as well as robust polemic with people who subscribe to ideas of the precariat and/or feminists

Our meetings on Malcolm X and black liberation have been some of the biggest ones across Britain getting more than 60 students into a room.

Our "Why Marx was right" meetings have attracted more than 30 people in places such as Preston where we have begun to build a group. This is partially down to the fact that the title alludes to Terry Eagleton's popular book. We have to think of how we could subvert Han-Joon Chang's popular book title "23 things they don't tell you about capitalism".

Our weekly SWSS forums ought to be the place where we build and strengthen the ideas of the movement. Between 2006 and 2008 we held a number of meetings on the politics of Hamas, Hezbollah, political Islam and Palestinian liberation.

These ideas prepared SWSS members and groups ideologically to kick start the wave of occupations over the attack on Gaza. It helped us deepen our relationships with Islamic Societies and Muslim students which exist until today. Strengthening the ideas of the movement by putting on regular and big SWSS meetings can counter-act some of the 'anti-political' tendencies that exist inside of the movement.

The speaking tour with Terry Eagleton and Alex Callinicos last Spring attracted the biggest meetings we have put on in recent years: Manchester 350, Oxford 350, Essex 170, KCL 180, and Sheffield 100. This shows the possibility of relating to students on a clear revolutionary socialist and anti-capitalist platform.

We need to provide questions that the movement, activists and academic radicalism raises. Displaying ideological clarity, being able to patiently explain and argue our ideas becomes far more important given a far larger pool of radicals.

In the months ahead, we want to:

- a) Roll out SWSS caucuses that are broader than just the SWP members: These should have a five-minute long political introduction and then set out the political tasks. We will have to patiently explain why we do paper sales, use petitions, and involve ourselves in particular political activities
- b) Continue to hold weekly SWSS meetings
- c) Organise a Students for Revolution Festival in the South (London) on February 24 and the North (Manchester) on March 3.
- d) Organise local SWSS teach-ins that can build momentum for our festivals. Essex, Leeds, Goldsmiths, and Central London were to hold these shortly after the printing date of this IB

At critical junctures the ideological radicalisation described above has practical consequences which comrades ought to respond to.

Building the movements

The party's anti-austerity and united front work inside of the universities and campuses has largely focused on the attacks on higher education.

While SWSS groups across Britain have been involved in a myriad of campaigns around issues of sexism, homophobia, Palestine, racism and fascism there are two organisations that our work is most closely tied up with:

a) National Union of Students (NUS)

b) Education Activist Network (EAN)

We continue to involve ourselves in our local unions at every level standing for part-time, full-time and NUS delegate elections as well as calling general membership meetings where this is still possible. We fight for our unions to adopt campaigns that raise the level of politics on our campuses.

On a national level, we will continue to involve ourselves inside of the NUS. Our growing influence on a policy-level at 2012's conference (i.e. winning the vote on the national demonstration, affiliation to DtRtP, etc.) and executive level are a testament of working with and against the NUS leadership.

Despite the recent fall-out over George Galloway's rape comments and the shortcomings of the NUS demonstration, NUS remains a mass membership organisation. Even if the links between students, student unions and NUS are a very different to that of a trade union which represents workers, it is foolish to leave the NUS to Labour Students.

Contestation at every level and pressure from below has forced the NUS to concede to demands raised by SWSS and the wider student left.

The Education Activist Network has helped SWSS comrades to act independently when the NUS hasn't acted. When NUS called a day of walk-outs in Spring term, the Education Activist Network organised a thousand strong protest against Universities Minister David Willetts.

However, we don't see it as an alternative to NUS! It is not a left-wing student organisation which stands in Students Union elections.

The Education Activist Network seeks to build unity amongst lecturers and students in defence of higher education. Its initiatives such as 'We support our lecturers' at UEL, or 'Hands off our classmates' at London Met continue to play a role in involving broader forces than ourselves in the struggle to defend education. Given the low level of struggle inside of the universities the EAN has continued to

- a) Develop a critique of the current crisis in Higher Education alongside the Campaign for the Public University, Andrew McGettigan and others
- b) Build solidarity with local disputes and student struggles across the globe such as Quebec and Chile
- c) Called initiatives and demonstrations around disputes, strikes and attacks

This autumn the Education Activist Network organised a Quebec Speaking tour and a national conference with more than 150 participants.

The Quebec meetings ranged between 25 and 90 students and largely confined to the activist milieu. The NUS national demonstration a few weeks later showed that the NUS actively demobilised for its own protest. While the implementation of the fees regime is going ahead, resistance at our universities remains generally low.

By and large, many activists are demoralised after the defeat of the tuition fee revolt. This can have rather damaging consequences as seen by the stage invasion at this November's NUS demonstration. SWSS seeks to provide a political response to this crisis by taking initiatives such as the 'Global Intifada' bloc on the NUS demo. The call was taken up by hundreds of students on the day itself, and has helped activists in re-orienting at a time of low mobilisations.

We need to make a tactical shift in regards to our anti-austerity work inside the universities. While we need to argue against the attacks on education we cannot reduce our anti-austerity work to this particular manifestation of the crisis alone. Austerity affects students and young people in a myriad of ways.

That means we need to extend our agitation to political questions such as tax avoidance, solidarity actions with strikes in Greece/Spain etc. as well as broadening the scope of issues to housing, DLA etc. Groups should find ways of drawing EAN and other political forces together to mobilise for local and national demonstrations.

This will enable us to relate to a growing mood for action inside of the universities and resolve some of the limitations that have been imposed upon us by the NUS which will channel all its energies into Labour's election campaign from now until 2015. Over the next few months we will want to:

- a) Agitate for general meetings inside of unions to discuss the call for a General Strike, re-affirming the No Platform for Fascists Policy, and Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions (BDS)
- b) Hold local rallies, demonstrations and skype link-ups in the universities on days that Greek/Spanish workers strike
- c) Get comrades to stand for NUS delegate positions and strengthen the organised left inside of NUS on a national basis.

Conclusion

When asked at a student meeting why so many students were apathetic, the late Chris Harman replied that the question started from the wrong premise. He argued that there were two poles: fear and anger; and the question for revolutionaries was how to turn fear into anger. That was at the beginning of the crisis in 2008.

With students facing £9,000 tuition fees, increased police repression, and rampant sexism on our campuses the question

remains the same. However, the system's protracted crisis has brought forth a new generation of angry students radicals. The success of our student work will lie in our political ability to display ideological clarity in theory and practice and provide a clear strategy for struggle, however large.

Central Committee

SOCIALIST WORKER ONLINE

A brand new Socialist Worker website, which has been redesigned from the bottom up, is currently in the final stages of testing and will be launched shortly. New features include a "responsive" design so it will great for your phone or tablet too!

Central Committee

DEFEND THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

Austerity – a new age of protest and policing

Defend the Right to Protest began as a response to the victimisation of protesters in the wake of the occupation of Millbank and the mass student protests of Autumn 2010. The policing of these protests brought into sharp focus the use of force and the criminalization of protest by governments unable to win consent for their austerity programs. As Chief Superintendent Derek Barnett remarked, in times of cuts "there will be rising disaffection - the government will need a strong and confident police force".

Students were subjected to kettling, horse charges, a media witch hunt, mass arrests, and disproportionate criminal charges, notably of violent disorder, and sentencing.

The ensuing trials have revealed the purpose of these tactics: to punish, intimidate and send a message to the wider public to think twice before taking to the streets. Commander Mick Johnson oversaw both the student demonstrations and the G20 protests. He defended this model of policing in the witness stand claiming, "nothing had gone wrong", despite the death of Ian Tomlinson.

His policing history covers the 1980s riots, the Poll Tax rebellion, the Mayday, Gaza, G20 and Tamil demonstrations, a period which has seen attempts to shape the police into a more co-ordinated force, able to deal with urban riots, mass industrial unrest

and civil disobedience.

In austerity Britain we are seeing the generalization of tactics combining aggressive policing with the punitive application of the public order.

This approach stems from fear that in times of widespread bitterness and volatility, protest can resonate widely - even when it involves relatively small numbers. As a government paper on Adapting to Protest states: "The character of protest is evolving in terms of: the numbers involved; spread across the country; associated sporadic violence; disruption caused; short notice or no-notice events, and swift changes in protest tactics. After a few, relatively quiet years, this is a new period of public order policing - one which is faster moving and more unpredictable."

This helps explain some of the more ridiculous recent victimisations of protesters, such as the six month prison sentence given to Trenton Oldfield for disrupting the boat race in protest at growing inequality; the pre-crime arrest of activists during the Royal Wedding for planning street theatre and zombie parties; and the special anti-protest measures and unprecedented security operation put in place for the Olympics - the biggest since the Second World War

Working for the clampdown

This is also what lay behind the response to the 2011 riots, when over 3,000 people were sentenced amid a moral panic about "pure criminality". Basic rights were suspended as 24/7 courts were introduced and people sent straight to jail with remand refused regardless of the offence. Shocking jail terms followed for "crimes" such as stealing a bottle of water, taking two scoops of ice cream and putting up facebook events.

While the use of the police and the law to assert control in a "new period of public order policing" has been most visible in relation to protest and events of national importance or "emergency", this is part of wider clampdown on working class communities.

Examples include the increased use of stop in search to police working class areas and the ongoing racist abuse and harassment of black and Muslim communities. Inquest records 1,443 deaths after contact with the police since 1990. One indicator of the increased hostility this is generating towards the police is the sharp rise in complaints to the IPCC, from 15,000 in 2002-3 to 33,654 in 2009-10.

A weak government

These developments are a product of the government's weakness. The treatment of students, for example, represented a very visible attempt to reassert order by force by a government that had lost the arguments and a police force that couldn't control the streets.

The ludicrous decision to arrest, strip search and charge UK Uncut activists occu-

pying Fortnum and Mason was, according to police briefings, a planned attempt to "draw a line" under the increasingly popular occupations of high street stores over tax evasion. Traditional attempts to blame the riots on the disintegration of the family and authority in working class communities could not be accompanied, in contrast to the 1980s, with promises to regenerate areas shot through with youth unemployment, declining services and deprivation.

This is a high risk approach, exacerbating an existing sense of alienation from the establishment and ruling institutions, with the potential to anger sections of society who might otherwise remain indifferent or hostile to unfolding resistance.

As Lenin argued, bourgeois democracy provides "the best possible shell of capitalism": capitalist rule is best maintained when working class people feel they have some stake in the system or are at least convinced that reform represents the most effective means of improving their lives.

One effect of the neoliberal years has been to erode the effectiveness of mediating structures required to bind working class people to some level of identification with the system. That the Tories could not even garner enough votes to form their own government is one illustration of this, coming in the wake of widespread disenchantment with the experience of Labour in power.

A crisis of the economy and of institutions

The crisis is accelerating the erosion of those mediating structures, narrowing the scope for concessions to resistance and for convincing working class people that the establishment shares their interests.

Put simply, economic crisis is generating a wider crisis of democracy and the institutions that claim to act in the public interest. Millions of people can no longer believe that their lives, or those of their children, have any chance of getting better. Labour's failure to articulate an ounce of the anger felt by millions of their supporters is widening the gap between political parties and the electorate.

In this climate, a series of major political scandals from MPs expenses to the banking crisis, phone hacking, Hillsborough, and the Savile and child abuse revelations, have eroded people's faith in a series of major institutions, generating a sense of "us and them" and exposing the mutually self-serving and corrupt relationships between the government, the media and state institutions through which the ruling class maintains their privilege and power. As Nick Clegg warned, "The pillars of the British establishment are tumbling one after the other".

The police sit at the heart of this crisis through their direct role in quelling dissent and their culpability in all of these scandals. This is undermining their ideological legiti-

macy. In the wake of the riots, for example, Norman Bettison said he was “troubled” by the “diminishing support for the police as the arbiters of social order... You can keep your water cannon, plastic bullets and curfews...What would put greater power into the hands of the police is the wholehearted support...of the public.”

Bettison has since been forced to resign following the devastating Hillsborough public inquiry which finally gave some official recognition to the role of the police in the deaths of 96 football fans and their ensuing “black propaganda” operation against the fans.

Scandal, corruption and racism have punctuated the history of the police force, but what is different today is how each is feeding into a more generalised crisis of legitimacy for the police. This is reflected in a crisis of confidence from within.

A recent Police Federation poll showed that police morale was at an all time low, with 98% saying it was lower than last year. One of the reasons cited for this is “the relentless criticism of what they (the police) do by individuals who are not in possession of all the facts or [who do not have] an understanding of the complexities of policing.” This is “serving to demoralise officers and to undermine public confidence in the service.”

Our response

In 2010 the President of ACPO warned of a growing anger towards a police force increasingly perceived as “acting as an arm of the state, delivering the elected government’s will, rather than protecting the rights of the citizen.” This anger is an important feature of a wider class rage.

Victories on specific issues, from the Hillsborough Inquiry, to the conviction of Stephen Lawrence’s murderers, can play an important role in building the political strength and unity of the working class.

The vulnerability of the government on such questions is remarkable given the lack of sustained organized opposition in Britain to date. The SWP’s ability to help bridge that gap by building action, networks and confidence inside the organized working class can have a major impact in generating a political response to the crisis of their institutions.

We need to find ways of engaging with the anger and campaigns developing around police corruption and racism and the clamp-down on protest. In so doing, we can win influence in important struggles that can land blows against the government. We will also gain an audience among wider networks of people who we want to win to our strategy for defeating austerity and the capitalist system.

Shaping these struggles can also help prepare our side for the battles ahead. While the key targets of repression thus far have been students, anti-capitalist activists, anti-fascist protesters and young and black and Muslim communities we know that any rise in class

struggle will at some point have to confront the police and the anti-trade unions laws. The outcome of such battles will depend crucially on the balance of class forces, but this will itself also be shaped by the political confidence of our side, not only to act independently, but to confront the law and the state. A fantastic example comes from Quebec where the students’ decision to defy emergency legislation, backed by huge numbers of trade unionists, proved to be a turning point in a struggle that defeated university fees and the politicians who tried to introduce them.

Defend the Right to Protest (DtRtP)

Defend the Right to Protest has developed into a national campaign with widespread support. It has played a significant role in building solidarity with struggles over police racism, corruption and violence.

DtRtP began as an open letter initiated by students and lecturers involved in the Education Activist Network and on the NUS and UCU National Executive Committees. It sought to defend victimised students following the mass occupation of Millbank. It managed to win widespread support amongst activists, and of a number of MPs, key trade unionists and figures in the movement from Tony Benn to Naomi Klein, Slavoj Zizek and David Harvey.

The achievement of broad unity around a principled stand in defence of arrested protesters was not straightforward. In the immediate aftermath of Millbank, high profile denunciations of “violence by protesters” from NUS president Aaron Porter and UCU General Secretary Sally Hunt contributed to a very polarized atmosphere on campus and in the unions. The dispersal of scores of arrested students across the country, many of them first time protesters with no idea about their legal rights, or means of talking to people about the possibility of a defence campaign, hampered contact with defendants, making it difficult to build campaigns.

However, the police violence on subsequent demonstrations which saw Alfie Meadows almost fatally injured and Jody McIntyre dragged from his wheelchair, combined with the shifting mood in the build up to the TUC demonstration on 26 March 2011 helped shape a more favourable climate for the campaign. One indication of this shift was Len McCluskey’s call for the police to “keep their sleezy hands off our kids.”

Justice for Alfie Meadows

The police decision to charge Alfie Meadows with violent disorder gave a human face to the reality of police violence and the clampdown on students through the courts. It led to support from the NUS and the five trade unions (UCU, NUT, PCS, CWU, NUJ) which now back the campaign.

Winning this support was crucial in rais-

ing funds and enabling the campaign to reach into a national network of local student unions and trade union branches. A number of well-attended fringe meetings were held at union conferences (CWU, UCU, NUS) which were accompanied by strong interventions in support of the campaign from the conference floor, including at NUT.

The campaign around Alfie helped DtRtP win unity around demands to drop the charges against arrested protesters and for an end to police violence. In particular DtRtP emphasised the political nature of the witch-hunt against students and the need to stand by all protesters, regardless of the charges or the various positions held on the question of direct action. It was for the movement, the campaign argued, and not the state, to debate and decide the best strategy of resistance. Allowing their side to create divisions between good and bad protesters would only lend legitimacy to the state’s attacks on any form of protest deemed effective.

Over time DtRtP was therefore able to win wide-ranging support for a campaign that took a principled position in defence of protesters, while being flexible enough to allow debate on more controversial issues. This won the respect of activists from across the movement, from trade union general secretaries and MPs to autonomists.

The DtRtP committee consists of representatives of the major unions, families and defendants from a range of campaigns, legal firms defending protesters, along with activists from UK Uncut, Occupy, Queer Resistance, anarchist groupings and the SWP.

Prisoner solidarity

The momentum built around the campaign however was too late for the significant numbers of young people who pleaded guilty early on and ended up in jail. In response to this, DtRtP helped organise court support and protests during the court hearings and launched a prisoner twinning campaign aimed at building solidarity with those convicted. This included encouraging individuals and union branches to twin with an imprisoned protester - by writing to them, providing funds and other material support and ensuring they did not feel abandoned or destroyed by their experience.

It included several well attended solidarity protests outside prisons, including one attended by around 150 at Holloway Prison on New Year’s Eve 2011 which extended to imprisoned rioters. DtRtP also kept in touch with friends and relatives of prisoners, some of whom spoke at public events.

The most successful twinning campaign was based at Sussex University where widespread support was built for imprisoned student, Zenon Mitchell. Backed by the local student union and UCU branch it involved gathering large numbers of messages of support and letters, building the best attended student union meeting of the year (which unanimously voted to support

Zenon), along with a 200-strong campus wide public meeting.

This was politically important both for those inside (one college student thanked DtRtP for its support and vowed not to be beaten by the experience) and for the solidarity networks generated among those outside.

A victory for our side

In the longer term the state has proved far less successful in victimising student protesters than it was with the Gaza protesters of 2009. A comparison of the figures relating to the two groups shows that while similar numbers were charged with violent disorder, around two thirds fewer students were found guilty or ended up in jail. There are contextual reasons for this. Firstly, racism against Muslims was a much sharper driving factor in the persecution of Gaza protesters (although it also featured in how students were sentenced). Secondly, the wider backdrop of austerity and sympathy with the students was clearly reflected in juries who in many instances acquitted students in the face of pressure from “authoritative” police accounts.

But the campaign’s role was important. Its political engagement helped shape the wider climate and gave confidence to defendants not to break under the pressure. More than one defendant, under huge pressure to plead guilty, entered not guilty pleas following advice from DtRtP and won. A notable victory was that of C & A Hilliard - the brothers, accused of pulling a cop from his horse, whom Cameron claimed “belonged in jail”. They were acquitted in an hour at their second trial, against the evidence of nine police officers.

One indication that the CPS overreached itself during these trials are the new guidelines on protest. They warn against prosecuting first time protesters and those essentially deemed of “good character” (they also, however, involve worrying guidelines encouraging the prosecution of those who have been on protests before or who wear face coverings).

The last remaining trial in the student cases – that of Alfie Meadows and his co-defendant Zak King – is of enormous importance. They will undergo a third trial in February 2013. The police want to roll back some of the political capital made by our side around this issue by turning Alife from a very public victim of violence to a perpetrator. We cannot allow this to happen. Winning this case will give our side a very public example of how solidarity and resistance can beat state victimisation. It will enable a defensive campaign to be turned into an offensive one, which demands the police responsible for Alfie’s injuries are brought to justice.

A weakness of the campaign is that the considerable national support achieved has not always been translated at a local level. This trial is an opportunity to invite

the campaign into union and anti-austerity meetings and to win a wider number of affiliations in our union branches.

Ebbs and flows

One of the challenges confronting DtRtP is that attacks on protest have undergone sharp ebbs and flows. Often the court hearings and defence campaigning take place long after the event, with the public focus has long gone. There have also been different phases in the shape of the struggle, from one where street protest and activist groups were coming under attack to a period where attacks receded as strikes and major trade union mobilisations took centre stage. The catalogue of scandals around the police has also required the campaign to develop a broader political response to a range of related issues.

Activists in the campaign have learnt that being effective requires responding to key moments that draw in wider networks of people and help shape an effective response. Examples include the major public events organised by DtRtP in response to the Royal Wedding arrests, to the verdict on Ian Tomlinson’s death and to Sean Rigg’s inquest. A “Rhythms of Resistance” gig drew a crowd of 400 people and linked support for student protesters with that for riot defendants. All of these events have involved a broad range of speakers including SWP members. Work has also been done to build international solidarity, including protests in support of the student struggle in Quebec and in solidarity with Trayvon Martin.

It is through these initiatives that DtRtP has developed into an umbrella organisation supporting a range of different defence campaigns and wider justice campaigns against police violence and racism. This has been achieved by providing support, arguments and resources, by working together to shape specific campaigns and to build unity, and by threading the politics and profile of the national campaign through each initiative – rather than seeking simply to brand each one as a DtRtP event.

Defend the Right to Protest by Protesting

A key part of enabling the campaign to build and extend its roots has been by positioning itself as part of the movement against austerity and asserting that the best way to defend the right to protest is by protesting. This has been important in keeping the various defence campaigns rooted in current struggles and in giving the national campaign an oppositional edge that goes beyond merely a liberal defence of “rights”.

It has meant the campaign has helped to build reciprocal solidarity – with defendants and other justice campaigns whose networks have in turn been mobilized in solidarity with the resistance. This involved waging an

argument about students and other activist groups providing solidarity on strike days with the lecturers and other workers who had supported them, and helping to shape a wider perspective about the kind of struggle that we need to win. In this way the campaign helps to act as broad forum for discussing the strategy and tactics of our movement.

In the run up to the 21 November NUS demonstration for example, the Education Activist Network and DtRtP hosted a national tour with Quebec student activist and Classe executive member Jermie Bedard-wien, along with Alfie Meadows and other defendants.

These produced useful discussions about what kind of movement we need, how to take on the law, and how to build solidarity with student defendants. NUS also helped produce a bust card distributed to student unions and groups prior to the N21 demonstration, an important initiative that meant students were better equipped this time round in the event of arrests. A national statement was also produced, expressing solidarity with marching students and supported by five trade union general secretaries.

National conference

This autumn’s 300-strong DtRtP National Conference was a major national forum. Speakers included Darcus Howe, Gareth Peirce, Sheila Coleman (Hillsborough Justice Campaign), riot, student and other protest defendants, justice campaigns plus trade union, international and other activists.

The conference was supported by a range of unions and organisations including Inquest, NMP, Justice for Bolton, UK Uncut, Occupy, UFFC, Sean Rigg Justice and Change. The two threads running through the conference were the need for solidarity between our fights and debate about how we fight effectively. But there were other important arguments – about the nature of the state, police racism and the history of how our class has confronted the law in the past, from the Pentonville Dockers to the Poll Tax and the Sparks – all underpinned by a strong sense of class injustice and a desire for our class to fight back.

DtRtP also hosted a successful workshop at the Unite the Resistance conference, with a miner from Orgreave and the Blacklisting campaign alongside Carol Duggan and representatives from other justice campaigns.

Campaigning against police violence and racism

Key relationships have been built between DtRtP and a range of family justice campaigns, including Justice for Smiley Culture and the Sean Rigg Justice and Change Campaign who are central to the United Friends and Family campaign.

The issues of deaths in custody and

police racism have been brought into DtRtP meetings and campaigns by representatives of the families and justice campaigns. DtRtP helped organise solidarity in the courts during the inquest into Sean Rigg's death and at the trial of PC Simon Harwood.

It took part in a United Friends and Family Campaign press conference in parliament, with families involved in campaigns from Hillsborough to Azelle Rodney, Anthony Granger, Roger Sylvester and Mickey Powell. In turn, Sam and Marcia Rigg, Merlin Emmanuel and Ken Fero, among others, have attended court protests in support of Alfie and Zak, and invited DtRtP to speak at and attend their key events.

A discussion is underway about how to help strengthen such struggles. The character of the justice campaigns varies considerably. Many are driven by powerful and determined family members or by friends of victims of deaths in custody. There is a tendency for them to be community-focused, under-resourced and, beyond mutual support amongst the family campaigns, quite isolated.

There is a real need to help to build wider support for such campaigns in our class through the trade union and student movement. This is essential to fighting for much needed victories on this front (there hasn't been a successful prosecution since 1969). The prospects for doing so are more likely following an apparent shift away from a form of black community politics that was once a much more dominant feature of these campaigns.

An obvious focus for doing this is the annual United Family and Friends annual march. Over the last few years this has played an important role in bringing a wide range of family campaigns together. But the size of the mobilisation has not grown, despite wider public awareness and anger over these questions. Building union support over the coming months and delivering serious delegations would be an important step forward.

We should also look for opportunities to take local initiatives. In Manchester a recent public forum organized by comrades on "Who polices the police?" drew 80 people from an impressive range of campaigns as well as youth from the local area angry about stop and search and police racism.

The potential to build around these issues in the unions was illustrated in the 1200 strong meeting, organized by the RMT, with Jon Carlos, Doreen Lawrence, and Janet Alder earlier this year. Following the DtRtP meeting at UTR's national conference, Dave Smith from the anti-blacklisting campaign wrote to DtRtP to thank it for the inspiration. We should never forget how anger at injustice and oppression can have an important politicising impact on our class and strengthen a resolve to fight.

Carol Duggan and Marcia Rigg were similarly inspired to speak at an event

hosting 1000 people. We are now involved in discussions about launching a serious campaign around justice for Mark Duggan, whose inquest is due to start in January 2013. This is much needed, given the gap between widespread anger at Mark Duggan's death, and the lack of a national campaign.

Riots – the voice of the unheard

In the immediate aftermath of the 2011 riots, the SWP was among a small minority of political forces prepared to provide hard defence and sharp analysis of the riots. Inside DtRtP we were able to win a decent position that opposed attacks on the basic civil liberties of those arrested and warned of the threat represented by exemplary sentencing, the refusal of bail and the use of collective punishment as part of a wider clampdown on protesters and trade unionists.

Unfortunately, those forces prepared to move were in no way significant enough to be able to mitigate against the atomization that followed the riots or to seriously defend those coming under attack. These tasks were made harder by Labour's response: compare David Lammy's attack on the rioters, which he blamed on parents not giving their kids a good enough hiding, with Bernie Grant who, following the Broadwater Farm riots, said the police were given a "bloody good hiding". A poll of Londoners one month after the riots showed over 70% supported the future use of cannon and curfews.

The scale of state repression nevertheless created considerable unease. Arguments about the causes of the riots, the police murder of Mark Duggan and the wider simmering anger generated by stop and search and police racism have become much more widespread.

The riots and debates about their political meaning have had a big impact on politics in Britain. One example is the series of very large screenings hosted by the producers of "Riot from Wrong", including one held in Haringey where Lammy's appearance in the film was roundly booed.

DtRtP has worked to develop arguments and discussion about the riots, including giving a platform to riot defendants. In Hackney the campaign is working with Stop Criminalising Hackney (SCHY) Youth and has helped to build two local events that have attracted significant numbers of young people. An event held on the Pembury estate involved workshops led by hip hop artist Akala and on Know your rights, as well as an open mic session.

We have much to gain by finding ways of engaging with ongoing debates about the riots and the issues that sparked them. This can play a small part in putting our side in a better position to respond to victimisation in the future.

Challenges ahead

To date DtRtP has built serious networks by relating to a number of key issues around attacks on protest and policing more generally. The campaign has done so by building practical solidarity and by responding to, and organising around, related political issues. In the process DtRtP has evolved into a credible campaign and a very useful mechanism for helping to shape the politics of anger and resistance in Britain today.

Comrades have played a central role in building the campaign and have generated considerable respect amongst an important layer of activists. At Marxism, for example, a number of activists came to the event and joined the party. The role of Socialist Worker in consistently covering many of these issues has also won respect.

To date DtRtP has been most successful in relating to arguments and building networks amongst students and those campaigning against police racism and deaths in custody. There is still a lot of work to do in threading the campaign more seriously into our industrial strategy and looking at how we translate some of the initiatives that have been taken nationally into our unions, workplaces and communities.

Comrades have an important role to play in this. Doing so will put us in a stronger position to respond to the political opportunities and challenges facing our class, now and in the future.

Next steps in the campaign

1. DtRtP in the workplace/unions: DtRtP is backed by five major unions. Comrades should use this as an opening to get backing for DtRtP (including passing the DtRtP motion) and related campaigns in union branches and workplaces. DtRtP can provide a range of interesting speakers, from Alfie Meadows to the Hillsborough Justice campaign and UFFC. Having discussions around these issues in our union, and at work, is part of building our political influence and is essential to the solidarity work we do. Contact info@defendtherighttoprotest with dates and speaker requests.

DtRtP has begun to do more work around attacks on trade union rights and in support of victimised trade unionists. Send in relevant reports and contact the campaign for support.

2. DtRtP on campus: DtRtP is supported by a number of local student unions and by NUS nationally. On many campuses, the campaign has been threaded through wider activities and events. We need to continue with this approach and have a renewed push to build support for Alfie Meadows in the run up to his trial.

3. Alfie Meadows: The fight for justice continues. We urge comrades to raise support for Alfie Meadows, including circulating the petition widely, organising messages of sup-

port and inviting Alfie to speak at events and meetings. In London, mobilise for the third court date on Monday February 11th, Woolwich Crown Court.

4. Take local initiatives: The initiatives comrades have taken in areas such as Manchester, Hackney and Brixton are examples of how we can relate effectively to key issues and campaigns in the community around attacks on protest, deaths in custody and police racism. Where there are live campaigns/issues in this area we should discuss what kind of initiatives are appropriate.

In the new year DtRtP is looking to organise a number of events that bring together some of the key struggles around policing - Hillsborough & Orgreave, Mark Duggan and deaths in custody, the riots and protester defendants. Contact the campaign if you would like to organise an event. Or think about how such an event/session might fit in with other initiatives such as the regional UTR conferences.

5. No Justice No Peace: An important focus for DtRtP will be building support for the United Friends and Family march in October 2013. Use the DtRtP motion to pass support for the march and make contact with local justice campaigns where we don't have that contact already.

Central Committee

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

The two decisive developments for our international work over the past 18 months have been, against the backdrop of the global economic and financial crisis, the Arab revolutions and the events that they have helped inspire, above all the 15 May movement in the Spanish state and the Occupy movement, and the development of more intense and more coordinated resistance to austerity of Europe.

The Arab revolutions have confirmed our long-standing analysis of the Middle East, summed up by Tony Cliff: 'the road to Jerusalem lies through Cairo' - in other words, the defeat of imperialism (represented in concentrated form by the State of Israel) depends on the development of revolutionary movements among the Arab masses that topple the local regimes, which are themselves closely bound up with imperialism.

The role played by Egypt's new Islamist president, Mursi, in brokering a ceasefire in Gaza is an indication of how the revolutions are already changing the regional balance of forces.

We have sought therefore to build solidarity with the revolutionary left and the

workers' movement especially (though not exclusively) in Egypt. MENA Solidarity has been an important vehicle for developing links between British and Arab trade unionists (for example, through visits in both directions), and for publicising cases of repression. But we have also provided a platform for representatives of the Egyptian revolutionary left at Marxism 2011 and 2012, and at other SWP events.

We need to keep this up. Work is beginning on a delegation to the World Social Forum, which will take place in Tunis in March 2013. This could be an important venue for discussion among activists from Europe and the Middle East.

Our argument for solidarity with the Arab revolutions has been complicated by the imperialist intervention in Libya, the efforts by the Western powers and Turkey to bend the Syrian uprising to their advantage, and a pessimism on the left (both in the region and beyond) expressed in the idea that the Muslim Brotherhood are the main beneficiaries (this pessimism is challenged by Phil Marfleet in the next issue of International Socialism).

But the revolutionary process in the region will continue, as is shown by the explosive response to Mursi's attempt to take extra powers after his success over Gaza. More generally, the crisis makes it much harder for him to restabilise the situation, as is indicated by the deal he has just struck with the IMF, which will mean higher fuel prices, an explosive issue for Egypt's poor.

In Europe Greece is in the eye of the storm. Our Greek sister organisation, the Socialist Workers Party (SEK), is playing a pivotal role in Antarsya (the Front of the Anticapitalist Left). The huge surge in support for Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left) is an expression of the escalating class battles that have been unfolding in Greece since the first austerity package was imposed two and a half years ago.

Not surprisingly, a considerable pro-Syriza bandwagon has built up on the left internationally. Those involved tend to ignore the solidly reformist thrust of Syriza's politics. There have been a number of attacks, some very sectarian, on SEK and Antarsya for their decision to run candidates in the parliamentary elections in May and June 2012.

We need to maintain a stance of solidarity with the struggles of Greek workers, unemployed, and students against austerity, and also with our own comrades, defending SEK's right to make the tactical choices it judges appropriate. The struggle against fascism is, thanks to the rise of Golden Dawn, becoming an important front of international solidarity. Fighting racism and fascism and defending migrant workers are issues where SEK has an outstanding record.

There has been discussion in the International Socialist Tendency about how we can contribute to the development of more coordinated action against austerity in Europe. The problem, as we know from the experi-

ence of the pension strikes in Britain, that there is a big gap between what's necessary and what we can deliver.

This is even more true on an international scale. The general strikes in southern Europe on 14 November were an important step in the right direction, but the same kinds of vacillations and betrayals by the trade union bureaucracy that we suffer in Britain are to be found in the rest of Europe as well.

The IST Coordination issued a statement drafted by the comrades of En Lucha in Spain to mark the 14 November general strike. Following discussion at the IST meeting in July, it was agreed that the Coordination should meet more regularly and issue more statements. A Dutch comrade has been appointed coordinator with specific responsibility for the IST website. The results of his efforts in improving the site are already evident.

Solidarity with groups of socialists and workers continues to be a very important part of our international work. An international campaign involving the IST but also other revolutionary organisations helped to keep our comrades in the International Socialist Organisation (Zimbabwe) out of gaol. But we need to remain vigilant against further bouts of repression by the Mugabe regime, especially in the run-up to next year's elections.

Apart from the MENA Solidarity, our most important solidarity work currently is around the wave of struggles by South African mineworkers. The massacre of strikers at Marikana last August symbolises the African National Congress government's commitment to propping up a particularly corrupt and brutal version of capitalism in South Africa.

Our comrades in Keep Left, as part of the broader Democratic Left Forum, have been active in building solidarity with the miners' strikes. The Marikana Support Campaign is extremely important in providing desperately needed material help for the miners and their families. We need get trade unions in this country to donate and affiliate.

Finally, relations between the SWP and the International Socialist Organisation in the United States continue to improve. We worked together, for example, to support the Zimbabwean comrades and have taken very similar approaches towards the Arab revolutions and the Occupy movement. We speak at each other's political festivals (Marxism in this country, Socialism in the US), invite each other to our conferences, and collaborate in publishing books through Bookmarks in London and Haymarket in Chicago.

It is significant that this improvement has survived a serious disagreement over Greece, where the ISO continues to support the Internationalist Workers Left (DEA), which is part of Syriza. The Chicago teachers' strike and the rejection of the Republican right in the presidential elections are the latest (though tentative) signs of a certain revival of the left in the US. This provides a good basis for further cooperation.

Central Committee

FINANCE REPORT

Despite a foul economic climate, the SWP has managed to maintain sound finances over the past year. For us, though, finance is never simply a technical question of income and outgoings.

Strong finances help us to punch above our weight in the struggle. But our financial strength rests ultimately on our weight within the working class. If we want to meet the challenges of the period ahead we will have to expand greatly our subs-paying membership.

The subs base

Our main source of income is the membership subs that comrades pay to the party. Job losses, the attacks on wages and the pressure on living standards mean that a number of long-standing comrades have been forced to lower their subs in recent months. This trend is likely to continue.

The subs we collected in October 2012 by Direct Debit were almost identical to the figure for October 2011 (they fell by about 0.5 percent), even though there has been a slight increase in people paying by Direct Debit (the number rose by about 2 percent).

We were able to maintain the level of income because there has been some progress in encouraging newer members, student members and young workers to pay subs. Of course, some of these members will have to start on a lower level of payment. But it is important to get them paying something.

We must re-establish the culture whereby new members are convinced of the political importance of their financial contribution, and we must periodically return to these members as they become more integrated into the party and their circumstances change. Winning people to paying subs is part of the process of winning people to the party and holding them within it. Those who are won to paying a decent level of subs tend to be the ones who stick with the organisation.

That said, one consequence of the increased number of newer members paying subs is that more of them are also cancelling their subs, often because of financial difficulty, but sometimes because they have dropped out of activity. The solution is again a political one. Branches must regularly contact new members and try to involve them in the life of the party.

Subs drives

In recent years we have run a number of successful subs drives during the first few months of the year. We did so again in 2012. This year we were not able to raise the subs base quite as dramatically as we had in 2009, 2010 and 2011. Our

subs income went up £3,250 a month by the end of the subs drive, compared to an average of £3,800 for the previous three years. However, this year we managed to speak to more people than in any of those previous subs drives.

Again, this suggests that many long-standing comrades are finding the current economic situation difficult but that there is scope to talk to a greater number of people about beginning to pay subs.

We propose to repeat the subs drive in 2013. This will involve each branch contacting members to ask them to raise their subs. It must make a central priority asking those who are not yet paying subs to do so or asking those who pay very little to increase. This has, in recent years, been the most difficult aspect of the subs drive to get right, but it is vital to the future of the party.

Other sources of income

Other factors have helped to improve our income. We have run a number of successful Socialist Worker financial appeals, with the 2012 appeal making good progress so far. The sales of tickets for Marxism 2012 were up on previous such events, indeed they were the highest in many years, helping us to cover the costs of this extremely costly but politically important event.

Our income from sales of Socialist Worker has remained fairly constant. We have also benefited from various one-off donations and bequests from comrades.

These circumstances mean that the party has not needed to borrow additional money from comrades or other sources over the past two and a half years—indeed we have now repaid almost all of these kinds of debts.

Expenditure

It has been necessary to keep a tight grip on the party's day-to-day expenditure in recent years in order to ensure that money is available to fulfil the party's central political priorities. Overall our spending has remained more or less stable over the past 12 months. But a major change in the political situation, for instance a rise in the level of struggle, would probably pose a short-term challenge for the party, even if it later translated into greater recruitment.

In such a case it will be necessary to appeal to members and supporters for increased funding to meet the needs of the struggle.

Local finances

The state of local finances is extremely uneven. The key factor determining whether they are strong or weak is the presence of an effective branch or district treasurer. Their main role should be to talk to local members to ask them to make a contribution to the branch or district bank

account. Fundraising events can also be a useful source of income and can add to the political cohesion of the party.

Because the SWP is centralised (the paper is produced nationally, not locally; the organisers are appointed by the central committee, not the district; etc) it is right that the bulk of members' subs should go to the party nationally. However, members should be asked to make a smaller, regular local contribution, where possible by standing order. This can cover costs of room hire, travel, publicity, etc. The SWP finance office can help treasurers prepare a standing order form and can offer advice on raising local funds.

Conclusion

Careful centralised control of our finances can only achieve so much. Ultimately the financial strength of the party rests on our political strength—the size of our membership, our members' willingness to pay a high level of subs to fund the party, and our ability to sell our publications and build our events.

Over the coming year we need to continue to build party organisation—branches, districts, student groups, party industrial fractions, workplace readers' meetings, etc—to recruit new members and to retain those we win through common activity and political discussion. Currently less than a third of our registered membership pay subs. We have a long way to go to strengthen the financial culture of the party.

Finally, we are proposing that the subs drive in 2013 is used to both raise our income from existing subs payers and to expand the subs base of the party. This will require that every unit of the party puts someone in charge of the subs drive and that this person ensure that all members in a particular area are contacted to discuss the politics of the SWP, our perspective and why they should pay subs.

Central Committee

A CULTURE OF RECRUITMENT

As we are all too aware, resistance has not been onwards and upwards this year. For most of the year real examples of workers struggles and protests against austerity have been lacking in Britain compared to last year.

Ideologically, the weakness of the government and the experience of what cuts mean in practice are breaking up the hegemony of the cutters consensus. The government's so called 'growth strategy' is

being attacked by organisations as politically diverse as ours and the Confederation of British Industry. There is a debate going on about the alternative to neoliberal austerity. It is into this debate that we need to make the case for mass, collective, self-emancipation from below.

The regional rallies held on 'What is the socialist alternative to the crisis?' this autumn were an important contribution in this respect and were a step forward for the districts. The numbers who came were:

Sheffield 80, 3 joined
Manchester 100, 5 joined
Leeds 76, 6 joined
East London 55, 2 joined
Bristol 61, 4 joined
North London 72, 2 joined

A rally is an opportunity for people to find out what the Socialist Workers Party is all about. This is why we build it as our flagship event.

It is organised in a way that introduces activists and others to revolutionary politics in an open and friendly atmosphere where they can explore revolutionary ideas by discussing and debating with revolutionaries themselves. The method of building this event has been drawn from the experience and creativity of members.

Part of the challenge in having an event about the socialist alternative while under capitalism is to get people's imagination going: how can you give expression to our ideas beyond words. In Bristol, members approached a local graffiti artist who had produced the image of the hoodie stealing an Olympic ring. They agreed to put a collection together of pictures of resistance from around the world which was then used to help build the meeting.

In Manchester they organised Syrian food, made banners for the event, and like many other places, used an audio/visual presentation to build a picture of struggle.

At the Rally in Leeds, 30 non-members came from the universities and the trade unionists and activists that comrades have been working with over the years. It was a lively discussion and debate and gave us a sense of who around us is beginning to look towards our politics and how to relate to them. It also showed what we could achieve if we pushed out.

For us in the membership office, it was about helping win a vision of how these events could fit with the objective situation and a method to build them beyond the usual suspects.

It is in this light that we disagree with the suggestion that the amount of workers in the centre are a 'fetter to building up local and workplace organisation' (Ruth, South London). The concrete examples given that could be done by branches instead of the centre (contacting new members when they join, signing up members to Marxism, or keeping track of and analysing paper sales) are things that need to happen *both* from the branch and national office.

For instance when someone joins

(through the national website, at a local branch meeting or however) it is important that person gets a sense of the organisation existing beyond their own locality. As full time workers we ensure this happens but it does not stop there.

We spend time supporting comrades building local branch organisation too: helping to develop new members to be able to take on roles and winning more experienced cadre to the job.

This is not a linear process and there are difficulties. People's lives become more or less busy and at times they drop in and out of activity. This is true not just of those playing a leading role in the branch but more generally also. Therefore it is important that our lists of members are real and comrades use them.

In the office as part of everyday practice if someone says they no longer want to be a member, we take them off the lists.

We have a membership of 7,597 this year, recruited 890 people since this time last year, and last year had a membership of 7,127 (all figures in IB2 2012). We have taken off 420 people from the lists this year. Central to this process has been a real engagement by the branches with the people on our branch lists.

Our experience of getting comrades together for the rallies to phone around the membership list in its entirety is that you can get hold of people that we have not had contact with lately (and some of them came to the rally). Even though many do not attend branch meetings it does not mean that they are doing nothing. Many are active in their unions and areas, others who cannot make meetings could do other activities if contacted.

A well organised branch with a branch secretary, a membership organiser, a meetings organiser and a paper organiser who meet as a branch committee each week, are in a much better position to keep people in touch and to manage the branch lists.

Some branches have organised a branch ring round tree where all active comrades ring a few people each on the list. This keeps members in the loop with what's happening politically and if they can't make branch meetings we can discuss ways that they can be involved.

It's important we don't disregard people on the lists who are inactive or difficult to contact. One example from Leicester is a comrade who after 13 years of inactivity, is now the branch membership organiser and has been central to rebuilding the branch from meetings of 6 or 7 to regularly 15 to 18.

Other inactive comrades have come back into activity and are playing central roles in the branch, UAF and Unite the Resistance. New members have been developed to take on leading roles such as branch secretary.

The membership office exists to help create a culture of recruitment and retention in the party. The job of the membership

organiser is to win a strategy for growth in the branches. We are now building up a much bigger layer of people who recruit others to the SWP at Marxism, demonstrations, branch meetings, in their union, and at the rallies.

This is an important step forward but if we are to meet the challenges to come we need to continue this and utilise all the experience and talents of our comrades, new and longstanding.

Simon and Christine (membership office)

MARXISM, FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S OPPRESSION TODAY

The context

The starting point for any discussion on women's oppression today needs to be firmly placed in the context of the global economic, and consequent political, crisis, as well as the role of women in society, notably their position in the working class.

This must also be placed within a broader picture of 30-40 years of a neoliberal agenda and relatively low working class resistance.

This context shapes not only the experiences of women in work and in education, but that of the working class as a whole. The current crisis is not only leading to austerity in the form of attacks on the working class, but also to the exacerbation of oppression, and therefore the potential for divisions in the class.

But it can also fuel resistance. When it comes to such resistance, due to their presence in the workplace and trade unions, women are playing an increasingly key role.

In 2012, the exacerbation of oppression as a result of the economic context mentioned above is manifesting itself in increasingly worrying forms.

Not only do we see the continued and ever more regressive sexualisation and commodification of women, we are also witnessing a ramping up of threats to access to abortion, as well as to maternity and flexible working rights, just to name but a few examples.

We see the continued trivialising of rape, as we saw with the Assange case and Galloway's abominable comments on the matter.

Added to that, we see how the right, both parliamentary and the fascists, are attempting to use equalities issues to divide us and stir up hatred and division. This is evident in the racism that threads itself through

women's (and other) oppression(s), such as we saw in the Rochdale grooming case, where backward ideas of women were presented as a problem that exists uniquely within non-white, (usually) Muslim communities.

One result to this is that women are often portrayed solely as victims of predatory men, especially those from non-white communities. But this has not been the only reaction. Many people have been rightly outraged by Galloway's comments, as we saw in universities across the country. However, this doesn't always translate into the correct or desired action being taken.

The NUS's reaction to students' anger was opportunistic, giving Galloway 'no-platform' (a position reserved until now only for fascists) and thus using students' anger in order to hammer the left.

On top of this, Galloway's comments and his refusal to apologise for them, has led to the implosion of Respect, which just last year made a massive breakthrough electorally for the Left in Bradford.

This shows the extent to which the issue of women's oppression today and how it is dealt with, especially by the left, is not a side-issue to the bigger question of class politics, but plays an absolutely crucial part within it.

However, it's clear that in 2012 the situation for women is in many ways a vast improvement to that of just a generation ago. But the situation is contradictory. Most women in Britain who can work, do work, and this has shaped their role in the family and in their relationships.

Young men and women mix and have friendships in a way that was considered uncommon even 30-40 years ago. However, there is also a creeping misogyny towards women, where young women are treated increasingly as sex objects.

Such contradictions create confusion and frustration, which we've seen burst onto our streets in the form of Slutwalks and other such events.

Where we've come from

We need to understand where the contradiction springs from. On the one hand, the mass entrance of women into the world of work, and to a lesser extent their access into the world of further and higher education, from the post-war period onwards, and the struggles of the late 60s and early 70s, saw massive breakthroughs in terms of women's rights.

Ideologically and organisationally, feminism was at its height during the late 60s and 70s. This is not surprising given the context of heightened class struggle and consciousness from the late 60s onwards, on the one hand, and the continued existence of backward, sexist ideas on the other - ideas that were not solely adopted by the right wing but also persisted amongst the left and the trade union movement. The high level of class struggle during that period was also

reflected in women's demands at that time (childcare provision, access to contraception and abortion, equal pay, etc)

However, different ideas existed within the women's movement, including feminist, which saw men and patriarchy, rather than capitalism, as the source of the problem. The ability to counterpose those ideas with a revolutionary socialist tradition regarding the fight against women's oppression came from the fact that class struggle was very much on the agenda. It brought to the fore the contradictions in the situation, with the need for broad cross-gender solidarity at the same time as the obstacles presented by the prevailing sexist attitudes of the day. But it allowed for such attitudes to be challenged and real progress to be made.

As the class struggle declined however, the divergent strands within the feminist movement became more apparent. That is not to say, however, that the whole equality agenda disappeared once class struggle declined.

What we did witness was the emergence of identity politics as opposed to class-based politics and many sought accommodation within the system rather challenging it as a whole. This did of course benefit some women, the results of which have been more women in professional and managerial positions. It has also left a legacy of the need to recognise 'equality' as an issue. We see with the various equalities structures in unions today, despite the limitations in their actual effectiveness and the fact that their continued existence remains vulnerable in times of austerity, especially with some arguing that the equalities agenda has been fulfilled.

Where we are

Since we have entered into the current severe crisis, however, the contradictions are becoming more apparent to see, especially to a new generation that has grown up in an era of relatively low class struggle, the weakness of the left, and being told that women have 'made it' and can 'have it all'. This means there is a whole layer women, but also men, trying to make sense of women's oppression today.

On the one hand, many women reject the idea that they are oppressed at all, as this equates in their minds to victimhood, and on the other, the argument that men do not benefit from women's oppression is hard to grasp if they still carry the burden of household chores and caring in their relationships.

For many, the first place to start looking for answers is within what can broadly be called a 'feminist' framework. There has been an increase in 'feminist' authors and organisations (UK Feminista, Object) which reflects the rise in interest in such issues. Whilst it seems such organisations are not proposing a formal programme for change based on a feminist agenda, it is crucial that if we are to win the women

(and male) workers, we need to understand oppression from their perspective in today's context and prove the continued relevance of revolutionary socialist politics to them.

Marxism and feminism today

For some, the term 'feminism' comes with quite explicit connotations, including the central tenet of men being the cause of women's oppression, and the consequent ideas around men benefiting from women's oppression and that men and women acting in unity being, ultimately, an ideal one can only dream of.

As mentioned above, many women, and increasingly men, who are grappling with issues of women's oppression today are attracted to what we can loosely call feminist ideas. However, this doesn't mean they necessarily adopt a whole ideological framework based on patriarchy theory. For many, the term 'feminist' simply means someone who advocates (and is sometimes prepared to struggle for) equality between men and women. For a new generation of younger women, the 70s feminist movements may have little, if any, relevance.

Due to the context in which a new layer of activists find themselves, some women and men, no doubt including in our own organisation, seek to revisit some of our positions and approaches to the questions that are sometimes portrayed as being 'resolved'. Questions such as 'do men benefit from women's oppression?', debates around rape, and how to resolve the on-going problem of the double burden are examples.

Our organisation should understand why people, including in our party, may question our positions. They may even be influenced by feminist ideas and can at least partly be seen as a reflection of the period we have recently lived through. How we deal with the arguments is important, though, and through explaining our tradition we can hopefully also ensure it makes sense to women and men in the context of today's world. The women's day schools run earlier in 2012 were very useful in this respect.

Arguing and holding our position has not always made us popular. The Assange case is a good example. We had to take a principled position that neither sided with imperialism nor allowed the trivialisation of the women's allegations against him.

In particular that challenged the reduction of those women to simply pursuing some plot against Assange, recognising that that could in turn feed into incredibly reactionary views on women and rape, where so often, they have to justify themselves and their behaviour.

However, defending that position also earned us the label of 'rape apologists' in universities across the country, who condemned us for not immediately believing the women involved. That does not detract

from the importance of us having presented and held this principled position.

However, because women's oppression is the most deeply rooted and 'naturalised' of oppressions, and the way it plays itself out in society, even presenting these principled positions are often not enough to win people immediately to our tradition. Put simply, 'good sense' arguments alone are usually not enough to counter 'common sense' beliefs grounded in daily life. Our task would be simplified ad infinitum were that the case.

Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that oppression does not simply impact in objective, measurable ways – the subjective impact is massive. It distorts the way we see ourselves and others, it reduces our confidence and leads us to think that solidarity with others is unlikely. Understanding the roots of oppression and how it manifests itself in our lives is important and a good start. But, ultimately, only class struggle offers us the opportunity to overcome the divisions and the prospect of a society free from all oppression.

What's more, our understanding of women's oppression goes beyond simply individual cases. Oppression cannot, after all, be reduced to a succession of actions or activities, (rape, sexism, workplace discrimination, prostitution, etc).

Oppression is the result of alienated and distorted human relations. That is why we believe oppression cannot be overcome simply via better education or verdicts within the bourgeois legal system about whether this or that sexual act was consensual or not.

We are fighting for human liberation so our ultimate aim is not simply a world where sexual partners always consent, or men and women earn equal pay, or do equal housework. Our aim is a world where human relations are fundamentally redefined in terms of how we treat and view each other. In order to win people to this wider objective, we do need, however, to win them over the individual examples of women's oppression as they manifest themselves in today's context. This should include reframing them in the context of today's world when necessary.

Where next?

If we also wish to prove that the key to women's liberation is class struggle and socialist revolution, then we also need to pursue this a little further in terms of our analysis. Trotsky's famous quotation is a useful reminder of this: 'In order to change the conditions of life we must learn to see them through the eyes of women.'

We understand that the extent to which we overcome women's oppression will be key to measuring the success of a socialist revolution. But in order to change those conditions of life we also need to understand how women experience them in today's world so we ensure our argu-

ments for revolutionary socialism remain relevant. If we don't, we may well then open up the door to people drawing other conclusions, including feminist ones.

To understand the conditions of life for women today, I think we need to return to where this contribution started: the crisis, austerity and resistance, and women in the class. I think we would benefit from paying further attention to the impact of women in the working class today. In particular, I think we need to examine the qualitative impact of the quantitative changes (ie, the increased number of women in the working class today).

We are highly proficient at monitoring the changes in terms of the number of women in work, the number in trade unions and also the number of women on strike on the 30th November 2011. Highlighting this is important in terms of countering the victim argument and underlining the potential for liberation through class struggle.

However, it will take more than just noticing and publicising these facts. For example, we have underlined many times that the 30th November strike involved the largest number of women workers ever. What we have not done, as far as I'm aware, is look at what this actually means. For example, we could ask and seek to answer such questions as: What does this mean for potential class struggle? What does it mean in terms of the potential to organise? What does the ever-pervasive presence of raunch culture in an era of austerity mean for today's women in the workplace?

Also, as I have argued, the fight against oppression is ultimately linked to class struggle. In order to be the tribunes of the oppressed, we need to ensure that we develop an industrial strategy with a fight against oppression at its heart. In order to kickstart some thinking as to how we might do this, I will throw in the following suggestions (for starters):

- We continue to develop a new cadre of women and continue to increase the number of women writing for our publications
- We continue to run annual day schools around the subject of women's oppression
- We revisit some of our key arguments (Do men benefit? etc) in an updated context –allowing for debate over such issues if necessary
- We set up a working group within the party (including men and women) to research the objective and subjective impact of the mass entry of women into the workforce over the last 30 years and what implications that has for working class resistance today

Sara (Cambridge)

WOMENS' LIBERATION – ARGUMENTS OUTSIDE AND INSIDE THE PARTY

Last year's conference 'debate' on women

It is good that someone raised the debate around women at last year's conference as a concern. It was a concern, but not for the reasons outlined by Ruth from South London.

The problem with the 'debate' was precisely that it was not one. There were a number of attacks on the record of the SWP (implicitly men) in a number of areas, such as not taking issues like child-care or our intellectual development of women seriously.

There were a number of women who wanted to contribute to discuss how this was not our experience, and to suggest how you actually organise child-care - as it is in our branches with the district paying for baby sitters.

Others also wanted to challenge the implication that men in the SWP were part of the problem. Unfortunately they did not get to speak. The discussion descended into a list of criticisms rather than anything constructive or political that comrades could take back to their branches.

Also as only one man was allowed to speak in the session, (essentially to offer an apology), this does not help the party debate or move forward.

Women's liberation is something that must be fought for by both male and female comrades in solidarity together. We are writing in an attempt to ensure that this year's debate on women has a sharp political edge to equip comrades for the very real arguments that take place both outside and inside the organisation.

The changing nature of women's oppression

Whereas issues such as abortion, equal pay, violence against women, inequality in representation etc. are ongoing there are undoubtedly changes in how women's oppression is manifested – whether it be the grotesque resurgence of past forms (eg the obscene objectification of women's bodies) or completely new ones whereby women should see using their bodies in a public sexual way as somehow liberating.

However, whichever way women's oppression changes its form, the roots of it remain the same – within the family structures, which are tied up with class society

and capitalism. And the solution remains the same – the smashing of capitalism by a conscious working class made up of men and women.

This is not to say that we stand aside from the fight for progressive reforms or, as is increasingly the case, to defend past gains. However we do have a duty to the class to provide an explanation of how true liberation can be achieved.

Pressures from outside

The party has an excellent record of being engaged in both theoretical and active participation in the wider movement around issues of women, whether it is around raunch culture debates, slut walks or through our publications. And the price to be paid for all active engagement in the real world is the pressure to accommodate.

This is something *all* comrades face whether deciding to duck out of an argument around a table at work, or voting to accept a dodgy deal at a union executive meeting.

If we did not feel this pressure we would be a sect, and therefore have no influence in the class and so not achieve our liberation.

But this means that at times of rising consciousness around any issue it is even more important that we have open, honest and sometimes hard arguments about the politics of how to win.

On the question of women's liberation this means a sharp debate around the issue of Feminism or Socialism, which is in essence a debate about reform or revolution.

Socialism vs Feminism

Many of the young women coming towards us and indeed joining the Party will come from feminist backgrounds and may still call themselves feminists. (And indeed we would describe ourselves as such if attacked by the sexist right).

However, one of the problems with feminism is that it is open to a wide range of interpretations. At a basic level most people will see it as a movement for gender equality, this is explicit on the website of Kat Banyard's UK Feminista for example.

This is completely valid but we must be clear that this is reformism, and very often quite a broad church with which even the likes of Theresa May have identified. Theresa May can indeed state that she is a feminist because as a bourgeois feminist she can argue for equality with ruling class men to have the equal right to oppress our class.

Most forms of feminism involve an acceptance of patriarchy theory and the idea that men benefit from women's oppression. This was more explicitly theorised in the movements of the 1970s and 80s and was usually accompanied, for example in *Beyond the Fragments* (a seminal Feminist work), by an attack on Democratic Centralism and the Leninist Party. The best of these women would often call themselves 'socialist feminists', implying that socialism on its own

was not enough. More radical versions were and are openly hostile to any form of socialist organisation.

We have a different perspective from feminists – we see women's oppression as being class based and needing class solutions – of course it is not capitalism that beats up a woman but a man, and of course individuals suffer women's oppression as individuals.

However, the key place where we see the fight for women's liberation is in the workplace where they have collective power, not in the home.

We see their strength in how well they can unite with others to fight, not in how they conduct their personal relationships, (unless there is abuse, which we never have and will not tolerate). This is not just based on theory, it is proved by working class history. *All* major breakthroughs for women have coincided with a general rising of class struggle – whether the Paris Commune, New Unionism in UK, the Russian revolution or the radicalism of the 1960s.

What all versions of feminism have in common is a failure to identify class as the fundamental division in society (at best it is seen as on a par with gender), and the working class as the agent of change.

As a consequence the movement of the 70s and 80s collapsed as the class struggle declined and its leading members built their careers in the media and/or the Labour Party.

A similar fate awaits the radical young women of today if we do not win them to Marxism. In this context to identify a current of soft feminism as a 'danger' is a completely valid political argument, not an insult.

Let us be clear - recruiting women who identify with feminism because they want to see an end to women's oppression is a good thing and a sign of the health of our Party. However if we patronise them and assume that they are not able to cope with a hard argument about why the Marxist tradition is correct we will ultimately lose them to reformism and do no-one any favours in the process.

Why are arguments important?

As the crisis bites deeper and workers look for solutions it is vital that we have a clear socialist argument, which cuts through the racism, sexism and homophobia which the ruling class constantly attempts to inculcate to divert attention from themselves.

As resistance develops we will be faced with new arguments thrown up by a new generation of activists. New recruits are rarely fully formed revolutionaries and there always going to be unevenness in understanding amongst comrades. The key is to have a clear and sharp debate to thrash out the arguments and clarify our ideas. This is a political challenge that we need to meet head on – i.e. how to take up these 'new' arguments and bring them back to the

'old' ones and win people to revolutionary socialism.

The only way to have these clear arguments is to debate them fully, and not shy away from them. In fact it is nearly 30 years since the SWP has had sharp debates about women's politics – (caused by the break up of the then women's movement as the class retreated), and there is no problem with having them again if they arise.

As Lenin said 'never lie to the class' – this also means our own members. If we shy away from having hard arguments with women around us (both within and outside of the party), we are being dishonest, patronising and worst of all will not win them.

Anna and Sue (North London) and Regine (Central London)

NAZI NICK AND 2014

Nick Griffin only needs 8 per cent of the vote to hold onto his European Parliament seat for the North West Region. This is a smaller percentage than that received by the majority of BNP councillors defeated in Barking in 2010. It is a smaller percentage than that received by defeated BNP councillors in Stoke in 2010 and 2011.

The form of proportional representation used at the European Elections - different again to that employed in the GLA elections - means that the 2014 Euros are a completely different ball game than the first-past-the-post system used in most elections.

The 2014 European Elections provide the BNP with an opportunity to recover from previous defeats, and to reposition themselves. Although the BNP received a poor vote in November's Manchester Central by-election, Central Manchester in 2009 ranked as only the 19th highest BNP vote out of 39 areas across the whole North West Region. The North West constituency has over five million voters, stretches up to the Scottish Border, down past Crewe & Nantwich, and is bigger than some European Member States.

It is worth noting that Griffin's successful vote in 2009 (132,094 votes) was lower than when he failed to win the same North West seat in the 2004 Euro Elections (134,959 votes).

If support for the Lib Dems drops at the 2014 European Elections - neither unlikely nor undeserved - this could potentially benefit the BNP on the basis of the European Election system.

The BNP are already throwing resources into defending their leader's seat - Griffin has been writing by post to everyone whom he has on record as having voted for him in 2009.

By the time of the 2014 European Elections, Britain could well be experiencing an intensified climate of cuts and mass unemployment far worse than the current situation - a scenario which the BNP may exploit to try to keep Griffin in office.

The crisis

The economic crisis is a key factor. Greece today shows what can happen in the heat of crisis. How many people had heard of the Greek fascist organisation Golden Dawn at the start of the year? Now this fascist party sits in the Greek national Parliament and terrorises whole communities with racist violence on the streets.

In 2009, Golden Dawn only polled 0.29% in the national election.

Today, Marine Le Pen's Front Nationale received a significant 17.9% of the vote in France.

In the late Nineteen-Nineties, the FN experienced a massive split, with a new, rival fascist organisation being set up. FN organisers and members left for the new party, including one of then leader Jean-Marie Le Pen's own daughters.

Many said the FN were finished at this point - Le Pen even played 'I Will Survive' at the FN Conference. Three years later, Le Pen came second in the French Presidential elections. How many people today remember the FN's rival party?

At a recent meeting in Salford in November 2012, Griffin argued that there is a huge amount of soft support for the BNP that "just needs something to make it crystallise", and that "We are just one crisis away from that happening." Griffin's explanation, of what that crisis may be, continued: "The train is about to hit the buffers on a spectacular scale... A financial crisis, the likes of which hasn't been seen since the 1930s, probably even worse in fact."

Historically, fascist organisations have always tried to exploit times of economic crisis.

If Griffin manages to gain the small percentage required to keep his seat, this will be a disaster - keeping him in office for another five years, and bringing Britain more in line with the advance of fascist organisations across Europe.

Street fighters

The street fighters of the EDL first appeared when the BNP were about to make the break-through at the ballot-box in 2009.

The past three years have seen racists and fascists protesting on our streets on a regular basis. A boost for the nazis at the ballot-box in the 2014 European Elections will renew the confidence of fascists to mobilise on the streets.

In February 2012, Griffin lifted the ban which prevented BNP members being EDL members/supporters.

In a number of places this year, BNP

and EDL have been on the same demonstrations together. Griffin posed for a photograph with nazi street fighters behind a White Power flag in Liverpool this year, while his Regional Organiser handed out 'Join BNP' leaflets to EDL thugs.

This follows a classic fascist tradition - ultimately, the fascist leader needs the street fighters, and vice-versa. Griffin knows his history. Hitler and Mussolini both used the street fighters when it suited, and pushed them into the background (even fiercely disciplining them) when the respectable image was to the fore. The Italian anti-fascist Angelo Tasca wrote:

"Mussolini had no more trouble in settling the crisis inside the party... the supporters of 'national revolution' understood the necessity of temporising, and recognising that Mussolini was the only pilot who could keep them clear of the rocks... Even over the young extremists he wielded an undisputed authority. He took a care to be always in touch with them, holding out to each man the hopes that were most likely to bind him to his service.. committing himself to nothing but inspiring others with the wildest of dreams... The reconciliation with the extremists had far-reaching results.. He had to calm the impatience of those who until lately had been his opponents.."

In Britain today, an alphabet soup of far right groups are trying to find their feet: EDL, NWI, NEI, CXF etc.

In post-World War One Italy, there were a whole number of different far right organisations: Anti-Bolshevik League, Italy Redeemed, and so on. Ultimately, they all grouped under one banner - that of the Italian Fascist Party. A similar process took place in Germany with the Nazi Party.

Talking about the way forward for "The anti-Islamist street protest movement", Griffin recently attacked EDL leader Tommy Robinson/Yaxley-Lennon for taking the EDL back to Walthamstow, saying of Lennon's challenge for someone to come forward with some better ideas: "Well here I am."

Griffin continued that he has met with "ex-EDL figures, top Casuals" and "senior current EDL members.."

Griffin must go!

In November 2011, Unite Against Fascism launched the Griffin Must Go campaign, to kick the nazi BNP leader out of his North West MEP Seat in 2014.

The campaign is already supported by 12 MPs, 4 MEPs, Lancashire Council Of Mosques, and many Councillors and Trades Unions across the whole of the North West.

In 2012, the Nazi BNP's Sharon Wilkinson was kicked out as the last BNP Councillor on Burnley Council,

after the fascists broke through there in 2002. Wilkinson still holds a Lancashire County Council seat. Removing her from that position in 2013 will help give continued impetus to the Griffin Must Go campaign.

Removing Griffin from his European seat would send an inspiring message to people experiencing the rise of fascist organisations across Europe in countries such as France, Greece, Hungary and elsewhere.

Paul (Lancashire)

BUILDING BLACK AND ASIAN CADRE IN THE PARTY

Coming out of the SWP National Black and Asian day school in November there were open and honest discussions about the main political issues affecting Black and Asian comrades today.

From the opening rally to the workshops and the final closing plenary, it is clear that there is a space for the organisation and our politics. There was a fierce discussion around Black Nationalism, racism, black capitalism, reformism and religion, national liberation struggles, education and separatism.

We thank the centre's efforts, and the CC - particularly Esme Choonara - for organising such an excellent day school.

However, coming out of the day school, there was a specific lack of party strategy in how the party can ensure its black and Asian membership is more reflective of the working class. While, objective situations are definitely not those of the 30s and 70s in America, we have our own political objective circumstances, ones of high unemployment, institutional racism, welfare and service cuts, decreasing opportunities for young Black and Asian youth, increased police brutality and persecution that we could increase our mobilisation around.

Our objective situation, in which there has been a growth in anger, evident in the London riots in August 2011, further highlights the importance of the party's intervention in these areas. We need to develop the discussion around why the party doesn't have many more black and Asian members than it currently does and how we can carry on recruiting more whilst continuing to avoid tokenisation.

What also became clear from the day school is that we need to continue to encourage and support the development of the black and Asian cadre that currently exists, which has significantly improved this year

but still has large room for development.

In order to recruit more black and Asian activists and further develop our black and Asian cadre we suggest:

1. Throughout the year, we should hold regional and, where possible, district educationals around issues and arguments that particularly affect our black and Asian comrades e.g arguments around black nationalism, privilege theory and the crisis of black leadership.

2. These educationals should feed into national day schools where comrades can again have the chance to discuss and debate these arguments and help to develop the party's strategy and tactics at a national level.

3. The excellent ISJ article on the crisis of black leadership has brought to light the urgent need to fill this gap with our party's politics.

We suggest we form an established, recognised black and Asian fraction (based on the LGBT fraction who's success was outlined in IB2) in order to further develop black and Asian cadre, continue building the party through black and Asian networks and to take active roles in the party's anti-racist work such as Unite Against Fascism.

A black and Asian fraction could be helpful in organising the events we have suggested above and could call caucuses when necessary, for example, the black and Asian caucus called before the LMHR 10th Anniversary event was very successful and helped our intervention.

4. We should also encourage the involvement of our black and Asian comrades in the Defend the Right to Protest campaign and the justice campaigns linked with DTRTP.

This would not only help to sharpen our cadre but also enable us to relate to groups that have been particularly affected by institutional racism and police brutality

Kate (Goldsmiths SWSS & SE London), Aamna (Queen Mary SWSS & East London), Arnie (UEL SWSS & West London), Saba (Chiswick Community Sixth Form & West London) and Ayodele (South London)

ORGANISING THE BLACK AND ASIAN MEMBERS IN THE PARTY

Members of the CC at last year's party conference argued for the need to build on and organise the existing black and Asian member's cadre within the party. They

felt that it was important that we had a visible layer of black and Asian comrades who could be at the forefront of taking up arguments about how to fight racism and Islamophobia.

One month after conference a group of 20 black and Asian comrades met together for a caucus at Bookmarks where we discussed how we should proceed with this task.

It was suggested that we hold a couple of educationals aimed at sharpening our arguments around the origins racism, its development over time and the different struggles against it. The initial caucus was also used as an opportunity to get names of comrades who would be willing to go around different branches and introduce meetings on topics relating to racism; which would allow for a more broad discussion to be had throughout the party.

There were two subsequent educationals – one on the Roots of Racism and the other on Black Nationalism and Socialism. I felt that both educationals worked really well because there were a good mix of new and more experienced comrades who were able to take up questions about racism and apply it to previous struggles, such as the experience of the Communist Party in the southern states of America.

The educationals gave me the confidence to introduce branch meetings for the first time and indeed I went on to speak at half a dozen different branches across Essex and East London.

Another notable success was the political intervention we undertook at the Love Music Hate Racism anniversary event in September. The event was attended by 600 on the left, with differing views on questions such as how we combat the threat of the EDL and other far-right organisations.

By having a caucus beforehand we were able to discuss what might come up on the day and make sure we had comrades in all the meetings ready to make contributions in discussions and respond to contributors making contentious points.

Perhaps the culmination of organising a Black and Asian member's cadre within the Party came this month (November 2012) when we ran a national day school in London. The event was very well attended by comrades from a wide range of branches including Manchester, Edinburgh and Essex. There were also a number of new members and several students from SWSS groups. The depth of discussion at the event was very high and proved that the organising work done by the party had paid off.

Although our black and Asian members cadre is more organised than it was a year ago undoubtedly our next challenge will be whether we can build on it and win new members to our party's revolutionary politics.

Zakariya (Essex)

GIVE 'EM ENOUGH ROPE

People around the world have witnessed the horror of Greece's Nazi Golden Dawn, doing what fascists do. To paraphrase Tony Cliff, 'Polarisation is taking place on a grand scale to the far left and far right' amid a prolonged, hellish crisis.

Alongside incredible general strikes and the rise of a radical left, are fascists who openly organise attacks on migrants. Fortunately in Greece, as in Spain, anti-Nazis are organising opposition in no small way with those who've been on the 20 general strikes.

2013 will see bold initiatives by anti-Nazis to try to turn the tide in Greece eg a mobilisation against Fascism in January. We can but hope they have the successes anti-fascists have had in Spain.

Here, on a far more modest scale, the 150,000 strong TUC October mobilisation was a good follow up to the brilliant September 1st, anti EDL demo in Walthamstow. (A mobilisation which humbled the EDL)

From within the TUC demo are the sort of forces that can deliver knockout blows to fascists. The positive response that UAF received on our stall showed again how right it is to place ourselves within the organised working class.

We should be proud of what we've been able to achieve via the party and UAF in mobilising against the EDL. Others are also coming back into the fold. That Searchlight magazine has come a long way to backing certain UAF moves speaks volumes. The Blue Labour Hope not Hate strategy is widely discredited in many anti-fascists' eyes, though it still holds support among sections of the higher echelons of the movement.

We face a better situation than many of our comrades internationally, in some respects, than this time last year re the far right in the UK. The crisis means though that the pondlife will come back next year, sniffing out openings, electorally and otherwise.

So a period of reflection is in order. UAF and essentially no one else, have consistently held demos against the EDL's efforts, even when this has been far from straightforward, eg against the 'racialising' of grooming scandals as in Rochdale and Dewsbury.

For all the chat on the web, it has been largely been left to us and people we have been able to win around us to challenge fascists on this difficult terrain. (It's nice to see certain other anti-fascists back, but you have to wonder where some of them have been in the last 3 years).

Likewise, UAF initiated a successful 'No Platform' policy re the EDL at London's Conway Hall and with the PCS union, countered EDL attempts to make capital out of the Abu Qatada farrago, at the Home Office.

Tommy's Downfall

It's no exaggeration to say that UAF/SWP have been central to Tommy Robinson's Downfall. It's worth repeating that in my view, the rot set in for EDL, post their 2011 Blackburn demo (where indiscipline from the leadership has resulted in splits).

From then, it's been downhill for EDL. Here, it's salient to reflect that offshoots of the EDL have fared no better in 2012.

Anyone who was in Brighton and saw the defeat of March For England, some months ago by around 1,000 locals will know what I mean. Their day was a disaster as people lined the streets to show them the door. The one pub they got into was *very* unfriendly and police had to get them out of the area for their own safety. Seeing grown men cry can be distressing, but on this occasion... Incredibly, they want to return to Brighton, next April?! Madness, they call it madness!

It's been a war of attrition between UAF and EDL. Their Numbers have declined, the quality (sic) of those they attract has atrophied and anti fascists confidence and counter mobilisations have increased in size and strength (around 18 union banners were on the Walthamstow demo). Sitting in his isolation cell in Wandsworth, the future looks very uncertain for Robinson.

A recent demo to protest his innocence (sic) saw just 85 EDL attend. It was literally, a washout. He's gone from a position of some influence among the far right in Europe, to a laughing stock and having his faculties questioned. His efforts to ingratiate himself with celebrities was a sign of someone losing the plot.

There are parallels between Robinson and Oswald Mosley. As Morris Beckman notes, Mosley made a huge political gamble on the then Blackshirts future, ditto Robinson re the EDL stumbling from one flop to another in the last 12 months.

However, local Divisions are looking to regroup by going 'back to basics' through regional mobilising eg in the West Midlands, the North East and Essex. (Though even here, tensions within Divisions exist eg within the once strong Essex mob) But EDL's ability to harness what they have is problematic for them.

Also, like Mosley, Robinson's ambition continually vies with his stupid impatience. Just as in previous times of defeat for fascists, there are now 57 varieties of far right groups vying for followers.

Of course, there are many differences between Mosley's time and now, but like the Blackshirts in the late 1940s, EDL now are ill disciplined and lacking a direction. (Anti fascists, then as now, have been central to this turnaround) EDL are now recruiting the dregs, many former EDL now see the organisation as pointless. (One sometimes wonders if someone at the top of EDL isn't a spook, such has been the lunacy of some of their recent moves. Unlikely, but it isn't unknown for state agents to be in crucial positions within such forces.)

Sadly, of course, Islamophobia still reeks

from various mainstream politicians and the likes of the Daily Express and their ilk, internationally.

Recent cases of grooming have seen various far right groups seeking to capitalise from this horror, as yet, with little gains. An Islamophobic backdrop and the crisis means this may not always be so. (Comrades in areas like Rochdale and Rotherham have also played important roles in undercutting the scum on the grooming issue).

Thus, it's worth thinking through how the EDL have been beaten; for now. It's taken 3 years and around 85 anti fascist mobilisations, plus many own goals from EDL, to where we are now.

That no decisive victory has happened is due to a number of mainly objective variables such as the level of state intolerance of anti fascism, from the Met to local councils, certainly not due to subjective will. (It is commonplace, that wherever the EDL go, the 'Prevent' strategy is rolled out by the skulduggery of state officials in order to weaken anti Nazi opposition. The financial cost of this alone runs into many millions of our money.)

UAF groups on the ground such as at Walthamstow and Cambridge have been crucial to ensuring that where EDL come, they get the proper response.

The tactics of the united front have of course been crucial. After the Bolton demonstration, Martin and Weyman's 'softly softly' approach was important in helping UAF steer through choppy waters. It cannot be stressed enough that it has been the united front approach that has been crucial to today's state of play.

Bringing on board important parts of the Labour movement has helped quantitatively and qualitatively. Without such, Walthamstow would not have been such a success.

Moreover the party was able here, as elsewhere, to swim within various bodies on various occasions and not have our independence overly compromised.

Obviously, it is not a straight line of march and there have been many moments when obstacles have been put in our path. But without getting the general line of approach right, we, and I believe anti fascism in the UK, would be in a sorry state.

Moving on, the EDL's tactical incompetence is more akin to 'Dad's Army' than Stormtroopers. The BNP also are in the doldrums, not least because it is good sense for many people that they are a racist rump, again in no small part due to anti nazi campaigning.

The racists realign

But as Sun Tzu pointed out, it's unwise to 'underestimate your opponents'. That's why it was right to launch the North West 'Griffin Must Go' campaign, early, to prepare the scum's departure (we hope) from Strasbourg in 2014.

This has attracted widespread Labour movement backing and has sunk good

roots. What's currently happening is as Searchlight usefully note, a 'cross fertilisation of the far right'. Members of various nazi grouplets are looking to seek a way out of their morass.

Griffin himself has been openly courting Nazi thugs from the Infidels, in an effort to save something of a street/activist presence, as and when required. His 'return to type' here, needs to be spelt out in our work, in the months ahead.

The ex-BNP MEP Brons new outfit, the BDP and the English Democrats are the two most serious bodies who are looking to gather up ex-BNP and EDL members, and wilder ex-UKIP elements.

Due to the BNP's toxic brand, Griffin's mob got nowhere in recent by elections.

The Rotherham by election (where the BNP and the EDL are standing) will be a real test for the Nazis. They will feel they will do well against a backdrop of the former MP's expenses scandal, their campaign to exploit child grooming and the depressed local economy.

Rotherham recently saw the biggest EDL demo for some time, where a largely regional mobilisation saw about 300 of their thugs assemble.

It's too early to call it, but if the Nazis fail to hold their deposit again, this will be a good indication of their collapse in support. The days of action UAF are holding in Rotherham are important in countering their efforts locally.

Things fall apart

EDL leaders' stupidity and their Laurel and Hardy like 'another fine mess' behaviour, was writ large of course, on September 1st, in Walthamstow.

Joyful was it to hear Robinson's hissy fit as thousands of anti nazis tried to slip the police and confront EDL.

Robinson and the other EDL leader, Carroll, even left their troops at the scene of their debacle to face mass arrest and fend for themselves for hours.

When 'Generals' desert the troops like this, the outcome is predictable. Cue recrimination, and mucho fallout which continues to this day.

I'll leave it to Walthamstow comrades to paint the full picture. Shortly after this, EDL's Walsall demo saw around 150 scum have a torrid day of it, (they suffered 33 arrests) while anti fascists had a largely successful time.

Since then of course, Robinson and 52 other EDL (including regional organisers) find themselves neutered, due to their bungled attempt to have a demo, almost certainly in East London. Their 'March on Rome' was more like 'Carry On Up Shit Creek'.

Norwich was another bad day in the Bunker for EDL. They were outnumbered 8 to 1 by locals, and were it not for the police...

Comrades were prominent throughout

and the big paper sale reflects the respect comrades enjoyed for their efforts. EDL ex-members is clearly a growing club.

So Walthamstow as with Tower Hamlets, last year was both an inspiration and a wake up call. Firstly, as particularly on September 1st, EDL were trounced and then in October, (where the ban happened) they failed to show.

Secondly, as in some areas UAF groups have withered somewhat. Of course, our class' fight against austerity is the key link in the chain.

But concretely, where UAF groups have shrunk, when the likes of EDL demonstrate in some localities, we almost have to start from scratch.

Martin from Bristol's piece in IB 2 is an honest reflection of this. It must be said too, that Bristol's big, bold demo humiliated EDL, so these problems aren't insurmountable.

Also on the day, Martin S and Weyman were crucial in ensuring that the day was successful for our side, when other parts of the left (the Socialist Party), literally tried to split the demo.

Best practice has been that where the work has been put in people turn out in numbers to oppose EDL. There has been a real shift in anti fascism since Bristol and Brighton showed again, what's possible.

Large, vibrant demos have recently sent EDL into a tailspin. I also agree with the CC that the 'We Are' adaptation was only intended as a tactical shift to, in certain circumstances, bring on board much wider forces to take things forward eg Walthamstow. The danger of course, is that UAF's identity can become foggy and that we don't grow.

I well know what tricky terrain such work is and have had my fingers burnt myself, re anti fascism! In my view, a welcome reorientation to UAF as UAF must be swift.

Cambridge showed last year that where UAF has earned its spurs locally, people will successfully mobilise and defeat EDL. I'm confident that Cambridge can better their 2011 performance next February (when EDL say they'll return). All this under the UAF banner and on more favourable territory for us.

Comrades have done a great job under the 'We Are' tag but it does bring attendant pressures from all sorts of actors, largely, but not always, to move rightwards.

There have been a couple of moments when we have got it wrong eg recently when a few comrades helped give out police leaflets on a demo. When set among all else that comrades have done this is secondary and was swiftly corrected.

That we have demonstrated so often against EDL has put huge pressures on comrades who locally have been central to opposing EDL.

However, if we occasionally look tired, EDL faces say much. At Norwich, their front apart, it was evident that some of their

hardcore deeply felt their 'unwelcome'.

Walthamstow of course was even better in that regard. A word of caution, though. EDL 'deputy' Carroll, got nearly 9,000 votes across Bedfordshire in his effort to become police commissioner, also the ex BNP infested English Democrats, took over 22,000 votes across Yorkshire for the same elections.

The fascists will look to grow from this (they were happy with these results) and will seek to get more members sold on an electoral path for now, especially as street, opposition to them is growing.

This in itself won't go down well with some quarters of the far right who prefer punch ups to 'pavement pounding' and will deepen tensions for the wannabe Fuhrers.

Football

Here, I'd like to say some thing re Football. UAF has enjoyed some modest success from leafleting against EDL at various grounds.

Clearly though, things are at a more serious level now, given for instance, Lazio fans' fascist violence and the authorities' pathetic response.

That several black players have expressed their dissatisfaction with official anti racist group's like the FA's 'Kick it Out', reflects grass roots anger with establishment anti racism.

What comrades in Cambridge and the North West especially have done, is worth recording. Alongside persistently leafleting grounds and nipping in the bud, EDL attempts to recruit fans, they have got clubs, as far as Championship level, to facilitate their activities.

Both at Burnley and Cambridge for instance, ex players and chairmen (yes, I know) have held well attended anti racist events at Supporters Clubs.

We could do a lot worse than trying similar things at clubs where we have fans, York City, Millwall, Man City, to name but three...

At clubs where such nights happened, anti racists are on the front foot and racist fans know they will get short shrift from clubs should they start up.

Such initiatives are clearly needed – witness a section of West Ham fans at Spur's first home game following the Lazio attack, chanting 'Lazio' and other anti-semitic shite. (To their credit, a number of Hammers fans challenged these planks.) It's not easy but the examples cited above are a model of how to shift clubs on this matter.

Strengthening UAF

Moving on, Tony Benn once said that he didn't think he'd gone "far enough" in certain ways, for myself, I think we should aim to go 'that far'.

That EDL hold us partly responsible for their decline is a badge of honour. We need to capitalise on this. The party and

UAF have great credibility here, as well as abroad, among anti nazis. (It beggars belief that Hope Not Hate are claiming "we (they) have stopped the EDL"!?)

So one area we must rectify is an increase in UAF members. It's clear from meeting people at various demos that many people follow our web page and Facebook sites and see us as the first port of call re mobilisations.

We need to turn the large number of supporters we have into paying members. A number of such people will join UAF, if they are asked.

Moreover, in every area, we know people who we are regularly in contact with who will join UAF, if the question is put to them. Such an approach helps in politically shaping UAF, where you live.

Our political kudos has to be solidified and this is a key way of doing so, it also can ensure a regular flow of income to UAF.

In sum, our successes are real. Our joy has been mirrored recently by the Nazis' misery.

It has taken time to win bigger numbers of people to ignore various state attempts to criminalise/demobilise anti Nazis and get on the streets. Patience as ever, has been a key revolutionary virtue. But we are at an important moment. Our party and UAF have won many political arguments and we have done well with what has faced us, from many quarters.

In 2013, we should be confident as we are in a good place re anti fascism. The wind is clearly in anti fascists sails.

Of course, as Paul Weller said, 'death to complacency', but we have shown that our approach can work to the scum's detriment. Our credibility is such that we can draw in more forces and successfully isolate EDL and their offshoots.

The EDL (and the BNP) have gone from pillar to post in the last year. Resistance in the workplaces (and colleges) can only add fuel to our fire and make next year another grim one for the far right.

Paul (National member)

REFUGEE CAMPAIGNS

Attempts by UKBA to re-institute dawn raids on families in order to deport them as well as the threat from Y People the housing provider to evict 140 people whose claims had been refused leaving them completely destitute, has led to an increase in campaigning for refugees across the city.

Both policies were met with outrage and comrades in leading positions in the Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refu-

gees a 12 year old united front campaign were able to argue for large meetings of activists to co-ordinate demonstrations and other activities to attempt to stop the attacks.

This was built on years of work around the issue in Glasgow which have resulted in a number of successes in opposing detention and deportation.

A demonstration in the city centre in June of over 1,000 people was supported by the STUC, which passed an emergency conference motion, numerous unions the Church of Scotland, the Catholic Church plus a large variety of NGOs local projects, students etc.

This powerful group of organisations represents a challenge not only to the Westminster government but to all politicians and political parties in Scotland in the run up to the independence referendum.

They are being put on the spot as to what sort of immigration policies they would support if Scotland should become independent. The fact that, as across Britain, the housing contract had been taken from the council and a charity and awarded to a multinational security company, in this case SERCO, has enabled us to start targeting these firms in a more organised concerted way and to link their frequently brutal and violent role in detention and deportation with their role in the privatisation of jobs and services.

We argue that refugees and working class people generally have a common interest in fighting them and that the issue of refugee rights belongs at the heart of union and community campaigns against cuts austerity and the coalition government. We have been able to argue against racism and scapegoating in this way.

For the last two years the SWP has had fraction for asylum and immigration work which has helped very considerably. It has meant across Britain we have been able to start to co-ordinate a campaign against SERCO, G4S and Reliance with comrades in Manchester in particular.

It has also meant much more frequent and detailed coverage of the issue in Socialist Worker and comrades from Manchester Birmingham and London bringing contacts and union banners to the Glasgow evictions demo.

As well as the joint work on the housing contracts there is a postcard campaign against indefinite detention under asylum and immigration law which has already distributed 20,000 across Britain and which has had support from the NUJ UCU and the Quakers. More unions and organisations are being approached to support the postcard's next reprint.

Following on from success in both Glasgow and Manchester working with the NUJ to defend refugee journalists from deportation we are working closely with Unite the Union to help unionise

asylum seekers and refugees into its new communities branch which is proving to be of great interest to people.

The fact that such a large and powerful union is doing this is of immense importance in the fight against racism and the asylum laws and the knowledge and contacts built up over the years by campaigners is proving crucial to the union in accessing asylum seekers and refugees to talk to them.

The evictions of those left in the Y People flats have finally reached the sheriff court amid much publicity and anger.

Some cases have been adjourned pending an evidence hearing on human rights issues. The case attracted the pro bono help of an advocate (a highly unusual situation) and there is the real possibility that a combination of legal work and continued protest could inflict a serious defeat on the government in terms of its use of destitution as an attempt to force people to leave the country.

United front work over a long period has enabled us to propel the issue of asylum and immigration and the fight for refugee and migrants rights to the heart of the debate on the financial crisis austerity and the need to defeat the Tories while addressing the question of what a new Scotland should look like. It is also playing an important role in the fight against the nazis.

Sadly racist attacks in Scotland increased again this year. However, a unique event took place in Glasgow over the last three weeks. The National Theatre of Scotland's production of 'Glasgow Girls-The Musical' played to packed to packed houses every night usually ending in a standing ovation.

It is based on the true story of how a group of Glasgow school students organised to defend their friends from dawn raids and deportation. This coincided with a local community organising to turn back the dawn raiding home office vans so protecting their refugee friends and neighbours.

The GcWR was closely involved in supporting them and mobilising the large demos which led to the ending of dawn raids in the city and ultimately to 1,200 families receiving leave to remain.

Many comrades found themselves working alongside hundreds of working class people in the city who were determined to show solidarity and defend refugees from removal.

Watching the show reminded many of us of just what can be achieved despite serious difficulties and has made us even more determined to get rid of these racist laws and the system which spawned them.

Margaret (Glasgow)

OVERCOMING THE LACK OF CONFIDENCE

Much has been said in recent times about workers' lack of confidence, their unwillingness to take action independently of the trade union bureaucracy when the latter sell out or vacillate.

This was particularly highlighted following the capitulation to the government of the right-wing union leaders - TUC general secretary Brendan Barber and Unison general secretary Dave Prentis - over the pensions' dispute. Their cowardice was in marked contrast to the courage and dynamism of the public sector strikes of November 30th.

There is a sharp difference today from the situation in the 1960s and 1970s which witnessed the rise of a powerful shop stewards' movement, in close touch with their members, reflecting the latter's interests and combativity.

The general picture today is a contradictory one: workers' lack of confidence provides union leaders with an alibi enabling them to betray or duck out of struggles, but anger at the grass-roots puts pressure on them, as the CC document in IB1 stressed - without this, the TUC conference last September would not have passed a motion calling for an examination of the 'practicalities' of organising a general strike - a motion supported even by right-wing-led unions such as Unison and the GMB. Again, the 20th October TUC-led anti-austerity march was smaller than last year's, though, at 250,000, still very large.

Another example: the recent firefighters' lobby of parliament was smaller than the previous one, but the threat to close 17 London fire stations is concentrating minds in the FBU. The union has called on members to follow up the lobby with visits to MPs surgeries, though so far there has not been a call for strike action.

The recent Unite the Resistance national conference was rightly hailed as a great success - its large number of activists, the high proportion of non-SWP members, the quality of the debates, augured well for the building of a cross-union, anti-cuts united front. UtR, and its existing or future local or regional groups, clearly differ from, but don't compete with, existing anti-cuts campaigns.

The latter witnessed communities coming together from local campaigns, trades' councils and union branches, pitted against councils bent on implementing the coalition's cuts.

In many areas, they played a key role, for example, in building local campaigns against threatened A & E closures. As such, they will continue to perform that

function. But UtR, nationally and locally, has the additional potential to put pressure on the union leaders, including, where necessary, the left officials, to criticise them when they fail to give voice to rising anger and discontent from below.

These groups will be trade union-led and, hopefully, through patient work, can begin the process of initiating struggles or building solidarity where they have erupted. UtR also differs from the Right to Work Campaign since, arguably, there remains a role for an independent campaign that initiates or supports struggles against unemployment, particularly amongst the young.

It is a good time to build local networks of trade union and campaign activists. In Camden, we have been trying to do this in the recent period, through public meetings, with local rank-and-file leaders on the platform, and by publishing open letters and newsletters.

With open letters, we invite activists to sign a statement, for example, calling on trade unionists and others to support a local dispute. With the newsletter, we invite local activists to write a brief article stating their position on a particular issue. In the most recent one, we invited half a dozen key trade union activists, and a leading disability spokesperson, to write a piece expressing their view of the importance of the 20th October anti-cuts demo.

It is important to stress that the British working class has not been defeated. We are not living in the aftermath of the 1985 defeat of the miners.

The labour movement has girded its loins, and carried out limited engagement with the enemy, but has not so far not come out to do full battle.

UtR, both locally and nationally, can play an important role bringing activists together across unions and campaigns, helping to overcome their isolation, and thus giving them the sense that they can win. The idea that victories against the coalition are possible is of special importance – Socialist Worker can play a role here, reviving memories of past struggles – for example, the miners in the early 1970s, the anti-poll tax campaign – in a way that can help to overcome the present lack of confidence.

Sabby (Central London)

BUILDING THE RESISTANCE, BUILDING THE UNIONS

Background

1) Since the election of May 2010 the resulting coalition government has, despite various set-backs, minor U-turns as well as often public schisms at both an ideological and policy level, proved rather more durable than even the Daily Telegraph dared to predict. And although well short of its' austerity targets, the government has done a great deal of damage to working class living standards as well as inflicting considerable harm on the welfare state and social fabric.

The general character of the situation has been both monitored and analysed in some detail in the pages of International Socialism Journal; particularly ISJ 131 (Richard Seymour, 'An anatomy of the Tories' and Martin Smith,

'Britain's trade union: the shape of things to come') as well as ISJ 133 (Charlie Kimber, 'Rebirth of our power?'). To say that we live in uncertain times is an understatement although the demonstrable incompetence of the coalition government combined with the turbulence of the global capitalist economy also makes for a great deal of uncertainty for the ruling class.

At the risk of courting unpopularity and possible charges of heresy, we would suggest that in the absence of a decisive breakthrough by our side, the other side in this class war isn't losing. Certainly the hired prize fighters of capitalism are yet to deliver a grievous blow, but as we can see from the protracted agony of the Greek crisis, there is no certainty of a decisive upturn in working class fortunes in terms of defending even the most basic aspects of living standards and the most vestigial form of a welfare state.

In the UK, since the high water mark of November 30th 2011, there has been no break-out from the dominant influence of the trade union bureaucracy. Even prior to the one day strike, it was evident from people we were selling Socialist Worker to that they were very much dependent on the union leaders for the go-ahead. And the 'heads of agreement' capitulation less than 3 weeks after the strike did little to detach even some of the more class conscious workers away from the authority of the trade union bureaucracy.

Of course there has been resistance but the pattern is more that of a meagre patchwork quilt rather than a generalised and rising level of defiance. Strikes, when they do break out are usually of a desperate and defensive nature and where initiated with a rare flash of official leadership initiative, they are more in the form of indignant protest than outright confident militancy. Some,

at best, offer often the most degraded and exploited an opportunity of public rage and indignation before the official leadership says it was the best they could do even to get the employers back around the table.

This experience is most commonly seen in the present UNITE unions 'leverage' protests which in so far as they raise the public profile of trade union activism, are to be welcome. And in some instances employers have been persuaded to reinstate broken agreements and/or re-engage suspended or sacked union activists (and in so doing de facto recognise the union at workplace level). But this 'naming and shaming' approach, although sometimes buying time and preventing a complete rout, usually ends with a compromise in which the employer has gained significant concessions which in real terms, represent a shift in the balance of power in their favour.

2) Whilst in no way picking a fight on the general perspective, we would however wish to illustrate our contribution by dealing with a few uncomfortable realities:

- That following the 'heads of agreement' capitulation in Jan 2012, the SWP seriously failed to realise (or was insufficiently honest about) the extent and the speed of demoralisation

- Whilst rightly avoiding infantile temptations to condemn the union leaderships outright, we nevertheless failed to engage in the necessary sharpness of criticism that the situation required

- A tendency of misplaced triumphalism made it difficult for many members to be open about the difficulties they were having in re-invigorating any sense of resistance. For many of us the main task was to stop first time strikers from actually leaving their union

- This left us flogging the dead horse of the pensions issue long after its unseemly and early obituary

That the bulk of public sector union leaders were forced by pressure from below to sanction what turned out to be the biggest single days' strike in British trade union history represents a considerable achievement.

And the extent to which SWP members contributed to that process is something of which we are rightly proud. But time moves on and posterity is never generous in its memorials to even very near misses.

The state of the UK labour movement: a statistical snap-shot Nov 2012

We have long recognised the impact of the defeat of the miners nearly 29 years ago; both in terms of persistently low strike rates as well as a 40% fall in trade union numbers.

The sharp decline in much manufacturing activity, the embedding of structural unemployment and under-employment in former heavily industrialised regions has done much to re-shape the landscape of working class

activity and organisation.

And although the employers were able to capitalise on the defeat of the mine workers; particularly in the case of the print unions, there have been virtually no set-piece symbolic humiliations for organised labour. The experience has been one of the corrosive effect of unemployment and job insecurity rather than wholesale defeat.

So in bald figures, what shape is the UK trade union movement really in?

- TUC union membership: 7.3 million
- Union density of full-time workforce: 37%
- As above EU (average all) : 32%
- As above USA: 7%
- Public sector density: 68%
- Private sector density: 21%

But the private sector figures are misleading unless we dis-aggregate the actual sector as a whole:

- Manufacturing (skilled & semi-skilled): 70%
- Privatised utilities: 70%
- Privatised public transport : 82%

Also, in some sectors, despite job losses and employment insecurity, union membership is now reported to be rising. Most notably these are:

- Education (all)
- Local government
- Construction
- Finance
- Media

It is worth noting that with the exception of construction, a marked feature of union growth in the above sectors is in women members- particularly in part-time and fixed contract work. (figures: TUC and Labour Force Survey 2011).

Without placing too much faith in statistical evidence alone, the above figures are hardly a picture of a labour movement in the death throes of an historical and irreversible defeat.

Re-assessing our industrial work

At no stage has any SWP member (to our knowledge) suggested that the struggle against austerity and the coalition government would be easy.

However, in constantly reminding ourselves of the coalitions' lack of ideological coherence, state-craft, intellectual clarity let alone any evidence of having a compass from which they can start to navigate British capitalism out of the present crisis, we have often tended because of all of the above, to repeat that this government is almost uniquely weak.

We shall see. But notwithstanding as yet unforeseen catastrophic externalities (or self-destructive internal tribal schisms), it is quite probable that the present government could remain in office in some shape or form until

May 2015.

Part of the saving grace for Cameron is the virtual total absence of a parliamentary opposition as well as an enduring consensus across the printed and broadcasting media in favour of austerity.

What we can be sure of is that the next time, the government will not fall into the trap of picking a fight on an issue that draws workers into a generalised confrontation and on a scale that forces sections of the union bureaucracies to actually deliver. But whatever the immediate prospects, our party is well equipped with the analyses necessary to understand the key elements in any developments:

- Our analysis of the trade union bureaucracy
- Our stress on the need for rank and file organisation
- Our understanding and experience of united front work
- Our rejection of the parliamentary road but;
- Our proven ability to avoid infantile leftist temptations to sectarianism

Given the uncharted and potentially volatile period we find ourselves in combined with possible ignitions that will arise from the wholesale damage being done to the social fabric, the Unite the Resistance initiative seems to be the right approach.

Principally, because although it aims to be cemented in the organised working class movement, it is also able to unite across a whole range of other resistance initiatives-students, community campaigns, anti-cuts groups, housing rights and rent strikes, anti-racist protests etc.

But whatever flashes of anger there will be to briefly lighten the gloom, the general character of the present is one of the defensive. It is a defensive situation in which the working class movement remains untested *and* as we have stressed above, a situation in which the working class has yet to sustain a decisive defeat. But as revolutionaries we do not have the luxury of going on hold as the tempo of class struggle marks time.

Younger activists. One thing that presently stares us in the face is the almost total absence of young workers in leadership roles in the present disputes and struggles.

By the end of their respective apprenticeships, the authors of this contribution had been involved in works stewards committees, had been involved in workplace and national disputes, were chairs of their union branches and were involved in lay capacities in their unions at both regional and national level. This was not due in any way to outstanding attributes but rather an environment of generalised struggle combined with relatively high employment that was conducive to high levels of combative union activity.

Although we cannot conjure those conditions back, the SWP has to become both a bigger and better force within the unions. And although we may be weak (or even

non-existent) in most work-places, it is nevertheless the case that there are still many people who would be receptive to our ideas.

What we need, and without in any way dropping other areas of our campaigning work, is to re-orientate the branches more towards industrial work. At least this should mean that branches and districts:

- Develop and understand the economic and employment profile of their area
- Establish at least one regular workplace SW sale
- Use SWP industrial leaflets regularly at union branch meetings, trade councils etc
- Support and sustain SWP members in their union and workplace activity
- Make branch meetings habitable for new industrial contacts to attend and whenever possible, recruit them
- Devote one meeting per quarter to industrial work
- Report *any* disputes in your area to SW and the SWP industrial department

Above all we have to break down the idea that industrial work is an aspect of party activity that is for 'specialists'. It is the essential life-blood of party work in which all members can play an active part.

But that does not mean approaching a dispute or workplace on the assumption that we are about to embark on a 'sermon on the mount' experience. On the contrary, such situations have to be approached with some degree of humility, in that there is an inside possibility that the workers actually involved might know more about the situation than we do. Be practical:

- Ask and listen
- Offer support; do they need money or leaflets producing?
- Do they need to visit or seek assistance from other workers?
- Ask for comments for a SW report
- What are the union officials doing?
- Would they like to attend the SWP branch and outline their case?

Union officials. In relation to the trade union officials it is important from the start to stress the solidarity capacity in which we are involved either in, or around the dispute.

We should stress how it is in everyone's interest that the member(s) are reinstated/ union recognition be won/existing agreements honoured/wage rates restored/safety reps recognised; it is surprising these days how a dispute may arise from a combination- if not all of the above grievances.

As far as the union officials go, it will differ from union to union. But it is important not to alienate ourselves by needlessly attacking an official simply as an act of gratuitous bureaucrat bashing.

Some union officials will be genuinely doing their best, albeit within the constraints of their job description. It is also important to realise how far down the union chain the process of bureaucratisation can reach. In many unions, through week-end schools or steward's courses, many young activists can

be drawn into a process of assimilation with the union machine.

The partial return to 'Labourism'. We have noted over the past year that some unions; most notably Unison and UNITE are now offering a kind of 'full spectrum activist' package in the form of quite high quality lay-representative training combined with an induction into the mid-echelons of the union machinery and all topped-off with membership of the Labour party.

In a way, this is a good thing in that it connects union activism with some kind of political space- albeit a reformist partial vacuum. But because of the context in which activists are being inducted through this process, it will have to be reformism with a radical edge if it is to attract those who seek an explanation for the mayhem that is affecting working class lives.

In some ways this development is to be welcomed in the sense in which it can provide a forum in which we can openly debate a wider range of ideas- not least the need for rank and file organisations. In some instances we will find it very tough going and as we have noted earlier that the bureaucratisation often starting quite low down, there will be no shortage of careerists wanting to jump on the union machine.

Broad lefts. In such situations there will be ample opportunities for our rank and file efforts to inter-face with more established broad left groupings- some of which are quite engrained into the mainstream of certain unions.

This is fraught with some dangers- not least because in the past such forums have become nurseries for some rank and file activists, who despairing the daily grind of the labour process will start to see a career as a superannuated union official as an attractive option. And it is also commonplace in some unions for broad lefts to be quite cynically used to embellish the radical credentials of certain 'charismatic' and 'progressive' bureaucrats.

Because of such dangers it is important that our fractions through the industrial department are clearly directing our union activists ever-outwards towards rank and file work that is founded on democratic activity inside the union organisation and direct action in the workplaces and wider campaigning movements.

And it is essential that at every stage that we realise that any union, however militant, can never be a substitute for a revolutionary party rooted in the day to day life of the working class. We should always be aware of both the attractions as well as the dangers of *syndicalism* and this is an issue we will touch upon in our concluding comments.

Post Nov 30th 2011; uniting the resistance. By any measure the TUC demonstration in London on 20th October represented a setback from the previous year. If the aim of the campaign against austerity is to build ever bigger mass demonstrations and protests,

then for the latest such mobilisation to be actually smaller than before shows a marked degree of slippage.

No amount of enthusiasm or creative interpretation of events can tell us otherwise. However, as we have argued above, the fight is far from over and although somewhat down it is far from out.

Construction industry

Throughout 2012 the UK construction industry has been a battleground in which the ideas of militant trade unionism as well as the metal of some of the most seasoned union activists have been most sorely tested.

It has been a year of mixed fortunes, starting with the collapse of resolve of the contracting employers in the face of a rank and file revolt over their attempt to impose the employment conditions BESNA agreement. This was then followed by a victimisation at Ratcliffe power station of a union safety rep and his immediate reinstatement following a massive unofficial strike on the site by over 800 contract workers called by the Joint Sites rank and file organisation.

At the same time a fight to defend Blue Book terms and conditions at the Grangemouth refinery in Scotland was won and along with it, union recognition and the reinstatement of union reps.

The pendulum then swung back the other way at Ratcliffe when the electrical contracting firm used slippage in the contract schedule as a pretext to once more sack the union safety rep. But this time around due to the slowness off the mark on the part of the rank and file combined with the ineptness of union national officials, the rep stayed sacked.

But whilst all of this was going on a major construction electrical and mechanical contracting company, Crown House technologies (CHT) was found to have opted out of the Joint Industry Board (JIB) agreement which was probably seen quite rightly to be a stalking horse for the employers re-imposing a BESNA type Mark 2 on the industry with all the attendant wrecking of terms and conditions.

And at the same time the situation with the BFK consortium on the London Crossrail project was coming to a head with an initial lock-out of 48 UNITE members on three of the project contracts as well as the victimisation of a site steward which remains the basis of the current Tottenham Court site Crossrail dispute.

So far, so much recent labour history *except* for the fact that in each of these (and other) construction disputes, the role of the SWP has been quite central.

Not only have a handful of SWP UNITE construction activists (plus one UCU energy economist) been able to play a role in informing and directing much of the debate in the rank and file group, we have also found ourselves in the unfamiliar situation of being consulted by some very senior union

officials.

For instance at Ratcliffe we produced a leaflet for the rank and file that outlined in detail the company structure and finances of the contractor that was initiating the victimisation. It seems that once the site workers understood their enemy, the more they were confident in taking them on. And so with Crown House where in Leeds we not only gave out leaflets on a city centre construction site, we also managed to recruit some 14 workers to the union.

Similarly with Crossrail solidarity work where at the Leeds Arena site where a BFK partner BAM is the main contractor, a protest picket and subsequent leafleting resulted in (at the last count) in around 24 workers joining the union. It is worth pointing out that in both the case of Crown House and BAM we, the SWP through the rank and file group, actually wrote the union leaflets. (Despite protests from the union construction section national official).

Which is where we wish to bring in the problems of a potential lapse into syndicalism. Because much of what we have been doing has been the basic organising work that should have been done by any half-serious trade union official. But at the same time as socialists who recognise the unions as the basic building blocks for an organised working class, it would seem both churlish and purist *not* to have taken a lead in such bare bones activity.

It is a given that SWP members are expected, where possible, to be active union members in their workplace. Much of that work will often be the hum-drum of union routine. But as we said at the beginning of this contribution, post-Nov 30th 2011, for many of us the main task was to keep demoralised members actually in the union.

Which is why the Unite the Resistance conference on 17th November was so timely in that it broadened the network for a bottom-up opposition that can do much to service the efforts of those engaged in building basic union organisation as an essential part of rebuilding working class confidence. But is only with Socialist worker as a weekly reminder not only to those we seek to influence but also ourselves, can we be reminded that however sexy, Wobbly and noble, the idea of building 'one big union' might seem, it can never be a substitute for the task of building a revolutionary alternative.

'Movementism' and the dangers of 'tailism'/ substitutionism

As Marxists in the Bolshevik tradition we believe that a revolutionary party is a vital instrument in raising both the consciousness and tempo of working class actions to the levels from which the revolutionary assault on the capitalist state can be decisively launched. But such aspirations have always to be tempered with the reality of the actual level of class struggle.

In the course of its development, the SWP has always avoided the pit-falls of the numerous and long forgotten* Seventh Day Adventist sects that were forever stressing the pre-revolutionary potential of *any* situation.

This prescriptive certainty would, of course have the caveat that any failure of the working class to realise the revolutionary potential at hand, would be down to the backwardness of a class forever misled by Stalinist hyenas and reformist class traitors.

Accepting that for much of the time revolutionaries will always be a minority, the SWP has always looked to the united front in various forms as an essential gearing system through which revolutionary ideas can engage with the material reality around certain issues and in a form that can actually mobilise people in their thousands and well beyond our own immediate membership and circle of supporters.

The dangers inherent in united front work arise from the fact that as the most devoted advocates of working class unity in what are essentially *defensive* situations, we are often in danger of assuming leadership roles in a growing mass movement and in the process losing our revolutionary identity. In most instances this trap is avoided but in the recent past it has claimed a number of notable casualties.

One problem might lie in the often dominant notion that united front work, because it means generating a non-revolutionary audience, is somehow 'softer' work in which we don't have to be as sharp and quick-witted. Of course the opposite is true. United front activity, be it in a rank and file grouping, the UAF or Stop the War, requires us to be much sharper and for our members to be more disciplined.

A frequent allegation – usually from the left sects, is that the SWP only initiates united fronts in order to generate a recruitment opportunity from within a wider audience that we would otherwise not have. This allegation usually comes from sources unworthy of noting, but it is an insult that can affect the confidence of some of our members. On this we should be absolutely open. Yes, we are for openly recruiting from within *any* situation in which the best class fighters are engaged, because as Marxists we believe that in the struggle for socialism a revolutionary party will be an indispensable necessity.

Nevertheless, it is important that at every stage we refute the allegations that the united fronts that we initiate are neither 'SWP fronts' nor popular fronts in which political content is diluted to an amorphous mush.

And in terms of our presence in such fronts, it should always be with the understanding that we will be working with people who are not necessarily socialists but who do agree with us that the Nazis have to be driven off the streets.

The campaign to build for the 30th Nov strike in Leeds was an outstanding success

and one in which SWP members played a central role. But the energies required prior to the strike were at the expense of much party work – attendance at branch meetings became patchy, branch routines such as paper sales suffered, our student work became de-focused and internal life in the party district became fractious' and on occasion 'uncomradely'.

Post-strike, whatever we had achieved in terms of recruitment became a 'turn-over' as the branches failed to make sufficient recovery so as to make them habitable for new members. Party education fell by the way-side and district meetings reflected that the party in terms of its development had achieved little better than 'marked-time'. Some of the comrades who had taken such a lead in the pre-strike build up withdrew from activity- probably due to a combination of exhaustion and disappointment post heads of agreement.

Throughout most of the above period the Leeds district had no organiser and much of the leadership was exercised through a part-time district committee liaising continually either by phone- or increasingly with almost weekly meetings with members of the central committee.

In retrospect, many of the above problems arose from us assuming levels of responsibility in the wider movement at the expense of maintaining party life to the necessary level from which the party could be sure of making modest gains in the post-strike period.

For a small revolutionary party, the demands in any period are ones of continual testing pressure. But in the present period of enduring crisis and a relentless attack on living standards and the welfare state, those pressures are magnified- as are the opportunities. Even a year ago it would have been unthinkable that a union national officer would have been seeking the advice and cooperation from an SWP member regarding the content of a leaflet and how to conduct a campaign.

Such proximity to the official movement is both highly unusual and un-nerving. It is also not a relationship that will endure, but one from which so far we have emerged with our credentials and reputation intact. It has also been at least partially productive in getting the union to deliver resources to a rank and file initiative that is engaged in fighting the bosses on the ground.

But to end on a personal note – or rather on a recent personal experience. Whilst travelling to a hastily convened crisis meeting with union officials called at the behest of an assistant general secretary and urgently seeking some guidance from the party industrial department, it was disconcerting to find that the two industrial organisers had both gone on holiday.

Given that the situation at Ratcliffe power station had gone bad and that union organisation at the site was in the balance *and* that we were having to immediately respond to the Crown House crisis, it was

scant comfort to eventually get through to Charlie, who in the most soothing and comradely terms stated that on the basis of our combined experience he could trust us to effectively fly by the seat of our pants.

But in retrospect there may be a lesson here in that amid conditions of growing uncertainty across terrain for which there will never be an accurate map, we will have to increasingly inform our theoretical knowledge and experience with a sense of audacity. And although there is nothing to lose and a world to win, a fully contactable industrial department wouldn't go amiss for the time being.

Brian and Pete (Leeds & West Yorkshire)

A RESPONSE TO 'BUILDING THE PARTY' BY THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

The Central Committee (CC)'s article, "Building the Party" in the second IB was most welcome and most informative. It is imperative that we take a good, hard look at the state of organisation on the ground and honestly assess how we're progressing, because ultimately building the revolutionary party is the underlying aim of everything we do.

The problem

A key sentence in the CC's assessment was "No branch meeting, no effective intervention politically or organisationally". This could not be more clear or more true. What makes it problematic however is that we are not in a good enough condition to apply it.

There are large areas of the country, even in major cities where there are no branches at all and therefore no chance of any "effective intervention". And where they do exist, there are simply not enough comrades involved in them. As a result there is a huge gap between what should be done on the ground now and what is actually being done. The party should at least be visible, but for so many people outside, it has ceased to exist.

"No branch meeting, no effective intervention politically or organisationally" is an idea that has been absent in the party in recent years. Instead the organisation has sought out short-cuts, first in the united front (UF) and then in the unions. The party itself was neglected and expected somehow automatically to build itself. We lost our balance and it has cost us dearly. The correct approach would have been, from a

solid party base, to engage in all three areas of work at the same time inclining towards one area of work or another, depending on the times.

The party can do admirable national work as with Unite the Resistance and other united fronts, and it can hold impressive city centre meetings, but without a local SWP base in numerous geographical areas, none of this can be followed up. In this political upturn where the anger and bewilderment are massive, we have to be able to intervene in the wider politics on an enormous scale, to be highly visible, highly political and highly active. And to do that, the form of the party required is that of a fine mesh network of branches. At the moment there is no such network, just a few, straggly, unconnected threads.

Comrades are of course aware we are not as strong or as well organised as we should be. The earlier dissolution of the branches by the old leadership is now generally accepted as having been a bad mistake and the present CC has been trying to correct this. But despite some improvement, the problem remains.

Abandoning fundamental party work

The mistake the party has made is to see united front and union work as both divorced from, and at the same time, superior to party work, instead of all three being integrated and united through party organisation on the ground. This has resulted in two damaging and ongoing outflows of comrades from local party organisation.

In the first instance, the mistake of subordinating branch work has led numbers of comrades to promote themselves out of branch activity altogether to pursue their politics in what they regard as more effective arenas elsewhere. This invariably leads them mistakenly but permanently to view branch work as beneath them. They then can't understand that SWP branch building has become a political necessity for all. Branches themselves are not just temporary stepping stones, but, particularly in a political upturn, permanent mature fighting units of the revolutionary party.

This absenteeism from branches is the result of, in the past, locating the united front as the centre of everything, to the exclusion of everything else. But the pull of the unions too is particularly effective in drawing comrades out of branches. A passionately held view aired at the time of the Democracy Commission was that, rather than the UF work before it, the trade union struggle was not just the most significant fight, but the only fight, and indeed the very essence of revolutionary politics. Chris Harman argued at the time what nonsense this is, particularly in an industrial downturn, but that view seems to have prevailed. It is misguided to think that a national network of union fractions is a substitute for a

national network of SWP branches and that an SWP branch is just a trade union support group. Neglecting the party in favour of union work is as bad as neglecting the party in favour of united front work.

A direct result of these abstentions is an even more damaging flow of other comrades outwards. New members join the party and, if they can find a branch, often involve themselves enthusiastically in branch work as they rightly see the activity as important. But they soon come to realise that a core of the party does not agree with them and sees it as low level work done by low level people. They are at first bewildered, then disillusioned and then tend to drop out of activity altogether. If the branch is to survive it leaves the few remaining branch comrades to carry a massive amount of regular and unceasing work. This in itself is a powerful disincentive even to the active members, and also furthers the reluctance of the inactive members to get involved.

Towards a solution

Based on the statistics of three London districts, we estimate there are just a few hundred comrades in the whole country involved in the "effective intervention".

The truth is the active comrades are not able to cover a fraction of what is needed to be done now, let alone what is just about to hit us. Branches need to be built with some urgency because twelve years into the upturn, there are still not enough of us organised to relate to it.

But how do we go about changing this? The CC has been concerned with the problem for some time and this instinct is right, but it's not shared by the other major body of the party. The National Committee (NC) is comprised mainly of comrades who are not involved with branch work and therefore it cannot and does not relate to local organisation. Only a tiny minority of NC members in their election statements to conference have ever declared any connection with their branch whatsoever. It could only be that either they think mentioning their branches won't win them votes or they really don't have any interest in them at all.

How then can local party activists influence the NC to consider this not unimportant issue of party building? They simply can't. The CC national organiser has confirmed that there is no mechanism by which branches can put any resolutions to the NC. Perhaps members could bring the problem to Party Council? Ruth (S. London, IB2) shows the problem here, i.e. that the NC members attending purely by right tend to dominate proceedings. Even party conference has at best been a lottery as to who gets to speak, and it has only just become apparent that branches can submit motions. Other than that there seems to be no way for the active grass roots of the party to contribute to any of these bodies.

Conclusion

Amazingly despite all of this the party is very slowly developing. The number of branches advertising meetings in the paper is increasing encouragingly. But the organisation could take a huge step forward by emphasising party work as at least equal to everything else we do. It has to develop a culture where branch, union and UF work are regarded as a vital mix in a dialectical interaction of all three.

Progress is slow because of this traditional separation between UF/union work and party work and certainly the CC is trying to overcome this division between "the specialisation and the branch". This is very good. Is it really not possible for the specialists to come to a branch meeting ever, or to do a paper sale ever, or stick up a poster ever, unless in support of their own chosen interest? They won't be very suited to this work but it would at least prove to the active membership that they are taking local organisation seriously.

And this is the crux of the matter. Clearly at the moment local organisation is not taken seriously. That's why there are so few branches. That is why members don't want to be active. That is why our retention rate is so low. And that is why, regrettably, any amount of recruitment alone will never be the solution to our problems.

The only difficulty in an otherwise very useful CC document was that it was directed towards the branch activists, the very people who understand the importance of local organisation. The problem still is to persuade those who don't.

Anne and Martin (North West London)

VIBRANT ELECTION CAMPAIGN BEARS FRUIT

In Manchester, Chorlton, the election campaign for Mark Krantz, standing as a TUSC candidate, in the local council election last May won 8.6% of the vote. The Chorlton Ward had a distinct political make up: a sitting Lib Dem MP that meant many voters said they were voting Labour to keep the Lib Dems out. The Greens are very strong in Chorlton, it's their oldest base in the City, and the Labour candidate has been a Cllr for over twenty years.

In IB2 the Mark Krantz's Chorlton election campaign was described as 'strong and vibrant.' This contribution will give a brief outline of what this means, in order to inform and influence future election campaigns.

In addition it will outline the political gains that were made for the local Chorlton SWP party branch.

Standing where we had a local base

Chorlton SWP is a longstanding local branch in the Manchester District. Many SWP members live in the ward, we have been selling SW for thirty years in Chorlton and the candidate is well known locally. There is a large number of public sector workers, teachers, health workers and lecturers living in Chorlton, so many of these workers had been engaged in struggle, on strike on N30, joined the local and national marches, as well as pickets.

These were the key reasons we decided to stand in Chorlton.

Vibrant and strong, networked and rooted. Visit our campaign website for more details and reports www.votekrantz.org.uk

Vibrant

Our campaign was launched with a local gig that attracted 150 people: 'Songs for the 99%,' with international singer songwriter Roy Bailey.

Two UK Uncut activists supported our TUSC election campaign. Dressed as 'Greedy Bankers' they were roped to the tree in the local precinct. A comrade made a 'head of David Cameron' on a pole. The 'bankers' were pulled around Chorlton centre by the candidate, who used a mini PA to explain 'these are the people who have stolen millions while we have cuts.' A comrade in a wheel chair carried the pole with Cameron's head. We attracted 20 people who helped with this election stunt, giving out hundreds of election leaflets. Health workers and local activists helped with this 4 hour stunt and campaign stall. We won new people who left their details and were then visited. Some got involved in activity and helped. Word of what we did spread across Chorlton.

A campaign car was decked out in anti cuts slogans and toured the ward during the campaign. A second-hand book fare at the local library brought people together and raised money.

At the election count we made an entrance with two 'bankers' wearing rosettes made of fake money. They 'thanked' the Lib Dems for helping to make them richer, embarrassed Labour, and were a hit with election staff on the night. The argument was that whoever 'won' the election it was the bankers who would be the real winners. Everyone involved in this campaign enjoyed taking part.

Using networks

We did not start with mass leafleting door to door by a small group of comrades. Our starting point was to use existing networks of SW readers in the ward. The candidate visited every SW reader to explain why we were standing: 'Imagine if Chorlton elected an anti cuts candidate? Everyone who is up for fighting the Tories and the cuts would

feel stronger. The bigger the TUSC vote the clearer it will be that people round here are up for a fight.'

When canvassing a key argument on the doorstep was:

Q. Why should I vote for you? What will you do if you are elected?

A. It is not what I will do for you if I am elected. It is what we could do together. If Chorlton elects an anti cuts candidate, everyone who understands that we need to fight back together will be stronger and more confident. As a Councillor I would help build marches and pickets and protests. That is how we will get real change.

This is the politics of a 'class struggle' candidate, rather than a mere 'left wing representative' candidate with a left program.

Every SW reader was asked to help; leafleting their streets and sub wards, displaying posters in windows and gardens, arranging introductions to people they knew. Disabled and elderly contacts helped stuffing envelopes for delivery to people casting postal ballots.

Using and extending existing networks meant that 90% of election activity was carried out by people in the ward. Some SWP members from across the district came over to help with the campaign. It was the local SWP branch that carried this election campaign.

On election day many of our voters told us they were proud to be voting for resistance. Most who voted Labour said that it was only 'to keep the Lib Dems out,' none were enthusiastic. The Labour agent said she 'hoped we would come second in the ballot'.

Union support

Mark Krantz spoke to the RMT Piccadilly branch which donated £50, a PCS Branch Ctte, as well as to Unite Fujitsu workers and Man Met Unison workers meeting off site.

Selling SW and branch meetings

Throughout the campaign the local branch met weekly, and the Saturday SW sales continued.

The political gains for the Chorlton branch were substantial. Increased political profile and political confidence of our branch across Chorlton. We gained two new SWP recruits and moved our weekly SW sale from a small supermarket back to the local precinct where we had held the 'banker' stunt. We have the names and addresses of 100 people who voted TUSC in the ward as a base for the future.

By sharing the Chorlton experience of standing in the local election we hope to inform and inspire comrades involved in future election campaigns.

Manchester Chorlton Branch & Tony (Manchester Rusholme)

THE SWP AND DISABILITY: A RESPONSE TO ROB AND ELLEN

The resurgence in disability activism described by Rob and Ellen in the last IB is indeed an exciting development, as is the fact that new organisations such as Disabled People Against Cuts and Black Triangle have a wider and more inclusive appeal than their predecessors of the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. They agree that the SWP has been centrally involved in this, has played an excellent role in the Remploi dispute, and that coverage on disability in Socialist Worker has been excellent. So what's the disagreement?

Rob and Ellen say

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.

Is the party's current analysis unclear? Well, I would say yes and no.

Both Rob and Ellen contributed valuable input to the new pamphlet they mention. What they don't say is what we agreed to leave out - partly because it's a finer theoretical point, and partly because there isn't agreement on it. This is about the nature of disability as a specific form of oppression. Rob and Ellen say "disability is not included as a form of oppression within the party's publications on oppression" and that "this must change."

They also suggest that "the party's current analysis reflects the medical model". I couldn't disagree more. Firstly, the term itself will be new to many comrades. The 'medical model of disability' holds that the problems individuals face is a simple consequence of people's individual impairments.

The SWP's approach, in contrast, is based on the social model, which says disability is discrimination by society against people who have impairments. The evidence for this is readily available. I therefore assume the real debate is around the particularities of disability as a form of oppression.

The party's analysis started with a series

of articles and meetings by Pat Stack going back to the mid-1990s, in which he argued that the oppression of disabled people is rooted in the way society is organised around profit and wage labour. My article *Marxism and Disability*, which appeared in ISJ 129 in January 2011, developed this analysis further. I examined the distinction as well as the relationship between disability and impairment. In asking whether disability discrimination is “a form of oppression like that suffered by other minorities under capitalism”, I wrote that I wanted to “begin a debate which is perhaps overdue.”

Lee Humber’s reply in the next ISJ endorsed my overall approach, but emphasised that impairment as well as disability is “also socially rooted”. I think that he’s right about this. As I am unsure what Rob and Ellen mean in raising the issue of ‘how impairment will be experienced in a socialist society’, I will leave this aside.

The areas of controversy in my ISJ article which have led to most debate are highlighted as follows:

The nature and heterogeneity of impairment distinguishes disability from other forms of oppression.... [this] is another reason (besides the more fundamental one of its timing) why the disability movement attracted neither the opposition nor the scale of mobilisations and involvement experienced by other movements of the oppressed. Disability has no comparable equivalent to Stonewall or the great marches for black civil rights...

Other oppressed groups were not and often still are not considered capable of particular kinds of work. But this is not the same as employers wishing to avoid paying the additional costs of hiring a disabled worker, whether in the form of work station adaptations, interpreters, readers, environmental modifications, or liability insurance.

Capitalism in general does not scapegoat disabled people in order to divide and rule in the way it does with other forms of oppression.... Disabled people are often the victims of prejudice and ignorance, but they are rarely targeted solely because of their impairment.

The two years since this was written have certainly provided plenty of evidence to challenge these last two statements.

First, there has been an unprecedented accumulation of media stories about benefit cheats and scroungers, and the associated rise of the insidious term ‘genuinely disabled’.

Second, there have been a flood of reports and articles about ‘disability hate crime’ (a category which I believe is problematic). There is much else to discuss. DPAC is a coalition of a range of political strands, including some hostile to our politics, so we don’t always agree on the

way forward.

Although it is often posed as such, direct action need not be counterposed to the wider movement. Some in DPAC, for example, dismissed the TUC’s 20th October demo as tokenistic. But that day’s road blockade at Hyde Park Corner highlighted opposition to disability cuts as part of the overall fight against austerity - a point emphasised by Rob when interviewed on behalf of DPAC on that evening’s BBC news.

Debates on oppression often have wider implications. The SWP has had wide-ranging and sometimes deeply contentious debates on racism and black nationalism, patriarchy and women’s oppression, as well as on LGBT politics and ‘queer’ culture. It would be a matter of some concern if clarifying our stance on disability did not involve an exchange of different perspectives.

This is why Rob and Ellen are wrong to say we shouldn’t debate these differences in the pre-conference bulletin. The more SWP members who know the arguments at stake, the more likely the party is to develop a theoretical perspective to better guide our practice.

I therefore fully agree with their proposal for a party dayschool on disability. If Rob and Ellen get their disagreements into print beforehand, this could only help the debate. I am currently researching a book which will develop some of the themes I took up in the ISJ article, as well as others I did not (any input welcome!).

As for the other practical suggestions Rob and Ellen make, I think they are very sensible. I would add that we need to try and co-ordinate our work as a disability fraction better, a problem for which I am at least as culpable as anyone.

Part of what’s so interesting in recent months in particular has been the polarisation around disability. Media caricatures of disabled people as cheats, freaks or scroungers have been challenged, and not just by the Paralympics themselves. The Remploy strikes and DPAC’s “Atos Games” protests were popular, whereas Osborne & May’s failed attempts to bask in the success of the Games supplied among its most enjoyable moments.

The revolutionary left has often had to respond to new movements of the oppressed and the debates associated with them. Disability is another area throwing up new currents and arguments. We have everything to gain by engaging critically and honestly with them.

Roddy (East London)

DPAC AS A UNITED FRONT

I would like to add to some of the points made in IB2 by Rob Murthwaite and Ellen Clifford.

DPAC emerged when there was no disability movement. It was founded at a demonstration at Tory Party Conference in October 2010 called by the Right to Work Campaign, and formally launched at a 100-strong workshop at the Right to Work-sponsored People’s Convention in February 2011. DPAC took part in the TUC national demo the following month, as well as the public sector strikes of Nov 2011 and the TUC demo on Oct 20th 2012.

This point is not simply about chronology. DPAC has from the outset been linked with broader initiatives to build resistance to the public spending cuts. Our experience as SWP members working in DPAC provides an example of the politics of united front work at the moment.

DPAC sees the attacks on disabled people as part of a wider assault on the welfare state and the rights and equalities won in the past, and recognises that it cannot fight the cuts alone or even in alliance with other disability groups. It comprises a range of political opinion, much of it autonomist or socialist in outlook. Its emphasis on direct action and civil disobedience has attracted younger disabled people as well as older, re-energised disability activists. It includes separatist elements as well as others who are hostile to organised trade unions.

DPAC’s support for Remploy workers resisting factory closures earlier this year helped pressurise GMB and Unite union leaders to call strikes. The solidarity shown across the country for the first of these almost led to occupations to resist the closures. Despite our efforts, the Remploy workers were sold out. But the role of comrades in building support for the dispute was central to holding this developing united front together as internal tensions began to emerge.

DPAC has a National Steering Committee of 12 people, which coordinates a growing network of independent local groups. The SWP has been actively involved in DPAC since its emergence, with two comrades elected to the NSC in November last year. We have since then recruited one existing NSC member as well as several other DPAC activists.

There are of course tensions and potential weaknesses in any united front. High profile direct actions have included successful blockades of Regent Street, Trafalgar Square and Marble Arch on the TUC demo on Oct 20th, and the occupation of the DWP HQ which closed the superb Atos Games week of action. All these attracted publicity and led to a growth in local DPAC groups around the country.

While important, this can easily become a substitute for building mass action and a broader base of support. Joint actions by DPAC and UK Uncut tend to involve only a narrow layer of committed activists. The focus is the apparent heroic action of a select few who risk arrest and attack by the police on behalf of the rest of the movement, whose role is to stand on the sidelines and offer moral support.

Getting the balance right between direct action, building local groups and the work in the wider movement, especially with the Trade Unions, will test DPAC in the struggles ahead. Some protests have seen activists treating frontline workers in Job-CentrePlus offices as much the enemy as DWP or ATOS. One local group in Cardiff may be about to split with DPAC nationally over direct action specifically targeted at PCS members and others at JCP offices.

DPAC has met PCS officials nationally, and is arranging local meetings with PCS branches to discuss unity in opposing Work Capability Assessments and on benefits sanctions. DPAC has also been invited to send speakers to several Union conferences and has just produced a model affiliation motion to get financial backing and support from Trade Unions at both national and local branch level.

Again, this will create tensions as the bureaucracies of the big public sector unions, GMB AND Unison in particular, try as we expect to damp down any widespread resistance to the austerity cuts.

Successfully addressing these tensions may not be key to holding DPAC together in the medium term, but may well determine whether DPAC remains an example of the sort of united front we are building in other areas.

Organisations like DPAC can be central in drawing together social movements and local campaigns with grass roots trade unionists and the rest of the left. DPAC currently has a member on the Unite the Resistance Steering Committee.

Our role at Unite the Resistance conference in November was central to the conference's aims. DPAC chaired the workshop session on Welfare attacks and took a prominent part in the session on Equalities. Speakers in both the opening and closing sessions spoke of the important role DPAC is playing in showing how to build effective opposition to the Coalition cuts.

Disabled people have been hit hard and hit particularly viciously by the Coalition and these attacks have been one on top of another with many people being affected by both cuts to benefits and cuts to front line services.

DPAC's strength is that we understand that what is happening to us is just a precursor to the sort of attacks that will be affecting larger layers of our class as the cuts really begin to filter through over the next few months and years.

Roger (South London)

THE NORTHERN POLICE MONITORING PROJECT

Comrades in Manchester worked with others to set up a meeting in Moss Side in October 2012 which united 'black, white and brown' working class activists involved in campaigns fighting back against attacks, harassment, repression and 'murder' by the Police.

Over seventy people came to watch the film 'Who Polices the Police' which charts the story of the Police killing of Sean Rigg.

Following the film we heard speakers who had been campaigning over Hillsborough (The Hillsborough Family Campaign); Anthony Grainger (shot dead by Greater Manchester Police); the Hilliard brothers (two students unsuccessfully 'fitted up' by the Met Police); and Mark Duggan (his auntie spoke); the right to protest against racism and fascism (a white working class woman was one of many attacked on a UAF anti EDL mobilisation in Bolton, justice4bolton), as well as local Somali youth (routinely harassed by local police.) BARAC (Black Activists Rising Against Cuts) supported the meeting.

We argued hard - and won - a 'Muslim' chair. This was important as Islamophobia has become a central dynamic in racism and harassment in Britain since the 'war on terror,' which has accelerated anti Muslim racism and builds upon years of racism towards our black communities.

The Moss Side meeting was historic and unique in Manchester. It re-established resistance to police abuse, unified communities that the authorities seek to divide, coopt, incorporate, and suppress; and involved the Muslim Somali community.

Somali people are among the most isolated, marginalised and poorest in Manchester. Comrades have helped build campaigns and resistance to their oppression.

- A 70 strong meeting of Somali parents and students publicly exposed exclusion of Somali Youth from the local Academy School, and the denial of Somali parent's rights to involvement in their children's education. Subsequently the Head who had refused to recognise their grievances was 'replaced' with a new Head who has now asked for dialogue with the Somali Parents Group

- In response to the persistent police harassment of Somali Youth in Moss Side, we helped set up incident reporting and police monitoring. Subsequently the police 'backed off' from their persistent stopping and searching of Somali youth

The outcome of the Moss Side meeting was that a Northern Police Monitoring Project

(NPMP) was launched.

In its very early stages, NPMP is activating the full range of our connections with young and older people; muslim, black and white working class youth; trades unionists; and social movement groups.

Comrades involved in NPMP are, with others, aiming to join up:

- Descriptive analysis about how we are being policed
- Resistance to criminalising young people (e.g. our youth gaining confidence to exercise their rights in the face of police harassment)
- Northern based/connected campaigns against: deaths in police custody (e.g. Anthony Grainger and a nascent Mark Duggan campaign)
- Miscarriages of justice (e.g. Joint Enterprise: Not Guilty by Association (JENGBA), The Hillsborough Justice Campaign, students charged out of Millbank and youth charged out of the riots, and justice4bolton.)

This bottom-up initiative is contextualised by the ruthless attack on our class that is ever-deepening poverty and alienation.

We understand how vital it is for our class to expose and break through the false divisions, false consciousness and fear that is stimulated by our rulers in their every attempt to bend us to their will.

Equally, we recognise that there is no short cut to systematic, organisational and political development that:

- Respects and reflects the range of people who make up our class
- Exposes that - and how - the prevailing ideas of the society are the ideas of the ruling class - not ours
- Stimulates our abilities to emancipate ourselves from State oppression.

Developing the confidence to fight back is part and parcel of winning. We are not defensive: we are assertive. We have nothing to lose.

Nahella, Joanna, Mark, Rhetta (Manchester)

STOPPING THE EDL IN WALTHAMSTOW

On the first of September, 4,000 of us stopped the Nazi EDL from preaching their hate in our community. We blocked their route, took our streets back and there was nowhere for them to go - even to the toilet.

We had been preparing since 2008. We knew the day would come that fascists would want to try and build in Waltham Forest. The local UAF group was already established and had a good representation of local activists, including a Labour

Councillor, Amnesty International members and trade unionists. We had also held a very good local event on Holocaust Memorial Day.

We kick started it off with some organising meetings that we invited as many local people and groups to as possible. We had an initial opening meeting of around 40 people. Our organising meetings were fortnightly (until 6 weeks before the march, when they became weekly) and we sustained over 30 at every meeting.

We discussed various issues, some of which we take for granted, but that are worth re-stating. Firstly, we knew we had to take the EDL threat seriously due to the nature of the economic crisis and the rise in Islamophobia.

We also knew that it was important to call the EDL nazi or fascist and to campaign against them on that basis. We wanted to drive a wedge between anyone who may buy into the Islamophobia in the mainstream but would never wish to be associated with being a nazi or a fascist.

We wanted to celebrate our multi-cultural community in the face of the EDL and wider attacks on multiculturalism, but we knew that just to hold an event that celebrated Multiculturalism but didn't actively take on the question of the EDL wouldn't stop them.

We wanted to follow the lead of UAF and the model of united front work that they had so successfully built. We were ever mindful that we were a long line of protests against the EDL and we consider our success to be that of everyone who campaigned in Stoke, Luton, Tower Hamlets, Bolton and elsewhere. UAF had called 93 demos by the time we defeated the EDL the 2nd time round on 27 October.

Following the united front model meant for us that we wanted to work with local trade unions, the Labour Party, The Mosques, local community groups and so on. However we faced some challenges on this front. Locally The Socialist Party have a base and they are used to being at the forefront of most campaigns.

At one of our early meetings they suggested that the campaign should be run with the anti-cuts group and that we should not work with anyone who had pushed through cuts in the local council.

We voted on this at our early meetings and we won the majority of people to building a united front campaign that was about stopping the EDL and nothing else.

It's important to note that we whilst we did not wish to place conditions on anyone's membership of the campaign, we did not avoid the difficult topics and the points of disagreement we had with the government and local politicians. Our first public meeting had amongst others Zita Holborne from BARAC, Steven Saxby from the local faith forum and Martin Smith, all of whom very eloquently made the link between economic crisis, cuts and racism.

At that public meeting, 120 people

attended and the discussion was around how we build to defeat the EDL. Of course the thing with fighting fascism/racism is that most people are on board. However it does not mean that the way you defeat it, is easily agreed on.

We won again the argument around building a united front and we knew that at the organising meetings we wanted to change the focus away from just the discussion on who should be involved and start being active and actually involve people.

We organised our meetings so that we could have report backs on what had happened and ideas for what to do in the future. We broke down into local groups at the end of the meeting to organise the activities such as leafleting, putting up posters, contacting churches and mosques and so on.

We also had a press group, a group of younger people organising a local LMHR gig and contacting the colleges, publicity groups and so on. We tried to have an emphasis as SWP members of always doing activity with non-members. The result of emphasizing activity was that we became an outward looking campaign, able to engage a very receptive local community.

Newer members of the campaign gained huge confidence through being active and really enjoyed talking with local people. As one woman had said, she had been up and down Walthamstow market loads of times, but she'd never tried to talk with people and she was really impressed at how receptive people were to our leaflets. Having been active and talking to people she had a sense that we could stop the EDL if we managed to get local people involved.

Again, the politics of the united front are apparent. We were winning people to the idea that they could be agents of change within their own communities and work places. The self-activity of the working class is central to our politics and the transformation that takes place in people who are trying to change the world, even just in their own local community, is a very powerful thing to be a part of.

At our first public meeting a few local Labour Councillors had attended and we knew that the size of the meeting was very good and was an important part of our campaign being credible enough to pull in wider forces.

At our next public meeting we had Stella Creasy, the local Labour MP come and speak and support our campaign. This was an important turning point for us. The public meeting in itself was only 15-20 more than the last one, but the difference was our audience. We were no longer having arguments with the left over the strategy of the united front, we were having arguments with those to the right of us over the strategy needed to stop the EDL.

As the campaign grew and broadened, more people fed into the debate around how to stop them, and discussions inevitably turned to the question of whether the EDL should be banned. Of course this may seem

like the natural response when the community hears Nazis and racists are planning to march through their community. We had to argue that no matter what happened we had to be on the streets on that day, in as large a number as possible. It was our right, and most of us felt our duty, to protest against the EDL.

Further, and very importantly was the involvement of the local council of Mosques. They had heard about our campaign and were in favor of a ban on the EDL. However, they said if the EDL weren't banned they would march.

There were also Labour Party members in our campaign and others who supported the idea of the ban. The local council had also said they wanted the EDL banned, but they considered UAF and the local group to be the flip side of the same coin to the EDL. They were against any protests.

We knew from UAF nationally and from the experience of Tower Hamlets that although we don't agree with a ban, we can work with people who do as long as we all wish to mobilize the local community against the EDL.

We therefore had a very good debate at the public meeting and within our organising meetings about the ban, but about wanting to mobilize. We kept on with workplace meetings too and with our emphasis on raising money from the trade unions. We had workplace meetings in George Monoux College, two departments of the council, WF College and one planned in Whipp's Cross hospital.

A comrade was central to setting this up and had got all the staff-side unions on board and permission from management to hold the meeting in the canteen. The police visited the hospital prior to the meeting saying they were from the anti-terrorism squad and that Weyman Bennett kept company with some unsavoury types! The management pulled the meeting, but the work the comrade had done and the response showed that we were starting to push our campaign out in the right direction.

We had very good involvement of the local and national trade unions. A Unite equality officer who lived locally attended a lot of meetings and provided some good resources like leaflets and placards. They also contacted every branch in London asking them to be involved.

We held a meeting specifically for trade unionists on mobilizing against the EDL and for the 20th October TUC march. Local trade union branches donated money and publicized our events. The Trades Council sponsored our public meeting and we had speakers address an NUT reps meeting, Unite local branch meeting and have been invited to speak at the UNISON AGM. We placed a real emphasis on getting union banners for the public meetings and the demo.

Younger comrades in our district took on organising a LMHR gig. It was a real success and pulled in a layer of college and university students. It was also a real moti-

vator for us as it proved that if you look outward and organise, you can pull in a new layer of people.

Our leafleting at the tubes and at community events was starting to pay off. We were being recognized by people and we had started to get a better dialogue with the press. Local activists and campaigners were central in doing this and in involving the council of Mosques. They were starting to get more involved with us and had a lot of respect for UAF nationally.

When we knew that the police were refusing to ask for a ban, despite the attempts of the local authority, the council of mosques were true to their word and said they would now mobilize and march. They took their involvement very seriously and we held the stewards meeting in the Lea Bridge Rd Mosque community hall. They provided 50 stewards along with 50 from the local campaign.

The most important thing about a campaign that is going to take on the Nazis and indeed any other oppressive force is the numbers that come out on the day. It's not about macho posturing or looking for a scrap – it's about people getting together and taking their streets back and saying to the EDL these streets are ours, these communities are ours.

We held an SWP caucus with Martin Smith and Weyman Bennett the night before the demo and we thought at that point that we would have the numbers to march. We discussed through a strategy for the day, but it's important to note that right up until the Saturday morning of the demo we were still having discussions with people about the need to march.

The numbers that turned up meant that people had the confidence to march. Not only that, but when you look at the people involved in the sit down at the Bell Corner, it wasn't just young people and students that took part. It was everyone. The march and the sense of collective power that people experience when they act together changed the dynamic from fear and uncertainty amongst some to confidence and a sense of pride and unity in our local community.

The details of the day don't need to be repeated, comrades can read the SW reports and so on to see this. But it's worth looking at what happened locally after the event. Firstly, the front page of the local paper was a full colour picture of the demo and the slogan 'United we Stand'. This was a real shift for them. They had tried to sit on the fence a bit, but in the face of 4,000 local residents they couldn't.

Secondly when the EDL announced it was coming back, the local paper and the local authority announced they were going to run a joint campaign to stop them from coming back. The local council leader who had told his councillors to attend a film festival rather than the demo had egg on his face and wanted to get back in front of the local campaign.

We welcomed what the paper had said

and we invited the local council to another public meeting we had in the run up to October 27th. Unfortunately, they weren't able to take part and they tried to distance themselves from us and along with the police attempted to drive a wedge between us and the local Council of mosques.

Despite the local council not attending our third public meeting, we had a very good platform with a Rabbi from a local synagogue, The chair of the Waltham Forest Council of Mosques, Jeanette Arnold London AM, Stella Creasy MP, a local RMT rep, SERTUC, Sabby Dahlu of UAF and Martin Smith. The argument at this point around the question of the ban and the need to march was much sharper and our political intervention was central to galvanizing the need to mobilize.

The success of 1 September meant that we had won the majority of people to the need to march. However, the weight of the local paper, the local MP and the local authority's campaign for a ban was apparent.

The audience was fantastic in its response. Among speakers from the floor was an NUT NEC member, a regional UNITE official, the local Woodcraft folk who had mobilized for the demo and taken a delegation to the LMHR 10th anniversary event, A representative from the churches who were mobilizing, a student union officer from UEL and so on.

All of them had had a great experience on 1 September. One of our younger comrades responded brilliantly to Stella Creasy's downplaying of the march and we believe the party's intervention at that meeting was central to shaping the response to the ban.

We had forged very good relationships in our campaign and we also had good local support. We weren't too sure how everyone would react locally to the EDL stating they were coming back, but mostly people were angry and wanted to come back out again and show the EDL they weren't going to tolerate them.

We took a really good delegation of local activists to the TUC demo on the 20th and we distributed thousands of leaflets.

Nationally our comrades in UAF had been involved in discussions with other Muslim groups and as the 27 October approached, it looked like we would have vast numbers out against the EDL. The local council had again applied for a ban and right up until 5 days before the march was due to take place, the police had not supported the call for a ban.

However, our continued mobilization locally and the work of UAF nationally meant that they finally realised what they would be up against and what they would be protecting.

The EDL were so humiliated on 1 September that it was a real gamble for them to stake a come back on Walthamstow. It represented a wider battle for leadership of the far-right in the UK and it didn't pay off. Their abysmal turn out in Walsall and the fantastic counter protest further humiliated

them.

In desperation, they attempted a ludicrous attack on the East London mosque and rather conveniently for the leadership, were arrested and bailed. One of their bail conditions was not to enter East London.

So, what position did the state find themselves in 5 days prior to 27 October? They had estimated that we would have a minimum of 7,000 and that the EDL would have around 150-300. They didn't want to stand in the middle and a ban was obtained.

We kept up the pressure locally with leafleting and maintained our right to a place to assemble. The local council said they were not going to hold an event locally to celebrate multiculturalism, but they would have a fun fare and that no-one should be protesting. There was a lot of pressure on us to pull our demonstration.

Beyond the ban, the police also put in place a whole swathe of sections of the public order act that meant the EDL would not be able to set foot in the borough. They were allocated a space in Westminster.

Inevitably we lost people through the implementation of the ban. Of course, people felt it a real victory that through our campaigning we had managed to stop them coming to the borough. The council of Mosques didn't think it necessary to protest and it was also Eid, meaning the vast majority of Muslims would be celebrating with their families.

Even though the local MPs had signed a statement against any protest and in support of the ban, it is a credit to the campaign that Stella Creasy felt the need to come and speak on our platform. We managed to pull around 1,000 on the day and at the end, we defied the ban, took up the cry of 'whose streets? Our streets' and held a victory march. And what an incredible victory it was. Twice.

The SWP locally now has a great reputation and we also managed to build a UTR meeting locally in the middle of all of this of over 80 people. This has been the biggest anti-cuts meeting to date in the borough and is a reflection of our work in a number of united fronts.

Not only did the united front put 4,000 on the streets and broke the back of the EDL, it also created a new layer of local activists in Waltham Forest and re-energised the local labour movement. We managed to hold a pole of attraction in the movement that shifted the idea of politics away from representation to self-activity.

The numbers of people from Walthamstow that attended the LMHR 10th anniversary was really impressive. The panel we held there also showed the depth of our campaign. Interestingly, the panel was 3 women and 1 man. We had also proved in practice that stopping the EDL was not about macho posturing, but about a real local campaign involving everyone.

What is also clear is that as an organization we have made a massive difference to the growth of the far-right in the UK. Europe is a currently a warning for us all

that we cannot be complacent. Greece, Hungary and France are three cases in point. We believe our national and local strategy has been a central factor in the fate of the EDL and the BNP.

We also know that we stand on the shoulders of giants. The party's work against the far right has an incredible history and to that end we would like to dedicate this small contribution to Julie Waterson.

Jo and Dean (Walthamstow)

IN DEFENCE OF LENINISM

We wish to make a contribution to the debates that are currently taking place in the party around questions of democracy, substitutionism and the type of leadership required in a revolutionary organisation.

We hope others will develop some of the arguments we raise here at greater length and in a more rounded and theoretical way. But we felt it was important for working comrades who are trying to lead a key area of the party's work intervening in the class struggle – and who have helped lead significant strikes and struggles in the last few years – to make their voices heard.

Ruth from South London, in the last internal bulletin raises many important political questions. She quite rightly begins her article by expressing the absolute necessity for the party to uphold a high level of discussion and debate in order to seek theoretical clarity. It is good that members of our organisation are seriously attempting to think through these questions and it is healthy that in our party people are able to raise questions, debates and criticisms.

However, in the spirit of open debate, it is worth pointing to what we feel are some serious problems with some of the ways in which the debate has been phrased, both within some of the articles in the last bulletin, as well as in the way that comrades have motivated those arguments in discussion and meetings recently. We strongly feel that some of the arguments put in the last bulletin, if followed through to their logical conclusion, would represent a serious break with the traditions of a Leninist organisation.

What kind of party?

A revolutionary party must be an interventionist party, a combat party, seeking always to shape and impact upon the class struggle.

Ruth and others who have contributed to previous bulletins and who have spoken at various meetings recently are absolutely correct to focus on the importance

of open debate and discussion in the party. It is essential if we are to be a democratic organisation. We can have no return to the days where many comrades felt afraid to raise criticisms of the party's leadership. The much more open and questioning discussion in the party since the reshaping of the organisation after the democracy commission is essential and welcome.

It is also absolutely essential, as many contributors to these debates have argued, that the party recruits new layers of young fighters – as we have in fact done in recent years in a way that has transformed the atmosphere and political health of many branches and districts- and also encourages them to develop politically and begin to lead in our party.

However, it is worth pointing towards the purpose of discussion and democracy in a revolutionary party. It is not an abstract exercise for its own sake – the party cannot simply be a talking shop or a debating club. We have these democratic discussions and if needed sharp debates in order to then make decisions and act in the real world. The party exists as, and only as, a tool to intervene in the class struggle and impact on it.

For example, the party has long debated and will continue to debate, the nature of the trade union bureaucracy and its relationship to the rank and file. We spend a lot of time in the party, trying to gain as much theoretical clarity on this point as possible. But theoretical clarity alone is not enough. We must also apply theory to practice. So, to refer again to our understanding of the trade union bureaucracy, we have sought to weave a course (sometimes more successfully than at other times!) between the danger of adapting to the pulls of the bureaucracy on the one hand, and the risk of abstract propagandism on the other.

One crucial way we have sought to do this is through initiating Unite the Resistance for example – in a time when we simply don't have the conditions for large scale independent rank and file activity and action trying to find a way to ally with sections of the left bureaucracy in order to develop campaigns and action which can then boost the conditions in which greater rank and file confidence, organization and independent initiative are possible.

It simply isn't true to say, as Ruth does, that there has been no discussion in the party about the way in which we organise Unite the Resistance. In fact there has been endless discussion – the issue is in following the discussion with implementing the conclusions in practice.

Our fear is that in many of the debates around these issues there is a strong whiff of a retreat from seeing the party as a democratic centralist organisation – with full debate followed by united action to intervene in real struggle – into a navel gazing left debating club.

Leadership

Although Ruth and others says that they do not want to make analogies between the party leadership and the type of leadership that exists in organisations such as trade unions, or reformist parties. The conclusions they draw are dangerously near to doing this.

There is a very strong smell in these arguments that locates a problem as being inbuilt to, inherent in, any form of leadership – that there is a general problem with any structure or organisation which has some form of centralised leadership.

This is not Marxism as we recognise it, but rather represents a quite different political tradition.

The problem lies not in the concept of leadership or some inherent problem with structure. In each case you have to look at the social basis and function of the leadership.

The trade union leaders hesitate, sell out, go rotten not because they are leaders– but because of the social role the trade union bureaucracy plays – mediating between workers and bosses (including the state) as we have long argued in our tradition. This is precisely why even the best union leaders on the left are subject ultimately to the same pressures as those on the right. The issue is not an inherent one of "leaders", but of the specific contradiction between rank and file workers and the social role of the union bureaucracy.

Those who head reformist parties in similar vein are not rotten because of a problem of leadership – but because they aim to and then do win parliamentary office and run the bourgeois state which exists to serve the interest of capitalism and the ruling class and not the working class who vote for the reformist parties.

In Stalinist Russia the problem was not as some from traditions hostile to Marxism have argued that the "seed of Stalinism was in the Leninist model of a democratic centralist Bolshevik Party". Our tradition has always rightly and firmly rejected this argument. The Leninist party was that which led the, to date, so far only successful example of the working class taking power and beginning to reshape society.

It failed, for reasons comrades can and should read about, not because of some problem with party structure or leadership but because of the rise of a new social class which made the party and the state their tool and subordinated workers to the drive to accumulate – hence our tradition's analysis of state capitalism.

There is simply no analogy whatsoever between any of these situations and any current arguments around leadership issues on a revolutionary socialist organisation such as ours.

Of course we need to guard against tendencies to substitute or look for short cuts – and these can then manifest themselves in particular methods of operating and leading. This was precisely the point about the

revolt in the party that has reshaped and improved it in recent years. But the source of all such problems nearly always lies in the (repeated) failure among those leading the party to recognise the reality of the political landscape we are facing and operating in, and in then denying that reality and seeing anyone who challenges that denial as a problem.

Our tradition's argument for leadership – and the centralist part of democratic centralism – is based on the uneven consciousness within the working class and within the party, and the need for the party to be combat organisation acting in unison to seek to affect the course of events and history.

We believe these traditions and arguments are correct and should be defended if we are to build the kind of party which can lead our class in the fight to change the world.

Elections democracy and accountability

A key part of these arguments seems to crystallise around demands for changes in the nature of our leading bodies and how they are elected and held accountable – exemplified in the motion at the end of Ruth's article.

We strongly believe that taken as a whole the proposals in this motion if adopted would represent a serious breach with a Leninist conception of the party.

Of course it is true that there is no one single model for how we should elect leading bodies, or of how they held accountable. And it is also true that within our own tradition the Bolshevik party at times elected a central committee in ways similar to those being suggested.

One point however is that we should learn from tradition and not slavishly follow it! There are we feel serious problems with the model of CC elections proposed – and some those proposing the change spell out the dangers themselves.

The key problem is that delegates at our conference are and should be voting for a leading body and not simply individuals. We do not want to vote for this or that individual to be a CC member, we want to decide on what we think is the right leading body for the party as a whole.

A top ten popularity vote is not the best way to do this in our view. But when you put this proposal together with the proposal to change the nature of the national committee to the real picture and direction of the proposals become much clearer. It does too when some of those backing such changes raise arguments suggesting that perhaps we don't even need a central committee in discussions and meetings.

The NC at present (whatever its faults) is a body which can take decisions binding on the party and on the CC and which is elected by conference as a whole body

to lead the party as a whole – and which is crucially accountable through conference to the whole party.

Instead we are, it is suggested, to have a federal body composed of delegates from branches districts and fractions – and which are accountable NOT to the party as a whole through conference but rather accountable to their own constituencies. It is a federal, parliamentary vision of a leading body.

This is, to us, a disastrous route for a revolutionary party to go down, and would be a slide towards our leading bodies becoming mere talking shops made up of a fragmented mosaic of people representing and accountable to "their" constituents, and this would in our view a break from any serious notion of a democratic centralist interventionist party in the Leninist tradition.

We therefore wish to argue strongly against the proposed motion and for a defence of leadership and of leading bodies elected as such by conference delegates and accountable through conference to the whole party – in short for a Leninist, democratic centralist party.

Yes to debate and discussion and criticism at all levels of the party, yes to democracy and accountability – but no to a politics which slides towards a rejection of all forms of centralised leadership and which moves towards a federalist fragmentation of our leading bodies which would reduce our party to an increasingly fractious, faction ridden and ineffective debating club not fit as a tool to intervene in and change the real world.

Jess (South East London), Paul (East London) and Doug (Birmingham). Jess and Paul help convene the party's teachers' fraction

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM – WE NEED MORE OF IT

Our Central Committee (CC) is without exception made up of talented, committed and extraordinarily hard working comrades. Over the last year the CC has generally got its perspective and political line right, despite a complex and fluid situation.

Like all those who work for the party, the CC members who work full-time for the organisation put an enormous amount in, while receiving salaries so low that they should cause comrades to look hard at their own subs.

Yet all is not well. We haven't seen a level of resistance in the UK remotely approaching what we need. Paying membership of the party remains about 2,500.

Many members remain politically and/or organisationally disengaged from the party to varying degrees, despite progress in strengthening branches, districts and fractions. Many members don't agree with or don't understand the party's perspectives, but instead of arguing them out or fighting to implement them they become passive.

For example, only one of the non-CC contributions in IB2 was about the party's general perspectives. Implementation of the party's perspective and political line has not been as effective as we might have hoped.

It would be all too easy for comrades impatient and frustrated by the gap between the massive tasks we face and the organisation we have to blame each other or the party leadership, or to look for short-cuts. To avoid this we have to explain the objective factors that are the primary reasons why things are not easier – primarily the legacy of decades of low levels of industrial struggle in the UK.

There is a particular danger of frustration amongst our young cadre, many of whom have come from political environments where autonomist ideas are influential. Older comrades need to think back to how they felt when they joined – the enthusiasm and excitement about Marxist ideas and the thirst for argument and debate. Young comrades will come up with all sorts of ideas – good and bad. Long-standing members have a responsibility not to be defensive or dismissive of their ideas, or to counter them with backward ideas such as counterposing theory and activity. We need to engage with their ideas and both learn from them and win them to our full politics. This is how we win a new generation to leading in the party and the class rather than driving them away.

Substitutionism

I won't repeat the arguments I made in IB1 last year in my article "Party and class today" about how the low level of struggle has created a problem of substitutionism throughout the movement and the impact this has on the party, but it is worth highlighting a few of the consequences.

In the unions the number of shop stewards / reps has declined, and their role has shifted to put more emphasis on doing things on behalf of workers (e.g. casework, legal action, focus on negotiation) rather than organising workers to win things for themselves. The pool of confident militants has shrunk, so elections to higher positions in the unions are less contested, allowing the left to be represented at the top out of all proportion to our influence at workplace level.

Passivity and substitutionism in the class has its echo in the party, with party "activists" doing much of what members should be doing, organisers doing what activists should be doing, and the CC and national office spending vast amounts of time chas-

ing round after us to make sure we do what all ought to be doing.

There's nothing wrong with a bit of substitutionism. Showing in practice that things can be done and how to do them is an important part of how leaders can win others to a new approach.

It is particularly useful when the party is making a sharp turn - if a minority who grasp this can implement it quickly and prove that it works, this can accelerate the process of winning the rest of the party to the turn.

But if the tactic of substitutionism is used often or for long periods it has corrosive effects. A party with a culture of substitutionism comes to depend on a minority rushing round to get things done; that minority becomes too busy to take the time to explain and argue to win the rest over; "getting on with it" replaces winning others over instead of helping win the rest over; the rest don't fully understand what the party is trying to do so become passive or just "go through the motions" of trying to implement something they don't understand; some in the minority can even become dismissive of other members who they see as not pulling their weight.

The period of relative passivity of the working class and the substitutionism that has caused in the movement means that comrades will recognise the effects of substitutionism on the SWP to some extent, despite our efforts to counter it. We will only decisively win the fight against substitutionism when we see sustained mass workers' action in the UK. But that doesn't mean that our decisions can't help or hinder us in the meantime.

Strategy or calendar?

Many comrades feel that we have a tendency to lurch from building one key event to the next, but don't always have much to show for it politically or organisationally afterwards.

This criticism is partly unjustified. While many organisations might have a "pick and mix" attitude, where individuals or branches prioritise whatever they fancy and dissipate their energies in different directions, we know that this is not effective. The democratic centralist tradition means we try to identify the key priorities and the party as a whole then focuses on them - whether they happen to be our personal preferences on a particular occasion or not. This approach helps us punch above our weight now, as well as establishing a pattern of working collectively that would be essential for success in bigger struggles.

But the criticism also contains a grain of truth, as perhaps an example will illustrate.

We know that we can't rely on the union leaders to consistently lead the action required to win. We understand that we need an organised movement or

rank and file workers in order to pressure the leaders and to go past them independently when they hesitate or sell out. But we also know that there is currently in the UK no rank and file movement capable of playing this role and that it cannot be constructed in the absence of mass struggle. This appears to be Catch 22.

But, building on the experience of the Communist Party in the early 20th century, the SWP has developed a strategy to try to solve the conundrum, in the form of Unite the Resistance (UtR).

As Alex explained at the November National Committee meeting, UtR has a dual role. Firstly as a United Front including both us and sections of the left officials who are (at least sometimes) willing to encourage a fight. This involves us working with and against the officials and putting pressure on them. Secondly, we want UtR to act as a point of crystallisation for a rank and file movement should struggle reach the scale that makes one possible. Clearly not everyone in UtR outside the SWP will share this perspective.

The SWP played a major part in building the highly impressive UtR conference on 17th November, and we could not have done this without a democratic centralist method that made it a clear priority for the party as a whole. We are now committed to working hard to implement the statement agreed by the conference and build UtR in every region. Again, democratic centralism is essential for the party to act decisively like this.

But the truth is that it was a minority of the party who helped build the UtR conference. We could have done even better if more comrades had got involved in implementing the party strategy. It's also the case that we built it successfully despite major unevenness in the level of political understanding comrades had of the strategy - why and how we were trying to build it and what we hoped to achieve as a result.

Had more comrades implemented the decision to build the UtR conference, we would have been even more successful. We need more democratic centralism. That requires convincing more comrades of its importance, so that we are a more disciplined organisation. But it requires more than that. It's perfectly possible to persuade someone to attend an impressive conference without a deep understanding of the politics behind it. But if you want to persuade a busy shop steward or a union official who is in the Labour Party to invest their name, time and energy into building UtR on an ongoing basis, you really do need to be able to explain why. To build real united front organisation through building events and out of events requires a much higher level of politics than is required just to deliver bums on seats.

Over-reliance on a disciplined machine

The fact that we have a large body of disciplined party workers and an even larger layer of disciplined party cadre who did their best to implement decisions, irrespective of whether they fully understand the politics behind them, helps us deliver in the short term, but this substitutionism also hides problems when much of the party hasn't been won to a particular strategy.

Discipline in a revolutionary party is primarily based on conviction, and if leading comrades are rushing around substituting for the party, they have little time to win the rest of the party to the position.

The need for a revolutionary party arises from unevenness in the consciousness of workers. The party gathers more conscious workers and sets itself the task of raising the consciousness of the whole class to the highest level possible. The need for leadership in a revolutionary party arises from the same dialectical relationship - the struggle of the most advanced section to raise the consciousness of the whole.

As outlined above, substitutionism is a tactic that can be used in moderation by leaders to demonstrate the correctness of an approach. But in excess it is counter-productive, creating barriers to the political development of the majority. Instead of arguing, explaining and trying to win the party as a whole, leaders who are over-reliant on substitution tend to resort to badgering comrades rather than convincing them - organisational rather than political leadership.

A leadership that is over-reliant on a party "machine" would tend to be highly protective of it. Anything or anyone they perceive (rightly or wrongly) as a threat to their control over it would elicit an exaggerated, almost paranoid, reaction. Instead of comradely and political debate there would be a closing of ranks and a desire to deal with any issues within the machine - "not in front of the children".

This was the unhealthy party culture comrades experienced in the era of Rees, German and Bamberg and which we have begun to correct. But let us not kid ourselves that the SWP is the "finished article" of a revolutionary party - we have a lot of work to do!

What might more democratic centralism look like?

If we want to strengthen democratic centralism in the SWP, one focus needs to be on continuing the change in leadership from being overwhelmingly organisational to being more political - with a greater focus on arguing and explaining (including *using* examples created by a minority) to win more of the party to get involved in implementing decisions.

If less overwhelmed by substituting for the rest of the party the leadership might have more capacity for analysis and theory so that we are better prepared for what is to come. To lead is to foresee. In recent years comrades have identified a number of under-theorised issues (e.g. electoral work, with interesting experiences in many countries as well as the UK) which are either likely to confront us in the next few years or already do.

The key to making such a shift would be to have a significantly enlarged CC mainly composed of comrades who are rooted in various areas of the party's work and whose experience is of making things happen by political persuasion rather than having a party machine to call on. This would force a major change in the role, operation and culture of the CC.

For example, a significantly enlarged CC comprising comrades from across the party, could meet about once a month on a Saturday or Sunday. A minority of these could work full time for the party and form an "org bureau" responsible for day-to-day organisational leadership and accountable to the full CC. All CC members would be responsible for collective political leadership and for fighting to win the whole party to implementing the line.

This would give us a stronger leadership, more rooted in the party and therefore better able to politically win more of the party to implement decisions. It would be more in tune with the democratic centralist principle of political centralisation combined with division of labour in implementation. It would be less reliant on the party apparatus and therefore less prone to defensive or "not in front of the children" attitudes.

A CC of this type could be elected at conference either by electing a larger slate, or, if proposals for individual election have been passed, conference deciding on a CC of that size, then electing individuals to it.

If we adopted this model, I think the new CC should include all the full-time workers on the slate proposed by the outgoing CC in IB2, not only because of their abilities and contribution but also because such continuity would be important in ensuring the move to increase democratic centralism strengthened the party leadership rather than causing major disruption to day-to-day organisation.

As long as the new CC didn't represent a significant shift in political balance, such an approach could also help unite the party after a period of turmoil by addressing the concerns of those comrades who are uneasy with aspects of party culture while continuing the current positive political trajectory that the party is on.

Ian (Manchester)

THERE ARE NO 'RE-ORGANISATIONAL' SOLUTIONS TO POLITICAL PROBLEMS – A REPLY TO PARIS

The description of the lack of 'democratic' life outlined by Paris in his contribution in Bulletin 2 made me wonder if we inhabit the same Party!

Paris declares that in the SWP 'substitution is rife, both politically and organisationally.' He states that 'the membership is passive,' that there is 'disengagement' with the democratic process.

More seriously he alleges that there is a lack of 'critical engagement' from the 'active core of the party' with the central committee due to a concern not to appear 'disloyal.' Apparently our membership figures are dubious and inflated. Many are not real members.

Of course all of the above are real dangers. However, real solutions to the real political problems we face in leading the class struggle, in building Party branches, in strengthening a cadre of revolutionaries embedded in the class, can only be achieved by making a 'concrete analysis of a concrete situation', as Cliff said of Lenin's method in building the Bolshevik Party.

Unfortunately Paris does not put forwards any political perspectives on any concrete political questions: not the fight against fascism, combating oppression, our electoral strategy, nor building in the unions, anti imperialism, women, gay liberation, or any other part of our work. Our Central Committee have produced perspective documents on these questions.

I would welcome critiques of the positions that the CC have outlined from every comrade in the Party.

Indeed, my understanding of 'loyalty' in a revolutionary party is that every 'loyal' member has a duty and an obligation to raise criticism, raise doubts, raise concerns. This is central to the Marxist Tradition. Leninism requires ruthless criticism of every perspective - followed by the single minded adoption of our strategy and tactics once they are agreed.

Let me be concrete.

At last years Party Conference I raised a critique of our electoral strategy outlined by the CC. I proposed that we should adopt a 'class struggle' model, based around the electoral orientation of 'we are the 99%.' The Central Committee reasserted their agreed electoral perspective. But CC comrades afterwards engaged with me in debate asking what did I mean? How could this be done? When it came to the May election I was encouraged, and feedback was welcome

at every stage. I spoke in every Manchester branch with proposals for our election strategy. Every branch took part in the debate. The Manchester Chorlton Branch ran the election campaign. (see the article in Bulletin 3) We achieved a good result after running a 'strong and lively' campaign. 'Substitutionism' did not happen, maximum involvement did.

What attitude should we take to the Alternative Vote referendum held last May? At last year's conference there was no CC line. It was debated openly, and we decided, after discussion, to 'vote no.'

There has been debate about the limitation of only pursuing a 'we are Your Town' strategy of opposing the EDL, and the danger of not also building UAF. The CC explain concretely this question. If Paris or any other comrade disagree, it is their 'duty' to raise disagreements. That is what the three month pre conference period is for.

A passive fictitious membership? The real challenge is not counting and then dismissing our members. It is involving them. The Manchester District had 36 members nominated to attend the SWP conference contending 31 places. It took phone calls, and long face to face discussions to explain to many comrades the importance of this years conference, and why comrades should consider going as a delegate.

Our task is to fight for every member, not 'right members off.' As Cliff used to say 'every member is like gold dust.' He meant they are all very important and valuable. Only by fighting for them all can you win and keep the greatest number to our politics. It is an insult to our registered members to dismiss them.

In workplaces, unions, communities, localities, many registered members who have been 'written off' often carry political arguments, stand up to the boss, oppose racism, and agitate for action. When a big strike or massive demonstration happens, there are always a whole number of comrades who 'resurface.' These members often hold the paper, carry our placards, sell the paper, and identify with the Party.

What about our trades union work? What happened to the 'hot autumn' we predicted and prepared for? It did not materialise. But I would argue that it was absolutely right to put the Party on a footing preparing us all for the serious strike action that could have come. If a major battle is expected, to not prepare comrades for a fight would have been a serious lack of leadership by the CC.

When the expected strikes were abandoned, and undermined by the trades union leaders and those that follow their line, it was CC members who provided a political explanation as to why this had happened. It was CC members who guided comrades in each union, making difficult tactical decisions. This was only possible because there is a dialogue between our trades union members, with CC members and organisers in the industrial department, and within our fractional organisation. Democratic centralism

is a living experience involving face to face discussion. It does not exist on paper.

Building 'Unite the Resistance' when there is no serious trades union resistance is a difficult strategy to pursue. Abstention and critique from the side lines would have been far easier. But if I had wanted to do that then I would have joined a political 'sect' not a combat party like the SWP.

Despite the difficulties, the UtR conference was a big success. In the Manchester District a local UtR group has been established, we took a coach down to the conference, and recruited people to the SWP on the way back. If the whole Party had not been argued with by the CC to build the UtR conference, we would never have known whether that perspective was achievable, nor whether it was the correct line to take. That is the 'centralism' part of the dialectic at the heart of 'democratic centralism.'

There is a material basis for the numerous contributions in IB 1 & 2 that focus on organisational solutions to the political challenges we face: the low level of strikes. While the Tories get away with murdering our welfare state, when the Labourism of the union leaders and many trades union members holds back and undermines the industrial struggle, then the project of looking inwards at the structures of the SWP, of criticising the CC members but not their political strategy, can become an easier, more attractive option.

It is easier to change the Party rule book that it is to change the world. But there are no 're-organisational' solutions to political questions.

I know that Paris is a committed revolutionary. During his time in the Manchester District he was a fearless and dedicated activist. His practice inspired us.

Paris - polemical debate is essential. But it must be built upon concrete questions. Lets join together and engage in the real political struggle. There are no 'resolutionary' shortcuts to developing revolutionary practice.

Mark (Manchester)

DEMOCRACY AND AUTONOMISM

I would like to reply to those articles in IB2 which represent the creeping infection of autonomism in their attack on democratic centralism and the slate system of voting in particular.

Their view of how the slate system works is not one I recognise as being in operation over the last 40 years. For example on page 23 of the print version:

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

This would indeed be an unfair system and would have meant important comrades such as Tony Cliff would have had a virtual veto since it would have been absurd to have had a CC without him.

My understanding is that once someone is nominated for the CC they are bound to stand on any slate that is nominated and to serve on it if elected. They are perfectly free, of course to make their objection to that slate known and urge people not to vote for it.

This in practice was how John Molyneux's nomination to the CC was dealt with. There was not a vote between the CC slate and John as an alternative CC all by himself.

The great advantage of the slate system is that the Party gets exactly the slate that the majority vote for and not the haphazard result of individual voting.

Jeff (Cardiff)

FRUSTRATION, DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM AND THE PARTY

This is quite a frustrating period for revolutionaries. On the one hand, the crisis is producing great anger and bitterness; on the other, nothing like the mass action that is sweeping southern Europe has occurred in Britain, and what mass action does occur (like the strikes against attacks on pensions) seems easily snuffed out by the trade union bureaucracy.

When will British workers catch up with their counterparts in Greece, Spain or Portugal is a question we often face.

The reason for the 'delay' has to do with the way the crisis plays out at different speeds and with varying impacts in different parts of the world system, with different traditions of defeat or victory. In the south of Europe, being tied to the euro has both intensified the effect of the crisis on the mass of the population and provoked a very deep reaction.

In Britain, the attack on living standards has yet to be pushed to the same extreme (though the government is embarking on a much more intensive round of cuts) and workers' confidence is still recovering.

That the 'south' is coming 'north' can be seen in the strike wave that hit Belgium in mid-November. There is every reason to assume that the 'south' will eventually cross the Channel and that mass resistance will grow again. How, of course, the accumulating bitterness and anger will explode cannot be predicted. And it may be that other fights, organised by people less inhibited by the weight of 'official' leadership, provide the trigger – though for resistance to be sustained the entry of the working class into mass struggle will be key.

Revolutionaries can't simply analyse and wait for the struggle to resume. We have to create networks connecting militants, which can be the foundation for future resistance that can resist pressures to call off action when the bureaucracy decides. Getting this right is not easy.

It's clear that the general strike slogan fits with a good many workers who want action and that it's right to call for it. But simply to call for it, hoping that calling long and loud enough will get action from the left trade union bureaucracy, is not sufficient. Hence the importance of the Unite the Resistance initiative. The national conference lived up to its aims and confirmed our analysis of neither depending on, nor attempting to bypass, the best elements in the trade union bureaucracy. But this is only a start. And it's easy to get frustrated and imagine there are 'magic bullet' solutions.

One type of frustration – thinking there are short cuts in the form of Stop the War-type united fronts – can be seen in the way the split from our organisation has developed: a movementism complemented by a theoretical downplaying of the working class and the role of revolutionary organisation.

But frustration at the tempo of class struggle can affect us too – the danger is that we turn in on ourselves and internalise the question of how we implement the perspective. The problem then becomes the sins and failures of the organisation. The leadership is seen by some contributors to IB2 as unpolitical and undemocratic.

One specific charge levelled at them is that the leadership (together with the party apparatus) is unable to win over the membership because it is the most 'disconnected from the day to day arguments in the working class' (Democratic Centralism and Accountability, IB2). But, as the example of UtR shows, this is not true. The conference could not have been built unless a 'disconnected' leadership (disconnected, that is, from the immediacy of the mood of despondency that affected workplaces after the pensions sell out) had not at an earlier stage been able to win our members, many themselves affected by the mood of despondency coming across in the day to day arguments in their workplaces, to an alternative strategy.

The leadership ensured that, through discussion in our trade union fractions,

we held together the minority of the class who wanted to fight. So, despite the retreat, it has been possible to advance the argument for concrete coordinated strike action, including in those unions whose leaders are prepared in general terms to talk about this but not prepared to 'name the day'. The significance of the UtR initiative can only be grasped in this context.

Yet there is no concrete discussion of this area of our work in the generalised accusations about the leadership being out of touch.

Nor is there, amazingly, any mention of what must be counted our greatest triumph this year – the anti-fascist work that culminated in the humiliation of the EDL in Walthamstow.

Of course, what local comrades did was crucial – but could they have achieved what they did without the leadership winning the membership nationally to mobilise behind a strategy that proved successful in beating the fascists (as against other strategies in the movement)? Silence on this avoids having to explain something that doesn't fit the argument about the leadership being remote.

Suspicion of leadership

This distortion by omission points to something more than generalised frustration. It shades into the suspicion of revolutionary leadership as remote and manipulative that is characteristic of movementism.

Taken seriously, this argument about 'disconnection' is an argument against democratic centralism itself. A full-time leadership is by definition 'disconnected' from the workplace. That doesn't make it any the less necessary. Any one comrade's immediate experience will reflect the unevenness of the working class (some workplaces are more militant than others, are better organised than others, are to a greater or lesser extent influenced by radical or reactionary ideas, etc.; we work in different campaigns, with pressure coming from alternative political forces, etc.).

Unless we can generalise from the best experience in ways that take account of the level of consciousness in different sections of the class, the revolutionary party will be a prisoner of immediacy and unable to lead – in other words, unable to propose the strategy and tactics required to take the movement forward. How else do we do that without a full-time, centralised ('disconnected') leadership? Otherwise, leadership is reduced to being a mailbox for communicating ideas and suggestions – the kind of thinking prevalent in movementist milieux.

A similar kind of politics also seems to underlie some of the arguments advanced for changing the way the leadership is elected (specifically the CC). Ruth (whom I quoted above) is not the only one in the IBs advancing a case for change. But her comments are revealing. Let us put to one side some unfortunate formulations used to imply that

the CC is not elected ('unused to being held to account through elections') – it is elected every year at conference – or that imply that the slate method is undemocratic because it supposedly involves 'limiting the number of people who take part in a decision'.

The key objection made to the slate system is that it diminishes accountability – that, in Ruth's words, 'it makes it very difficult to hold any one member of the CC to account.' Election on an individual basis would allow 'members to feel one person should be removed from the CC because they are not the best person for the job, or a new person to be put on, without disagreeing completely with the perspective and general direction of the party.'

Would this be an improvement? I think election on an individual basis, as argued here, would shift the basis of electing the CC from politics to personalities. It would matter less whether you 'completely' agree with the party's perspectives than whether you pick 'the best person for the job'.

Of course, the CC has to divvy up responsibilities. But the idea that we should add or remove people to the CC on a 'job' basis runs the risk of downplaying political cohesion and fragmenting the CC into being a collection of 'experts'. The risk would be of permanent factionalism on an undeclared, unprincipled basis, as different groups canvass for votes for this or that 'best person for the job'.

The logic of this is to move us away from a democratic centralist idea of the party towards a more movementist notion of leadership, one representing a coalition of overlapping interests (the kind of identity politics in which, for example, only women can ultimately speak for women, or only black people can ultimately speak for black people because all white people have 'privilege').

One consequence would be to institutionalise mistrust in the party – something we had a whiff of in last year's debate about how women being under-represented in our publications.

All the best contributions recognised this as a real issue and talked of what the party was doing to overcome the lack of confidence that women have as a result of sexism in capitalist society.

But other contributions implied that the main obstacle was a reluctance by the party itself to acknowledge the issue; lurking here was the assumption that only women in the party could be trusted to put things right.

No party structure should be fetishized. Any party structure is only as good as the purpose it serves, which is to strengthen revolutionary politics as a pole of attraction in the workers' movement and more widely.

The slate system, along with political clarity, has stood us in good stead, in a way that cannot be said of other revolutionary organisations (in the tradition of the Fourth International), which have been tolerant of permanent factionalism and eclecticism in their politics. The key thing should be that

our frustration with the pace of development 'in the outside world' doesn't lead us into a disruptive row over structures and allow a politics we reject formally (that of movementism, identity politics, etc.) to come sneaking in by the back door.

Gareth (Hackney)

BAD LEADERS, BAD MEMBERS? NO, NEITHER

I read the contributions in IB2 by Ruth and Paris with increasing concern. It hardly seems like the party I have been an active member of since the miners' strike. This article will focus on some of the problems in their analysis and proposals. I leave it to others to defend democratic centralism and the slate system in particular.

In defence of the party

First let's put the record straight. When Paris describes the past 20 years of the party as "where political disagreement was dealt with through suppression of ideas and people being shouted down" he is significantly re-writing history.

There have undoubtedly been unpleasant and unjust moments in our history. These should not be excused. But to imply that this is the overriding description of our history is fundamentally mistaken.

Why would so many people have remained in the SWP for decades if our experience was continued harassment and criticism by the CC? How would so many comrades have developed into the capable working class leaders that they are without developing a depth of Marxist politics and independence of thought?

As one who was called a liar from the platform by Lindsey German when I criticised her at her last SWP conference I have nothing to gain by romanticising our history.

However Paris needs to place his comments in the context of his own experience. His first few years in the party were defined by our leadership of the mass movement against the war, heavily (and mistakenly) overplaying the Stop the War Coalition at the price of party building for a significant period, the political disorientation as the anti war movement receded and the fight for a political strategy that followed. These have been exciting but difficult times.

The fight to re-orient the SWP after the StWC receded and Respect split was one which united the majority of the CC with the majority of the membership, both long standing and new members. The CC rec-

ognised the need to lance the boil, and the membership was up for a fight. Hence Pat Stack called that conference the ‘democracy conference’.

For those new to the party I would recommend reading Ian Birchall’s marvellous biography of Tony Cliff, and his previous ‘Smallest Mass Party in the World’, for a better understanding of the changing nature of the SWP and democratic centralism in the context of the changing class struggle.

Would an alternative to the slate system work?

In the same paragraph Paris both says that “Different political tendencies should be represented on the CC” and also condemns the “The monolithic style of leadership advocated and practised by Rees/German”. This is something of a contradiction. If we had a CC with different political tendencies represented then Lindsey, John and Bambery could still be on the CC.

Does he really think that we would be a more coherent, united and effective organisation in this situation? The divisions in the CC would be a permanent feature and the whole party would experience the debilitating effect of this.

My other primary concern with the way in which the arguments against the slate system are put is what is *not* being said. Is this opposition to democratic centralism simply the product of theoretical re-consideration? Clearly not. The comrades are raising their proposals as part of an open criticism of the existing leadership.

It is every comrade’s right, and duty, to criticise the leadership if they think it is failing us. So why not have the courage of their convictions and tell us who they think should be removed, and why? All this proposal does as it stands is foster distrust and disillusion, hardly beneficial to an organisation which can only thrive on open and honest debate.

‘Top down’ leadership?

Ruth argues “there is a danger that our leadership takes a mechanical approach to winning political arguments” and cites Unite the Resistance as an example of this.

According to this approach you would have expected the Unite the Resistance conference to be small, demoralised and full of the usual faces. Instead the conference was over 1,000, the biggest conference anyone on the left has organised for two years. The mood in the conference was also excellent, with a healthy tension between the union leaders present and rank and file activists.

Could this really have been achieved if the industrial office and the CC had been simply giving people instructions?

To deliver a sizeable and dynamic conference SWP members in local areas and workplaces had to be clear and confident,

and this is only achieved through debate and discussion, both locally and with the CC.

At different times I have contact with various members of the CC. They are permanently on the phone or in meetings with comrades or fractions. Does Ruth really think they are simply giving the line, that they don’t want to hear the experiences and opinions of their leading cadre or that those comrades don’t discuss and argue with the leadership? The accusation at the heart of her article is a poor caricature of Leninism.

Revolutionary democracy or bourgeois democracy?

One of the features of both Ruth and Paris’ articles is the effective substitution of elections for democracy.

Of course we want a democratic SWP. But to reduce our view of revolutionary democracy to our electoral system is to view the party as the same as the trade unions, or the Labour Party.

These elections are part of our democracy but by no means the most significant part. Outside of the conference season leadership and democratic debate go on every day across the SWP.

It is a mistake to imply that the CC give instructions, and we simply follow them. Initiative is at the heart of bolshevism, and without it we would be doomed. Debate between the leadership and the membership is a regular feature of our organisation, even if it doesn’t get reported in Party Notes or Socialist Worker.

For four years I ran the Anti Academies Alliance office. The leadership of the AAA was effectively a handful of comrades and non-SWP members.

Far from following the dictat of the CC we were left largely alone, sporadically talking through strategy with Michael from the industrial office.

Last year we made a proposal for an academy head teacher to speak at a fringe meeting at NUT conference. He was opposed to a local free school and we felt he had a useful contribution to make to the debate. Michael disagreed. We refused to accept his arguments. Alasdair wrote a proposal which was discussed at the CC and turned down. I argued furiously with Michael and other CC members. Who was right? On this occasion they were.

The NUT leadership is moving increasingly to an accommodation with the academies. Had the Anti Academies Alliance put an academy head on the platform we would have unwittingly helped this process along.

Instead we put the Downhills parents on the platform and had the biggest fringe meeting by far. Our mistake was that we were focused on the academies and free schools, not the wider debate inside the union. It took comrades who were

removed from the daily academies battle to see this.

Does this sound like the relationship between the leadership and the membership being described by Ruth and Paris? No. Yet it is a typical description of the sort of debate that exists inside the SWP.

‘Disconnected from the day to day arguments in the working class’

While Ruth has a lot to say about the inner life of the SWP national office at no point does she mention the fact that she works there. Yet this knowledge is crucial to understanding her argument. She describes the full time apparatus as “the most disconnected from the day to day arguments in the working class”. So how has it affected her own arguments?

In 1999 Julie Waterson recruited me to work for the party which I did for 8 years. Her first lesson was that the centre is not real life, it is a bubble, it is definitely not a commune. All the usual petty squabbles of office life – who left the kitchen messy, why can’t comrade x use email yet etc are played out alongside the tensions of trying to build a revolutionary party.

Ruth’s analysis of the inner life of the party is clearly set by this experience, but it is the preserve of a tiny minority of the party.

A cry of despair

When I read Ruth and Paris’ contributions it read like a cry of despair. The hopes raised by N30 were dashed and we seem further away from the European model of resistance than we were before. We all feel the frustration. We are all grappling for the key link in the chain to move the situation forward.

In this situation it is perhaps not surprising that some comrades are looking in on the party to solve the problem. ‘if only comrade y wasn’t on the CC’, ‘a federal national committee would make us stronger’ etc.

The search for a healthier, stronger, bigger SWP doesn’t start from our electoral system. It starts from an understanding of the balance of class forces, and our role in this.

I think we should be proud of the role the SWP plays in the class struggle. Yes let’s debate our strengths and weaknesses. But let’s not open ourselves up to an electoral structure that can only leave us permanently divided.

Pete (Birmingham)

A DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

Without doubt political life within the party has improved immeasurably since the Democracy Commission. Yet the processes of self-evaluation and, where necessary, improvement are on-going.

Indeed with increasing levels of struggle and a growing membership, it is vital that we ensure party structures are at their most effective, and that the party retains a democratic culture that fosters discussion and debate. Therefore it is in a spirit of constructive criticism that we offer these five points for consideration in IB3.

(1) We concur with the views of Ian A (IB1) and Ruth (IB2) that it is necessary for the party to re-examine the system by which the Central Committee (CC) is elected.

It is noted that the tradition of the Bolsheviks – the tradition in which we stand – was never wedded to a single method of election for its CC. We would ask that conference consider the relative merits of the alternative slate system as previously outlined during the Democracy Commission. We suggest that this would be a positive advance on the present method of election in two ways:

i) A change to the established slate system would mean that individual members of the CC could be held accountable by the party membership. We reject the notion that the alternative slate system would inhibit the party membership from electing proposed CC members who are hitherto “unheard of”. The outgoing CC should be confident enough in their arguments, and demonstrate enough trust in the membership to elect new comrades to the CC.

ii) We also note that a change in the system of election, in the continued positive changes following the Democracy Commission, can only strengthen the relationship and the bonds of trust between the party leadership and membership.

(2) Without doubt full-time party employees play a central role in the party – from the CC through the party publication’s journalists to the local organisers.

Yet an examination of the organiser role is long overdue. Once again we agree with Ruth (IB2) in the assertion that full-timers be afforded full speaking rights in national party gatherings (conference, party councils, aggregates etc.), and that these contributions need not be subject to party line.

However, this statement is indicative of a deeper problem. At present there is a tendency for full time organisers to operate as conduits (some would say transmission belts) for the view of the CC.

At a time of rising class struggle we would suggest that we require not full time

organisers, but full time activists.

Such a distinction may, at first, seem purely semantic but would in practice represent a profound change.

Full time activists would be accountable to the districts in which they work, and subject to regular review by members in that district. As such they would still be able to convey direction and instruction from the centre but would be ultimately responsible to the membership in their area.

It needs to be stressed that our aim is not to reduce the ability of the party to intervene in struggle, but to place the party’s organisers under the democratic control of a district’s party membership.

(3) At various points over the past few years it has been suggested that the CC could (and at times should) have been held accountable by the National Committee (NC). As non-NC members we are in broad agreement with this analysis but find that it raises a number of questions. Considering that a number of ‘oppositional’ figures have been members of the NC over recent years why has the body failed to hold the CC to account? If we are mistaken and the NC has held the leadership to account, why is it that the party membership is unaware?!

How might we ensure that the NC performs this vital democratic function? Is it possible to ensure that both geographical areas and sections of the working class are represented on the NC? Could NC membership be conferred upon fraction convenors and key united front activists without compromising the democratic nature of the body? Is this already the case?

The fact that ordinary members are unaware of the workings of the NC and its relationship vis-à-vis the CC should, in itself, be cause for concern. A full discussion of the role of the NC should be included in the conference timetable.

Finally we need to ensure that those branches without NC members receive regular reports of NC meetings. At Conference 2010 it was agreed that written reports of NC meetings would be produced and distributed to branches. This has not, to our knowledge, been implemented.

(4) At recent conferences the CC has seemed to voice exasperation at the continued debate over the question of the party’s use of the internet. In all honesty we share the CC’s frustration. Why has it taken so long for the party to formulate a plan for our online work?

Despite the assurances of the CC at the last conference our online work appears to have stalled. We might characterise the leadership’s position on this question as “pessimism of the internet, optimism of the will”. It seems that there still exists a reluctance to embrace the potential of the web, and a hope that procrastination will resolve the issue. The internet is potentially a wonderful resource at our disposal, one we must utilise *alongside* our printed party

publications.

We call for a commission to be established by Conference to produce a coherent model for our online presence. To contribute to this on-going debate we would suggest that:

i) Full time staff be appointed responsible for both the technical and editorial facets of our online work.

ii) Echoing Richard’s point from last year’s debate: we would suggest the integration of the party and the Socialist Worker website. SR and ISJ should maintain independent websites.

iii) That any future website be opened up to the membership. This should not only mean the opportunity to leave messages on individual stories and contribute to specific debates, but also allow party members to submit news, reviews and comment, to be published at the discretion of the online editor.

(5) It is not our intention to raise the specific question of the relationship between Right to Work and Unite the Resistance. Yet it is apparent that there exists some confusion as to how the two united fronts relate to each other.

Such confusion is symptomatic of a deeper issue whereby a given initiative from the centre is more or less presented as a fait accompli to the membership with insufficient room for discussion and debate. Again we find ourselves in broad agreement with Ruth’s contribution in IB2, where it was noted that it is often the case that the CC does not try to win comrades to a particular line.

Obviously as a combat organisation there are occasions when the speed of our response is dictated by objective circumstance.

But – to return to our original example – the fact that confusion has persisted over a key area of our united front work for so long would suggest that our channels of communication are in need of examination.

Our contention is that a closer relationship between the party leadership and membership could only lead to greater clarity – not only on this specific issue but on any new turn in the party’s work. If the decisions taken at the top of the party were relayed through CC members, as well as the pages of the paper or party notes, it would undoubtedly have a beneficial effect.

Of course the commitments and responsibilities of the CC may preclude this from happening everywhere on every occasion. Yet a more personable approach would no doubt prevent the membership from the, ill-defined but nonetheless real, feeling of ‘distance’ from the leadership, as well as allowing the party to re-orient quicker when time is of the essence.

In previous years IB contributors have raised the idea of CC members visiting districts or towns, a practice we understand to have been commonplace in the 1970s. We

re-iterate this call. For leading figures to spend a weekend or a few days in a specific location would help connect all sections of the party, assist in the development of comrades, and afford the CC a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the party as a whole.

Gareth and Joe (Portsmouth)
Dave, Stacey and Paddie (Brighton)

A SHORT NOTE IN DEFENCE OF SLATES

In IB2 Ruth calls for individual elections to the CC. She attacks a slates system for discouraging ‘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 that ‘makes it very difficult to hold any one member of the CC to account’. The implication is that slates are less democratic than elections of individuals.

The revolutionary party tries to lead the working class in its fight to defeat capitalism. That alone brings real democracy. Our internal practices exist to help achieve these ends. So the democratic question of how to choose a CC comes down to how to secure the best central leadership.

The system of alternative slates allows a balanced team with a variety of skills, aptitudes, combination of new and experienced, etc. to be proposed. It is based on forging common political strategy, not selecting personalities. With slates the argument is therefore about faults in political strategy not individuals. If members think a political problem exists, a different slate can and should be proposed to correct these faults.

Electing individuals starts from an entirely different premise, as Ruth’s contribution shows. She focuses on how to challenge ‘just one member’, holding ‘any one member’ to account and so on. Collective leadership and its political strategy fade from this picture. And with individual elections the creation of a CC would be more haphazard, and less likely to produce a coherent political line. That weakens democracy, because it weakens the party’s intervention.

The CC is responsible between conferences and NCs for the SWP’s political strategy. It is therefore a key component of centralism in the democratic centralist formula. That function must be part of any discussion of how it is composed. If we consistently had the wrong line, on, say, the Arab revolutions, the way to correct it would be to propose an alternative collec-

tive leadership. If a particular CC member consistently took the wrong approach on this and the CC did not call them to account, then the CC as a whole would have failed and a challenge to it would be needed. Singling out an individual would not be a solution.

Ruth criticises the previous CC for problems which resulted from internal divisions about policy differences which needed sorting out. Replacing slates with individual elections would not make this less likely, but more likely as it is a recipe for lack of coherent leadership.

A simple way of deciding whether individual elections or slates are best might be to consider the following: in 2011 the SWP was crucial in turning the momentum from the student protest into the 26 March TUC demo and then 30 November’s 2.5m strong strike (though we were unable to push that process further due to the strength of the union bureaucracy). What type of CC will best equip the party to spearhead the fight for the general strike, an assembly of individuals or a collective body?

Donny (Edinburgh)

RECONSTRUCTING THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Democratic centralism is a method of agreeing policies and then carrying them out in a unified manner. There is not a single “democratic centralist” model of organisation, nor is there a particularly “democratic centralist” procedure for electing a central committee—which is fortunate, since the procedure we have used virtually since the founding of the SWP in 1976 has exhausted any usefulness it may once have had.

The problems with the selection, organisation and operation of the CC have been raised by several comrades since the crisis of 2008-9. At the time, some of us argued that the party’s difficulties—above all its apparent inability to grow beyond a certain size—were not simply the result of the politics and personalities of the Rees-German-Bamberg-Nineham faction, but instead had deeper structural roots which allowed this group to dominate the CC and hence, the party, and which, unless consciously dealt with, would survive its departure. Only a very small minority of comrades accepted this analysis at the time.

The setting up of the Democracy Commission and the decisions of the subsequent special conference did lead to number of small but real improvements to the party’s electoral processes, although the most important changes were more intangible,

being mainly in the atmosphere and tone of our internal discussions, which have been largely conducted since 2008 without the disgraceful hectoring and bullying of the pre-2008 period. Welcome too was the inclusion in last year’s CC slate last year of two more non-full-timers onto the CC, bringing the grand total to three.

Nevertheless, if the radical analysis of 2008-9 was correct, as I believe it was, then problems could be expected to recur so long as the party continued to be run in an essentially top-down way.

The CC seems on the one hand to be eternally suspicious of the party membership—hence the recourse to labelling anyone concerned with the issues currently being investigated by the Disputes Committee as a “feminist” or “autonomist”, and on the other hand to be deeply reluctant to politically engage with the party membership—which may explain why it has taken until last week’s Unite the Resistance conference for clarity to emerge about the purpose of that organisation.

The result has been the twin problem of mobilisation without an understood political strategy and—partly as a result of this—of full-timers and a handful of cadres substituting for the majority of members.

We have always refused to follow Orthodox Trotskyist organisations in drawing up programmatic demands, transitional or otherwise. For much of our history this has been a defensible position, allowing the maximum tactical flexibility to respond to changing conditions at short notice without reference to positions which may have been rendered historically irrelevant or counter-productive. In a period of defeat, where the main objective—especially after 1985—was the essentially defensive one of deflecting or minimising the impact of the neoliberal offensive, this type of approach made sense.

But unconstrained manoeuvrability, like all forms of “stick-bending”, has come at a cost. To this day we tend to operate with a set of relatively short-term tactics through which we seek to intervene in the day-to-day life of the movement.

We are endlessly exhorted to build for this-or-that all-important demonstration or event; yet when they fail to occur because the trade union bureaucracy refuses to move, or if they are significantly smaller than we predicted, or if they are successful but nevertheless do not galvanise the labour movement, this has no consequences or implications for our analysis, despite the significance we have previously ascribed to them. We simply move on to building for the next all-important demonstration or event. What is our strategy?

We are told by the CC, as we have been since the onset of the crisis in 2007, that the future is unforeseeable and that consequently—although it is not usually put in these terms—medium- to long-term planning is pointless.

Now, while we obviously cannot predict

outcomes in detail, there are not an *infinite* number of possible outcomes and they all require different responses from the party and the wider movement of which we are a part. Consequently, we need to plan for what we will do in each of these cases, while taking account of our size and the limited if real extent of our influence.

But none of this will be possible while the CC remains as currently constituted. I therefore agree with much of the analysis put forward by Ian in IB1 and by Paris and Ruth in IB2 and will not repeat it here. But the central policy which these comrades argue for—the abolition of the slate system of electing the CC—while absolutely necessary for an effective CC, is still insufficient. At least three other changes would also have to be made.

First, the membership of the CC is absurdly restricted by both occupation and geography. With three exceptions, current members of the CC are all employees of the party and all without exception live in or around London.

The effect of this is to exclude the vast majority of comrades, with all their talents and experience, from even being considered for the CC—unless they are prepared to give up their job and any trade union role (i.e. their actual position in the working class) and move to the capital. The current arrangements may be convenient for holding weekly meetings, but how can they seriously be said to allow the best possible combination of comrades in our main leadership body?

To avoid any doubt: this is not in any sense a criticism of our full-time workers, who perform an absolutely essential and under-appreciated role—it is simply that their experience is not in itself wide enough to inform the decision-making of the CC.

Accordingly, the CC needs to be enlarged and should reflect the range of roles and activities which members perform as trade unionists, community activists, students and intellectuals, and in united fronts and campaigns. Any CC will require the membership of full-timers, not least in the post of National Secretary, but never one which is numerically greater than that of lay membership.

Second, for this expansion and reconstruction of the CC to work, meetings would have to be accessible for members who could potentially live as far away from London as Dundee or Cornwall. In order to make this technically feasible it would mean monthly rather than weekly meetings, which in turn means that these will have to intensely focussed on political rather than organisational issues, and on winning positions with the members by making arguments rather than by issuing orders.

Third, members of the CC must be free to express their views during the pre-conference period, in the same way as other comrades—including other full-timers.¹

At the moment, we have no way of knowing what individual CC members actually think on any issue, since there is never a moment in our internal life when the CC does not present itself to the party wearing the monolithic mask of unity.

What this results in is the CC being, not an body of comrades who are simply first among equals, entrusted with the leadership role by our democratic decision, but one above and apart from the organisation as a whole, the main active element and provider of initiatives. If there are disagreements, or even just differences of emphasis on the CC, we need to know what these are, since this obviously as a bearing on what decisions Conference itself may make.

Finally, this may all seem unfeasibly different from our current practise, but it is unlikely, to say the least, that any model of leadership is going to remain valid for nearly 40 years no matter what the level of economic, social and political change in the world. “We’ve always done it this way” is not an attitude which revolutionaries can afford to adopt.

Neil (Edinburgh)

STATEMENT ON DISPUTES COMMITTEE

In the past year the authors of this statement have been involved in a Disputes Committee (DC) case involving very serious accusations of misconduct. We have serious concerns with how that case was handled and will be appealing the DC decision at conference. We are writing to give comrades advance notice that we will be challenging the DC’s report, asking that conference does not accept it.

Viv and Rita (Hackney), Sadia and Simon (Birmingham), Jen (national member), anonymous member (details with DC)

2009 stated: “If [full-time] comrades feel precipitating debates – or even intervening in debates is inappropriate, or likely to earn them the sack, then our democracy is hindered.

“To take an obvious example, Charlie Kimber was for a number of years a journalist before he was on the CC. Would it have helped or hindered us if Charlie thought something we were doing was profoundly wrong, but didn’t feel free to say so?

“The answer is surely self evident. There could of course be dangers of one set of workers becoming a factional block, but we have normal party rules to deal with factions, or to deal with those who refuse to carry out instructions – apart from those rules such comrades must be free, and perhaps more importantly feel free to speak out as long as they conduct the arguments in the appropriate places.”

UNITE THE RESISTANCE, DEMOCRACY AND THE PARTY: A RESPONSE TO IAN, RUTH AND PARIS

The Unite the Resistance (UtR) conference on the 17th November was a great success. The turnout surpassed most comrades’ expectations.

Over a thousand people attended, the majority, by some margin, were not members of the SWP. The composition of the conference reflected some of the best militants in the working class in Britain today. A glance at the steering committee shows an impressive list of workers who have been engaged in leading significant battles both locally and nationally. The fact we also sold 1200 of the new UtR pamphlet also demonstrates the potential of rooting UtR at a local level.

To ensure that UtR becomes more than simply a series of one off impressive conferences we need to roll it out at a local level. The article in IB2 by Manchester comrades provides a useful model of how this can be done.

However it is clear to do so we need to get more comrades involved in building UtR. In a number of contributions to the pre-conference debate so far, there is a theme that emerges which suggests that the failure to involve wider numbers of party members in building UtR is a result of a lack of democracy in the SWP and a failure of the CC to provide a lead further reflecting a lack of democratic debate and organisation within the party (see Ian IB1 and Ruth and Paris IB2).

Their argument starts with, ‘there is confusion amongst comrades about what UtR is and what it’s for’. This then leads on to arguing that this confusion stems from the lack of democracy inside the SWP and therefore the need to change the democratic structures of the SWP by electing our CC members individually, regular IB bulletins, ‘bending the stick towards more theory’ and giving more democratic rights to full time workers of the party to counter the ‘top down leadership’ within the SWP to make it more responsive to the members needs and wishes.

Although we have some way to go to winning a majority of comrades to building UtR I do not believe, however, it is because of an anti democratic ‘top down leadership’ within the SWP. Indeed what I believe emerges in these articles in the bulletin is not a strategy for raising the level of understanding and engagement of wider layers of the party but instead a very different notion of what revolution-

¹ The Democracy Commission report in IB1 of October

ary democracy is from the one that has informed and shaped the SWP as a democratic centralist organisation.

Despite the assertion that their position is designed to counter bureaucratic tendencies in the party, the model put forward is closer to the social democratic type practiced within the trade unions than those in a revolutionary party based on democratic centralism.

Their articles give a nod to the rising levels of resistance. However I feel that they underestimate and are overly pessimistic about the potential of working class struggle as it stands at the moment. It is this pessimism about the real balance of forces which lends itself to a mistrust of the capacity of the party membership to engage with the struggle. The comments about passivity of party members are given no explanation other than a lack of democracy within the party. This failure to provide any other explanation legitimises a lack of democracy as the cause and new bureaucratic initiatives as the solution. In reality the proposals if implemented would institutionalise passivity within the organisation.

What is UtR?

Perhaps it is best to start with what it is not. It is not another anti-cuts organisation. UtR's exists to try to pull together a network of rank and file activists with sections of the most advanced sections of the trade union bureaucracy to try and maximise the levels of activity against attacks on working class people as a result of "austerity".

It is not a rank and file organisation, as has been noted elsewhere in IB articles. For a genuine rank and file movement to exist, capable of acting independently of the bureaucracy, there needs to be a far greater and more sustained level of struggle allowing such an organisation to emerge.

UtR crystallises all the complexities of the period in relation to the rank and file and the bureaucracy. In a situation where the rank and file do not have the organisation and lack the confidence to act independently of their leaders they look to them to give a lead before the will act. When their leaders do call action they respond magnificently as we saw on the 30th June and November.

This is why, unlike some of the left sects, who believe that we have sold our soul to the devil by working with some sections of the bureaucracy in UtR, we understand that to get more action off the ground which has the potential to lay the basis for real rank and file organisations to emerge, we need to forge a united front where possible with sections of the left bureaucracy.

Of course complex positioning by revolutionaries is needed within this united front to ensure that clear leadership is given to the rank and file element within it especially when the left union leaders vacillate or worse, as the left leaders did over the pensions dispute. Too often this debate is

a sterile one; either we simply denounce the trade union bureaucracy or we simply ignore the fact that certain left trade union leaders are doing absolutely nothing about putting their fiery words into practice. Both are wrong. We need to learn to be with and against the trade union bureaucracy based on a concrete understanding of where the struggle is at any given time.

It is the deed that came first not the word...

There have been calls for day schools for members on trade unions and the history of working class struggle as way of closing the alleged democratic deficit within the party.

Of course day schools on our tradition are a fundamental part of building a confident cadre that can lead within the working class and challenge the leadership of the party. However they are not a panacea to the problems of winning more members to building UtR or indeed being active revolutionaries. The calls for more theory articulated in some of the pre conference bulletins reflect a gradualist approach to leadership and class struggle; first you get everyone in a room to debate and discuss our theory of working class struggle and trade unions. When everyone is clear and has the 'correct' understanding then we go out in the field of struggle to implement this 'correct' understanding.

The problem with this is that it is neither dialectical nor democratic. It is the interaction between the revolutionary and the actual class struggle that develops confident leadership and refreshes revolutionary theory. Revolutionaries learn from the class to the class.

When I look back at the beginning of my learning to be a workplace militant it was not through going to party trade union schools. I do remember when I first joined, as a young catering worker, attending a branch meeting given by Roger Cox on organising in the workplace and picking up some very useful advice that stays with me till this day.

However it was not the starting point for me being able to learn to organise. Trying things out, making mistakes (getting the sack!!) and my experience at trying to organise as a student were key to learning how to organise. Ian who led the magnificent sparks dispute did not have a crash course on revolutionary theory before he was able to build and lead a successful rank and file strike. As the old saying goes there can be no revolutionary theory without revolutionary practice.

Unevenness in the class, unevenness in the party

If there were no unevenness within the working class there would be no need for a revolutionary party. If every worker was a racist or an anti racist there would be a

uniform consciousness across the working class. A revolutionary party, unlike any other party, exists to attempt to overcome the unevenness as a prerequisite to revolution. It does so by locating itself within the most advanced sections of the working class to attempt to provide leadership within it to raise the rest of the working class up to its level.

We do this by being the memory of the class; hence we put on events like Marxism as well as putting forward concrete steps as to how to win particular struggles.

This unevenness does not stop at the gates of the revolutionary party indeed the unevenness exists within it. This is why we need leadership within the party. To overcome the unevenness the leadership within the organisation has to relate to a minority within it initially, to make a particular shift.

Reading Paris, Ian and Ruth's articles there seems little understanding of this. Instead of this approach Ian et al once again propose a gradualist approach whereby through debate and education a majority of members are won to building UtR.

They also seem to suggest that the party has been for at least the last twenty years completely undemocratic and the leadership has 'suppressed debate' within the party. This is a complete travesty of the party and its history. If we were so undemocratic and the leadership so top down we would not have been able to lead so many mass movements and united front's such as the ANL, UAF or StWC which have impacted on the outcome and direction of class struggle in Britain significantly. As someone who has been in the party for over 30 years I can say that this does not match up to my experience or that of the vast majority of party members.

I'm not sure if this is the intention, but Paris appears to ridicule or at least question the method of stick bending by putting the words in inverted commas throughout his article. He wants to 'bend the stick towards more theory' and so on.

Stick bending stems from the unevenness of the class and party and the need to move the party quickly in a certain direction to raise the party up to the level of the most advanced sections of the class. Whenever we make a turn all comrades do not move at once in the same direction. The job of leadership in this situation is to win a minority to create the facts, the evidence of experience of how a particular strategy can give a successful lead within the class. This can then be brought back to the party to generalise those experiences across the whole organisation.

Democracy in a revolutionary party is not simply about fairness, politeness or openness for the sake of these things. Of course all these are important. They are important because it allows the state of the struggle to come into the organisation so that we can assess how we can relate to it. It is in this sense that democracy is a func-

tion of the struggle. We cannot talk about democracy within the revolutionary party without mentioning the other half of what a Leninist organisation is – the centralist part.

Any discussion we have needs to arrive at ways of relating to that mood and how to organise. Centralism is important because of the way the ruling class use the state apparatus in a centralised way to defend their interests and attack those who seek to undermine those interests. We therefore need to act in a centralised manner. When we collectively arrive at a decision we all act upon it even if we individually disagree with the outcome of that collective decision.

Centralism is also important because it is the means by which we generalise the best experiences of one section of the class to another to enable the party to overcome the unevenness within the working class.

Activity is the key to understanding democratic centralism. If you are actively engaged with attempting to build the movement and the party then democracy and centralism is a key to allowing you generalise the best experiences to the less confident sections. But if you're not then it will seem like you are just being barked orders at. Attempting to lead from the position of the passive majority, like every trade union leader does when they want to attempt to isolate the most advanced and militant member of a union, will only lead to further passivity, demoralisation and confusion.

The role of the full time worker in the revolutionary party

This leads me to one of the other demands put forward by Ian, Ruth and Paris; more democratic rights for full time workers. If the party supports their calls to give full time workers the same democratic rights as the unpaid members of the party it will bring about a significant shift of democracy away from the unpaid members to unelected full time workers within the organisation.

Let's be clear what this is not about. It is not about stopping full time workers expressing their views. In fact if through attempting to implement the perspective different experiences are gained then it is crucial that these experiences are fed back to the CC even if they contradict the CC perspective.

However the role of the full time worker is to implement the perspectives passed by conference and implemented on a day to day basis by the elected leadership of the party - the Central Committee.

The problem of granting full time workers the same democratic rights as non paid members of the party is it could lead to unelected full time workers overriding

the democratically made decisions of the members through conference and party councils. They have the time to organise which unpaid members don't. Of course there is nothing wrong with this, in fact that is what they should be doing, if they are carrying out the will of the CC.

But what if they disagree with the decisions on how to implement conference decisions or for that matter with conference decisions themselves and decide to use their privilege position within the party to pursue their own agenda? What we have then is exactly what many of us face; who operate within the trade union movement, a full time machine that uses its position to undermine members' decisions.

The party then as two national leaderships ; one democratically elected by the party conference ie the CC and one that is full time unelected pursuing a different perspective.

The Central Committee and individual elections

It is the CC's job to allocate different jobs on the CC. It is they who have a national overview and are in a position to judge who will be best to do certain jobs. Of course they make mistakes. The CC is the most exposed body in the party.

Whatever success or mistakes are made they are the responsibility of the whole of the CC not just the individual who holds responsibility for that particular job. If SW carried a headline calling for 'all power to the general Council of the TUC' the CC have the power to get rid of that editor and/or the membership have the power to stand against the leadership opposing the direction of the party.

If we go down the road of electing our CC members on an individual basis then not only does it become a 'popularity contest' but also it will break any possibility of the leadership being able to act in a collective way because it will reinforce individual members of the CC to be more responsive to their individual power bases in the party rather than to the collective will of the CC and that of conference decisions.

These proposals need to be defeated. It is true to say, as Ian et al do, that there are no revolutionary principals on a 'true' revolutionary way to elect leadership in a revolutionary party. But we must not see their proposals in abstract from the method in which they are rooted. This method will make the party less able to provide effective leadership within the working class by taking us away from the democratic centralist tradition.

Sean (North London)

DEMOCRACY IN PERSPECTIVE

1. The contributions from Ruth and Paris merit a response because they paint a less than accurate picture of the present state of the party and express either explicitly or implicitly a flawed strategy for growth in the future.

Ironically they concede that we have 'taken significant steps forward' and 'have left the worst elements of bad practice behind', but their overall effect is to paint a picture of a dysfunctional modus operandi that is barely recognisable. Any reasonable assessment of how we have been able to intervene in the numerous political situations locally, nationally and internationally outlined in the perspective documents and articles in the pre-conference discussion would arrive at a different and more favourable conclusion.

2. Before responding to specific criticisms it is relevant to provide some contextualisation for the present period since all our internal procedures should be judged by their efficacy in enabling us to engage in struggle.

The complexities of having to operate in a period in which both major political parties have essentially agreed on the austerity agenda and the union bureaucracy is rowing back from any sustained and co-ordinated resistance is outlined in the Industrial Perspectives document (IB2). One incident struck me as symbolic. Michael Crick (formerly Newsnight political editor now with Channel 4) asked Len McCluskey of Unite why he was applauding Ed Balls at the Labour Party conference when the shadow chancellor had made it clear that Labour would implement the Tory cuts. 'Oh I liked the bit where he talked about the achievements of the Attlee government' was Len's reply.

As Cliff and Gluckstein put it 'if 1945 was the zenith of Labour Party history from 1951 we are on the other side of the mountain.' There is a chasm between McCluskey's verbal support for a fightback up to and including a general strike and his activity in throwing the weight of Unite behind building support for Labour. This contradiction has been at the heart of the demobilisation and the implication in Paris' article that 'the class is in the ascendancy' is a dangerous misreading of the situation.

Operating under these circumstances no wonder we are frustrated, but it's how we respond that counts. Discussion about how we conduct ourselves as a party including our internal procedures and structure has to be judged by how it facilitates our intervention. What is crucial is the we don't respond to our frustrations with the level of struggle by turning in on our selves.

3. When Ruth writes 'we need to have absolute clarity of our perspective all the way through our organisation.....every member needs to be convinced of the correctness of the strategy, and grasp its nuances' I am reminded of Chomsky's 'ideal speaker/hearer in a homogeneous speech community'. No such person exists. It is a theoretical abstraction.

People come into contact with the party from a wide range of political backgrounds, with a variety of political experiences, with varying degrees of understanding of our theoretical tradition and members have fluctuating levels of commitment. They are all welcome and they can all contribute. It's called unevenness. There are no ready-made rounded revolutionaries nor is the process of developing a cadre a linear one.

Comrades learn through involvement but addressing this unevenness requires education and –dare I use the word- leadership. The purpose of our organisational structures is to enable this process. To debate. To convince. To decide. To act. Implicit in both contributions is a different view of the party. Do we want to intervene in struggles as an organisation or simply participate in them as a loose grouping of individuals. The former implies that we seek to shape the direction of the movement, the latter a pick and mix approach with no clear sense of direction.

4. Take the initiative of Unite the Resistance. It is argued that its purpose has not been won in the Party and has been applied less than whole-heartedly. Perhaps it is an assessment like this that caused many of our members to be pleasantly surprised by the size and success of the November 17th conference.

UtR is attempting the difficult task of engaging with those sections of the bureaucracy who may be convinced of the need for a fight and simultaneously pulling together those sections of the rank and file across the unions who as yet do not have the confidence or mechanisms to pursue resistance independently. It certainly hasn't been implemented evenly across the party, but it has already begun to provide us with the means of achieving our objective. It is obviously a work in progress and needs to be developed particularly in the localities. But if we waited until everyone fully grasped every nuance of the model it wouldn't leave the starting blocks.

5. Since I have been involved in helping to organise conference debate for some years it may be useful for me to respond to some of the other specific criticisms in both articles.

The comments about our approach to the internet simply don't bear scrutiny. It is suggested that 'the debates were dismissed and comrades were given the impression that their views were less valid than those of the CC'. The record of the conference decisions (Post Conference Bulletin 2012) sets out clearly support for both the CC document and a motion from members. The CAC even accepted an amendment (subsequently

rejected by conference) from the floor of conference just as the debate was starting.

After the conference the National Secretary used Party Notes to ask for further suggestions and expertise in the implementation of these decisions. Far from stifling debate we sought to encourage it. Even someone with my level of technological ineptitude recognises the importance of social media and the possibilities that the internet provides for organising.

Many of us read the SW on line and some have even argued that the printed version is obsolete. This is a legitimate debate that we will continue to encourage.

But it is a debate and differing viewpoints will be contested as they should be. Point 6 of Ruth's proposals on this issue has already been and will continue to be implemented and it is disingenuous to suggest otherwise.

But it is important to reiterate the fact that the internet is not a substitute for social interaction in debate of the type represented by union meetings, conferences and face to face discussion. Neither does it obviate the need for mass mobilisation and physical confrontation. Tahir Square could be filled with protesters partly by use of social media, but only their collective courage and determination to confront the armed forces of the Mubarak regime could bring about his demise.

6. The debate on the fight for Women's Liberation is also wrongly characterised. Ruth claims that some of those who took part were castigated for being 'soft on feminism'. It's obvious that such an epithet could in certain circumstances be seen as a gratuitous term of abuse, but in the context of a debate on differing analyses of women's oppression it can be seen in a completely different light.

From my own point of view I thought a minority of contributions in that discussion were tending towards the moralistic and if three decades of work in solidarity with the Irish struggle taught me anything it is that guilt is least effective political motivator. Perhaps we should be judged on this issue on how we respond to events that put our commitment to the test. The Assange affair was one such and a signed editorial in the paper made it clear that there can be no trade-off between anti-imperialism and women's oppression and that Galloway's intervention in the debate was fundamentally flawed.

This put us at variance with much of the left but it demonstrated that our analysis integrates the fight against women's oppression with the wider fight for social justice. The criticism of the lack of women contributors to an issue of the ISJ was absolutely valid but the impression that the editorial team were less than exercised about it implicit in some contributions was completely inaccurate and unfair.

7. The arguments about methods of elections are also represented inaccurately, particularly in relation to the way in which the slate system for CC elections has worked

in practice.

If it were the case that proposed members of the CC refused to be part of an alternative slate then accusations of a self-perpetuating leadership would be valid, but we have not operated the slate system in that way. In the example of John M and also in the case of John R, no member of the proposed CC refused to be part of an alternative slate. The latter case was not put to the vote because the alternative slate with John R's inclusion was withdrawn through obvious lack of support, but the argument remains valid. Even when there were major disagreements about the direction of the party no members of the proposed CC refused to stand on an alternative slate. There is of course an argument about how elections should be conducted and as far as I am concerned there is no one method that is infallible. I think the balance we have at present is about right – the NC is elected on the basis of an individual vote, the Party Councils reflect a more regional representation with delegates from branches and the CC is elected by the slate system. What would clearly be a recipe for disarming the party is the suggestion from Paris that 'different political tendencies should be represented on the CC'. The CC needs to provide coherent collective leadership. Of course there will be debate and disagreement, but enshrining an organised opposition within it would render it inoperable.

8. The tone of both articles and their specific proposals are the wrong response to the frustrations of the present period that we all feel. Their proposals offer a re-run of some of decisions we took last year and that is their prerogative.

However, to suggest that we are less than enthusiastic about encouraging debate and ensuring that younger comrades get the opportunity to engage in it could not be further from the truth. During the years I have been involved with the conference arrangements not a single issue has been prevented from being discussed; on the contrary we have always sought to ensure that differing and critical viewpoints were aired and if necessary voted on.

It is true that in the past some comrades may have felt less confident in expressing criticism and sledge hammers may have been used to crack nuts, but during the last three years there has been a palpable shift in the atmosphere in the party.

We have continued to re-assess our internal structures and methods of debate and decision making. No dissenting voices have been marginalised. Look at the record of voting patterns at the last three conferences – a wide range of issues has been closely contested. This way of working is vital if democracy in the party is to flourish. Simultaneously we have to bear in mind that discussion is sterile if it doesn't lead to clarity of action. We need maximum debate and maximum unity in action when debate has been resolved.

Shaun (Thames Valley)

ENDING SUBSTITUTIONISM

One of the main problems facing the SWP in the current period is the tendency towards substitutionism. Cliff recognised the dangers of substitutionism, even within a revolutionary party which holds to the principle of the self-emancipation of the working class.

He quoted Trotsky: "The organisation of the party substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organisation; and finally the "dictator" substitutes himself for the Central Committee." Although Trotsky was arguing against a caricature of the Bolshevik Party, his arguments raised a number of concerns about the dangers of substitutionism.

Substitutionism is less likely to occur in a period of heightened class struggle, when the working class is in the ascendancy. When the workers are participating en masse in the struggle, organising themselves and confronting the boss or the state, the party is less likely to feel the need to substitute its own activity for that of the class. Similarly, the party apparatus is less likely to feel the need to substitute for its membership.

However, in a period of low level of class struggle, it will often become necessary for the party to substitute itself for the self-activity of the working class, in order to keep the struggle going and the movement together. Cliff used the comparison of a failed mass strike: "Imagine a mass strike after a prolonged period the majority of the workers become tired and demoralised, a minority continue to man the picket line, attacked by the boss, and derided and resented by the majority of workers."

Coming out of the defeats of the 1980s, the working class movement in Britain entered a period of unprecedented downturn. The trade union movement was defeated, the rank and file movement smashed, and the left almost entirely broken.

Those that remained, including SWP members, primarily concerned themselves with holding together what remained of the movement in a period of low struggle and few people to relate to. Political forces such as the Communist Party and the Labour left, which used to mobilise thousands, were weakened and virtually disappeared, while the Trotskyite milieu suffered even worse, resulting in disbandment and splits. While the SWP, due to its analysis of downturn, largely weathered the storm better than most, it too was weakened. During this period, an understandable tendency towards substitutionism developed, where the SWP substituted its own resources and activity for the movement and the class.

The advent of mass movements such as the Stop the War Coalition, rather than alleviating this problem, accentuated it as, although millions were mobilised, few organisations on the left, or trade unions, rose to the challenge, and organised forces were few and far between in the anti-war movement. The SWP often provided the organisational backbone.

Although this was a period of genuine movements there was still a huge amount of unevenness. There was no real increase in the number of strikes, or working class organisations, and while many people were active in the anti-war movement, this did not generalise as we could have hoped.

The party therefore developed an analysis which referred to a "political upturn"- that the political struggle, namely the anti-capitalist and anti-war movements, was advancing even though the industrial movement was not. While here is not the place to go into detail as to the validity of this theory, it produced a number of problems.

Movements such as the anti-capitalist and anti-war movements did not, or arguably could not, translate into a regeneration of working class organisations and parties, as, say, a mass strike or rank and file movement.

With the industrial struggle still at a historically low level, the unevenness in the class remained, as did the party's tendency to substitute itself. Substitutionism took a new form. Where previously the party, out of necessity, substituted itself for the class in order to keep what was left of the movement together, during the Stop the War movement, because we theorised a resurgence of struggle, political, and possibly in the future industrial also, we dissolved ourselves almost entirely into the movement.

Our branches were broken up, and all activists were encouraged to go over entirely to the movement. This meant that the mobilisation of a mass movement, led by the SWP, did not translate into the rejuvenation of the party- a rejuvenation which we seriously needed. We recruited massively out of the Stop the War Coalition, but retained very few members, while our structures seriously weakened.

With the creation of Respect, our tendency to substitute went into overdrive. We theorised that disillusion with the Labour Party over the war and neo-liberalism would manifest itself in a left-moving split, and we should relate to that. This split with Labour, when it happened, was small, with only one MP leaving the party. Respect, when it was formed, relied heavily on SWP activists.

The forces of former Labour supporters inside Respect were out-weighted by those of the SWP. With Respect, we see a classic example of substitutionism. We believed, due to the "political upturn", the disillusionment with New Labour over the war, and the size of the anti-war movement, there should be a left-wing split with

Labour, therefore we tried to simulate one, substituting our own activity for that of the rest of the left.

The fact is that, while the Labour Party was weakened by the invasion of Iraq, the low level of industrial struggle meant that the foundations of the Labour Party, the trade union bureaucracy, remained tied to the New Labour project, and took little part in the anti-war struggle.

The rejection of the Left Platform three years ago was an important step in recognising these problems. As well as a "movementism" developing, where we dissolved into the movement and neglected the building of a revolutionary party, our apparatus, as a result, had to substitute itself for the membership. This translated into a top-down style of leadership from the Central Committee and a lack of participation by the membership in party democracy. Although things have moved forward, problems remain.

We are beginning to see a thaw, as the level of struggle has begun to increase in response to the financial crisis and austerity. The response of the trade unions, while marked by the vacillations of the bureaucracy, is still positive.

For the SWP, the key thing for us is to relate to the movement growing around us. Occupy, the student movement, the riots and many similar local actions show the potential for a serious youth fight back. We have seen the evidence for this in Bristol. Ignited by the student movement of 2010-11, a significant youth movement has grown. The Stokes Croft riots, while complex in their background, had a definite anti-capitalist influence. When the EDL marched in Bristol, and recently, when demonstrations were organised in solidarity with Gaza, it was the youth who came out on the streets in large numbers. In some cases influenced by autonomism, the youth movements still contain some brilliant anti-capitalist fighters.

Although we have related to these movements, and recruited out of them, we have failed, in my opinion, to realise our full potential in this regard.

This, I think, is due to a lack of dynamism and a latent conservatism, even sectarianism in some respects, which is a hangover from the period of downturn.

There is an organisational conservatism- a refusal to adapt our habits and structures in order to relate to new people. This seems to be a result of the backlash against "movementism" in which now a rigid, and almost dogmatic insistence in "building the party" through abstract party building, takes precedence to getting active in the movement. Many good members are not only failing to get the support they need in building the movement, but actually find the party is obstructive to their activity, as showing initiative is viewed with suspicion, as a sign of "movementism". We have found this is a common problem in Bristol, with attitudes towards involvement in

the movement sometimes verging on sectarianism. There is also, in my opinion, a continued adherence to a top-down version of Leninism, which again is a legacy of the substitutionism of the downturn period.

As Cliff argued, the party substituting itself for the class necessarily leads to the party apparatus substituting itself for the membership. Firstly, this is because in a low level of struggle, the participation of the membership in activity and decision-making is understandably lowered.

We do not exist in a vacuum, and a low-level of struggle naturally means less people feel galvanised by revolutionary politics. This, however, leads to a more difficult problem.

The apparatus, becoming used to the necessity of substituting itself for the membership can become a potentially conservative bloc. A virtue is made out of a necessity, and the self-organised activity of the membership can become viewed with suspicion.

This can lead to a top-down, anti-democratic view of party structure, which can become extremely damaging, particularly when the movement begins to come out of a downturn.

This becomes a serious problem when relating to the young people who are newly politicised in the current period. There is a strong strain of healthy, if often misdirected, anti-authoritarianism in the youth movement today.

It is healthy because it often constitutes a rejection of social democracy and other forms of state socialism, it is misdirected because this rejection of authority often includes a rejection of all parties and structures.

While we should not compromise our position on the need for a revolutionary party and democracy in the movement, we should, however, be extremely sensitive to these concerns, and aim at the highest levels of democracy possible within our party.

The best recruits we have gained over the past two years in Bristol have not come to us as blank canvases who we can simply “educate” in our tradition. They have come to us with their own theories and ideas, shaped by the dynamic and eclectic nature of the youth movement. We should see this as an opportunity to rejuvenate our organisation with new ideas, rather than as a threat.

The problem is that substitutionism leads to weaker democracy within the organisation. The opening up of party democracy, on the other hand, is an important step, but not the only one, in reversing this tendency. Cliff argued that the “internal regime of the party must be subordinated to the relation between party and class”.

Discussion, therefore, should be open, not just inside the party, but to everyone within the movement. Policies and lines cannot be delivered as a *fait accompli* to the class, we are more likely to make correct

decisions if people who are not in the party are aware of the discussion and contribute to it. I therefore support the democratising measures suggested by Ian in IB1. Direct elections to the Central Committee will facilitate discussion over the composition of the party leadership, which means conference votes will no longer be rubber-stamping exercises.

Internal bulletins before party councils will revitalise that body, which has, at the moment, little value other than a forum where the CC can mobilise the party faithful. Discussions in the paper are extremely important, and, despite a vote at conference demanding them, they have not occurred in any real sense.

The movement and the party are not homogenous, serious discussions about the direction we should take occur every day. This should be reflected in the party press.

However, more importantly, we need to fight for a new culture in our party, where the party apparatus is not allowed to substitute for the party itself. Continued massaging of membership figures and branch numbers must end, and the over-reliance on the central office needs to stop.

This cannot be achieved through a simple reorganisation of our structures. What is required is a complete opening up of our party and its democracy. Our current structures are a legacy of the 1980s, a period of defensive struggles and defeats, and are not suited to the period we are now in.

Tim (Bristol)

CONFERENCE MOTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

I do not think I will be the only one concerned with this issue, and I wish I had more time to expand on some of the points that I raise in this article, but pressures of work and other activities unfortunately do not allow me to do so.

I want to mention some critical observations on the document that was agreed at the Party Council in September regarding the submission of motions to SWP annual Conference.

First: The document was agreed by the delegates at the Party Council after submission to the PC by the Central Committee. This is my first objection to it: in my view, the proper body to decide how SWP annual Conference is organised is SWP annual Conference itself.

That is meant to be the ‘sovereign body’ of the Party, and involves (or cer-

tainly should involve, if it doesn’t) more of a focus on Party debates for members in Branches and Aggregates than does Party Council.

So, proposals on how Conference is structured in future, or on how motions are submitted or to be accepted at Conference should have been debated and voted on at Conference, not a Party Council months in advance of it, attended by fewer delegates than attend Conference, and at such short notice that only the delegates attending Party Council were sent the CC proposals to read before they were adopted.

The proposal itself should have been put forward in pre-Conference IB1, from either the CC or the Conference Arrangements Committee, to be voted on by Conference.

Second: The document adopted at the PC in September is also, in my view, far too dismissive of the procedures developed over decades by union activists and their ‘Standing Orders Committees’ or ‘Conference Arrangements Committees’ to ensure precisely that: there are clear and transparent rules for the submission of motions, including deadlines; that everyone understands the rules; and that there are methods of making sure that those running Conferences stick to those rules. This is democracy and accountability in action.

The statement “we certainly do not need the great swathe of rules that are used for a trade union conference” is difficult for anyone to disagree with.

Who, after all would advocate “great swathes of rules”, especially “bureaucratic” ones? We do, however, need rules about the submission of motions, and they do need to be clear, concise, and fit for purpose. There should be an agreed set of such rules, or ‘Standing Orders’ for how Conference is run, motions and all.

These ‘Standing Orders’ should be agreed by Conference. Then these should be the rules we use, unless Conference decides otherwise.

One example alone will show how we can’t avoid the question of having these rules. The PC document says:

“The commissions process would enable “emergency” matters to be raised.”

Even for this small point to be implemented properly, there needs to be a rule defining what an ‘emergency’ matter is, and what isn’t an emergency. Currently, anything can be submitted in an “alternative Commission”, not just ‘emergency’ issues.

Third: The document states:

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.

If this is the case, then what is the point of convincing the Branch, or fraction, or district to support or submit a motion? If I get elected as a delegate to Conference because I have put forward a certain political position that the members of my Branch think is correct, then I should be going there to argue for that position, not against it.

By submitting a motion to be debated, a Branch is submitting a mandate to debate that motion and for its delegates to argue for it. What would be the point in sending a delegate who was going to argue and vote against the Branch's own motion?

If my Branch submits a motion that we have debated and adopted as a Branch and I go to Conference and vote against it, then I would not expect to be elected as delegate the next time round.

Fourth: Under the Commissions system, a group of comrades can propose an "alternative Commission" to be voted on. Does this group of comrades now have to get their whole Branch, fraction, or district to support the alternative Commission first? Or can any group of like-minded delegates submit an alternative? Do we now have one rule for motions and another for Commissions?

Finally: The document goes on to state:

Sometimes rules can be used to stifle debate. But rules can also facilitate debate and make the process clear and equal for all.

I believe that one consequence of the rules adopted by the PC for Conference 2013 will indeed be to stifle debate, whether this is the intention or not. From now on all motions to Conference "need to 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."

My concern is now that unless a minority opinion in the Party can get a Branch, or fraction, or district, or aggregate, or the National Committee to adopt its position, then that minority will be unable to submit any motions to Conference.

This at a stroke makes a mockery of the current rules on members being able to organise as a faction in the run-up to Conference, in order to try to win Conference to their position.

From now on, a faction of members that remains a minority opinion in the branches will be denied the right to submit a motion to Conference to be debated.

I seriously believe that some impor-

tant debates like those that we have had recently at SWP annual Conference, and which I have been privileged to listen to and witness, simply would not take place in future. The whole Party would be worse off because of this.

These new rules are a retrograde step, in my view, because even though the minority rarely convinces the majority, simply having the debate out in the open allows all members attending Conference to actually hear it, understand the issues, and make their own minds up on them.

Whatever the final outcome or decision on the particular motion, the debate on it is invaluable as a basic method of political education for delegates, and a method of achieving genuine Party unity and maintaining that around a decision once it has been reached.

In particular, recent debates at Conference have been very useful and productive, such as the debates on Party democracy, or the role of women in the Party.

Will we be free to debate such issues to the same open degree that has occurred in recent years, now that all motions submitted have to come from a Branch, fraction, or whole district? I don't think so. Of course, the size of the hurdle to be jumped gets progressively bigger, the larger the Party structure in question is.

We would not even be able to debate a motion submitted by a minority group from our own Central Committee. I did not agree with the motion submitted by Lindsay German and John Rees in 2008/9 that we should cancel Conference and all go on the Stop the War / Gaza march instead. But it was a very valuable debate to be had, as it allowed the Party delegates to hear their arguments and (rightly in my view) decide to reject them.

Of course, members who want to submit a motion on an issue should try to win their Branch, fraction or even district to supporting it, and everyone should be encouraged to do this.

But if members do not manage to convince a majority in any particular Party forum that they are part of, this should not, in my view, prevent a group of comrades of like mind (call them a faction, if we need to give them a label) from submitting a motion to Conference to be debated.

When we debate issues openly, and decide whether to adopt or reject a motion, we all benefit from the process of that debate by sharpening our politics, whether we are on the 'losing' side or not. If we do not allow members with a minority viewpoint to take an issue to their own annual Conference, then we will all be poorer for it.

Simon (Huddersfield)

THE ROLE OF PRE-CONFERENCE DISCUSSION, POLITICS AND INDIVIDUALS

The report back from National Council to our branch in Edinburgh has revealed an issue regarding alleged misconduct by an individual, but also confusion about Party procedures in relation to it.

As a Leninist revolutionary party, the SWP sees its task as changing the world. In the current situation – the worst capitalist crisis since the Wall Street Crash of 1929 – this means discussing issues such as the general strike, relations between rank and file trade unionists and the bureaucracy, anti-fascist work, abortion rights, disabled and student activism and so on. The pre-conference discussion period is one in which all of these can be debated and then resolved at conference, so that we can move forward into 2013 in a united and effective fashion.

Issues regarding alleged misconduct do not operate in the same way for a very simple reason. We all know about the 30 November 2011 pensions' strike – the enthusiastic build-up, the brilliant day itself, and the scandalous sell-out afterwards. Therefore, informed debate about the level of confidence in the class today and what we can do in the future is possible.

Issues of individual conduct are different. Though the revolutionary party expects high standards and comradely conduct from its members matching our grand political ambitions, rumours about individual are no substitute for knowledge. Therefore it is necessary for the facts to be investigated before any meaningful discussion can take place. This is the role of the Disputes Committee, a body elected by the Party, whose majority is comprised of non-CC members and whose task is to look into alleged misconduct and report to SWP conference. Discussion of such matters in advance of that report can only be based on speculation and gossip, and is therefore a distraction from the important political tasks before us.

What does this mean in practice? While pre-conference discussion of the political issues of the day is an important element of democratic centralism and arms us for the future, issues referred to the Disputes Committee need to be dealt with by delegates at Party conference.

Comrades should exercise self-discipline and avoid ill-informed discussions based on rumour (or worse, the sectarian blogs.) Every comrade has to ask her/himself what standard of treatment they would wish to see were an investigation to

take place about their own behaviour if an accusation were to be made. The place for debate and decision on alleged misconduct is therefore at conference, after the Disputes Committee has reported.

It may be the case that an individual is discussed by those outside the party. These may range from people close to us who are interested not only in our general politics but how we conduct ourselves, to members of other left organisations, or even the security services who would like nothing better than to damage the largest revolutionary socialist organisation in the UK.

To those who are close we should argue that to participate in inner-party democratic centralism with all that that involves (both free debate and disciplined action thereafter), they should join us in the struggle for socialism and become SWP members. To those who are further away we should point out that we do not indulge in gossip and rumour but are keen to work with them in united activities through our unions, anti-cuts campaigns and so on.

To those who are sectarians involved in a zero-sum game where they foolishly see our discomfort as some sort of benefit to them, we should say that inner-party SWP issues are none of their business. Finally, to those who are hostile in general we should point out that the problem is their attitude to working class struggle, to the fight against inequality and oppression. When they have changed their views on these, a fruitful discussion of how best to achieve socialism becomes possible.

In the current situation of capitalist crisis, the challenges facing revolutionary socialists in Egypt, Greece, Spain, the UK and elsewhere are enormous. In particular, the gap between our aspirations and reality causes real tension. This is productive if we use the pre-conference period to work out tactics and strategies that take us forward in 2013 and bring the two elements closer together. But this tension can easily lead to losing a sense of perspective in which individual issues (which need to be dealt with) become a distraction and diversion from the major battles we face.

The SWP has a responsibility, both as a leading socialist body within the UK, but also as a leading element of an international tendency, to allow the proper mechanisms of dealing with alleged misconduct to operate as they should, and use its pre-conference discussion period for political debate.

As we go into a fifth year of world crisis, with Gaza, the Arab revolutions, Syrian civil war, Eurozone crisis, falling living standards and a frustrated working class, 2013 will be a very important year. We need to keep a sense of perspective when dealing with our inner-party life and these vital challenges.

Penny and Donny (Edinburgh)

LEARNING FROM GAZA 2009 AND BOLTON 2010

In Britain and Europe the right to assembly and protest is enshrined in the UN Charter and the European Court of Human Rights. Formally, people here do have the 'right to protest.

In practice, this right is attacked through a combination of:

- **Physical repression:** stopping people from reaching protest sites, displaying/using tasers, kettling, patrolling with hungry and angry dogs, injuring and arresting people on protests

- **Ideological and factual distortion:**

- i) presenting the act of protest itself as an intrinsically dangerous and aggressive act;
- ii) creating myths about what has happened (Hillsborough 1989)
- iii) 'racing' the protestors by trying to communicate separately with, for example, anti fascists who are Muslims and antifascists who are not, prior to protests;

- **Setting people up:** as exposed through eg. Orgreave(1984) and Bolton(2010)

In practice, the State is trying to demobilize protest for the future. The current economic crisis and rising austerity have brought about a change in the way in which the ruling class exerts their power over our class. They now have no carrots or even promises of carrots, so they are resorting to more sticks and bigger sticks. Repression is replacing consent.

We have seen the 'Anti Terror Legislation,' which we were told was brought in to repress 'Muslim terrorists,' now used against those protesting against economic and social injustice. Since it went on the statute book, Section 44 of the Terrorism Act has been used to stop and search thousands of people but it has never led to any convictions.

Remember the Gaza protests

The Christmas of 2008-2009 bombing of Gaza by Israel precipitated a march on the Israeli embassy including many young Muslims on their first demonstration. The police ambushed the march, attacked it, raided houses afterwards, charged 65 people with violent disorder. The students criminalised by the Gaza protests also included two first year university students who were each sentenced to 18 months.

Unfortunately the defence campaign involved a very top down approach with little involvement from local STW groups. Nevertheless, the sentences handed down to those involved in the defense campaign were far shorter than for those defendants

whose trials took place before the launch of the campaign. Only 2 out of the 17 people who pled Not Guilty were convicted. Some appeals were also won. Although the comrades involved in the campaign argued otherwise, the politics of the campaign were not generalised.

justice4bolton – fighting racism and fascism is not a crime

When the EDL announced their intention to protest 'against Muslims' in Bolton, Unite Against Fascism mobilized a counter protest. This was a national mobilization for the SWP. At our caucus before the demo we agreed to conduct a very disciplined protest: link arms, no throwing stuff, no spitting at the police, stand your ground. After the Gaza protest we did not want to end up arrested and imprisoned for 'throwing placard sticks'.

A political 'deal' had been drawn up between the Labour Council, the majority of the 'Mosque leaders' and the Police. Their intention was to separate the 'white anti fascist left' from the young Muslims angry at the racism of the EDL. Special measures were taken to keep young Muslims out of Bolton centre. In return the agreement with the police was that 'our young Muslim lads' would not be arrested.

For five hours the Police violently attacked with truncheons and dogs the anti Fascist protesters who were assembled in their 'designated protest' area. They wanted our side to respond with violence, but their attempts to provoke a riot failed. At the end of the day, Muslim youth broke through police lines, united with anti fascists and we marched around the town. We won the day.

The police announced that they had arrested around 70 anti fascists – the overwhelmingly majority of them white. Many arrested faced serious charges and our leading comrades in UAF faced charges of 'conspiracy.' The Manchester UAF Joint Secretary had her home raided without a warrant while she was in police custody. The Police intent was to smash the SWP members in the UAF leadership, to put them in prison, and to shatter any potential for unity between the organized Left and Muslim anti racists.

justice4bolton is the campaign that was launched immediately to ensure that every protester was thoroughly supported. It included:

- The systematic collection of witness statements from people who were at Bolton through creating a UAF email address so that, straight away after Bolton, people could share what had happened to them and what they witnessed with a central information site
- Cross referencing eye witness accounts, and photographic and video evidence
- Securing solid legal representation

- Organising protests outside the court hearings when they took place
- Stimulating positive media coverage about our right to protest
- Launching an assertive, unconditional and unifying political campaign

Almost three years later where are we in justice4bolton?

- The 70 arrested reduced to 5 being charged: the CPS abandoned the vast majority of prosecutions
- Four out of those five charged worked with justice4bolton
- One, with prior convictions, was convicted
- Two were found not guilty in Bolton Magistrates Court
- The last one of the four protestors defended through justice4bolton had the police assault case against him collapse and *two leading TAU officers have now been charged with conspiring to pervert the course of justice. Their trials are due to take place in spring 2013.*
- The police have been told by the CPS that 'no further action' should be taken against our leading comrades who are UAF organisers
- A counter offensive against the violent police conduct has been launched by justice4bolton
- Five civil actions against the police for unlawful arrest and assault etc. have been lodged. These actions are ongoing.

Had we not launched justice4bolton, some of our leading comrades would be in prison serving sentences of up to five years and both the anti fascist and the wider protest movement would have been seriously weakened.

justice4bolton has launched a broad based motion (downloadable at www.justice4bolton.org) that is backed by all three Bolton MPs and embraces students, anti cuts, environmentalist and Gaza protestors, alongside anti fascists. It calls for a People's Enquiry in Bolton and enforceable procedures on how to police protest

Asserting our rights

This contribution is intended to inform comrades about the experiences of comrades in Manchester District who have been involved in campaigns that assert our protest Rights. A number of lessons can be learnt.

Making a stand is essential. When we are clear, unapologetic and assertive we inspire resistance in others.

An open, wide and inclusive campaign is always necessary. Securing serious legal representation can ensure that the people charged - or even convicted - can have their charges dropped or win releases.

As the Gaza and Bolton cases show we must organise from the beginning, before people plead guilty, and defendants must act collectively.

Attempts to divide campaigners must be challenged: whether it is violent campaigners from peaceful protesters, Muslims from whites, students from trade unionists.

Endemic racism and sexism are political facts and therefore all Rights campaigns, including those for students and anti capitalists, must have Muslim, black and women leaders and speakers. Conversely, campaigns set up to defend 'Muslims' should have trades union speakers. In the 1970s the International Socialists took the victorious Pentonville Dockers on a tour. We had Irish speaker Bernadette Devlin MP on the platform.

The Muslim community is being criminalised and comrades need to think through how we can consistently, systematically, effectively and thoroughly cross fertilise between the Muslim - Black - Irish - Jewish - and white working class communities, and thereby avoid mechanical approaches to asserting our Right to Protest.

Rheta, Nahella, Joanna, Ron, Mark (Manchester)

HOW SMALL CHANGES CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO A BRANCH

The saddest thing about long branch meetings is seeing contacts turn up at their first SW meeting and leaving without a single comrade being able to talk to them, or get their contact details. We have made a few changes to what was already a good branch in Edinburgh and the results have been positive.

Moving from a branch which runs on till 9.30pm, to one that finishes the meeting at 9pm or so, can lead to growth, increased accountability and the development of new cadre. It may seem obvious, but comrades who are parents, who have to get up for work early doors (a Scottish expression), who are disabled and who find sitting still for two hours draining/painful/impossible, can all find long meetings difficult. Shortening them is orientating on the working class.

Democracy and accountability

Democracy and accountability is not just about the CC and its relationship with the members. The second half of the branch meeting, after the political lead off, can, with the best will in the world, degenerate

into a long list of exhortations- sometimes by the same poor person. A crisp 7.35pm start and 9pm finish to the meeting allows for a 'third half'. Instead of the energy draining out through comrades' toes while the list is gone through, people spring up at 9pm (no exaggeration) and talk to/recruit new folk, get together to arrange meeting up for sales and other activities they have signed up for.

It means the branch becomes habitable for all, a place to recruit on a regular basis, and it introduces accountability between comrades if someone doesn't actually turn up for something. In Edinburgh, it has meant that all branch meetings have become places we can feel confident that we can bring along our workmates and contacts.

A branch committee

Setting up a branch committee to get through organisational stuff allows the branch to breathe.

The only way we could trim down the branch meeting, was to set up a branch committee. Unlike a trade union branch, which is elected representatives only, we have opened ours out to any branch member who wants to attend/take a lead as well. This has meant that our Monday branch committees last on average 35 minutes, but we agree an agenda for the branch, plus who will chair (different comrade every week), who will lead off on what, encouraging new comrades to speak to agenda items.

(Branch committee notes are emailed to comrades who turn up at branch meetings. No point in burdening other comrades with these minutiae.) The only items for the branch meeting agenda after the political lead off and discussion, are basically what we did last week (and how it went), plus what we are doing in the week to come and why. This doesn't preclude in-depth political discussion and debate on items like Utr etc.

Introduce the concept of job-sharing

This is something that Paul McGarr mentioned in his wonderful booklet on how to build your trade union branch. We have to learn to delegate and job share, to spread the load and develop comrades. In Edinburgh we held elections for the usual posts of SW organiser, branch sec, finance, but introduced two members' secretaries, contacts' organiser who took on the role of emailing people gleaned from sales, demos and members, plus people who have taken on responsibility for branch meetings, educational, social media, the appeal and students.

As a result, more comrades are involved in the nuts and bolts of branch building, comrades who previously spoke rarely

at meetings have now chaired them and gone on to do excellent political lead offs. Because branch committees are open to all members (we hold ours in a central mosque cafe), comrades feel like they can drop in any week. They can also offer their services for bite sized bits of party work, eg Marxism team, or an up-coming public meeting, maybe fitting into their work commitments/energy levels.

These suggestions won't fit every branch. We have the luxury of branch attendances of between 14 and 24 but oh the difference these changes have made to us.

Penny (Edinburgh)

AUSTERITY – WE STILL NEED TO BUILD THE ALTERNATIVE

In last year's Pre-Conference Bulletin No. 3 I had a contribution published under the title, "Austerity – We Need An Alternative!" The central contention of the piece was that, as regards the fight-back against the Con-Dem's disastrous austerity policies, we need two-prongs for an effective response.

Firstly, we need to explain what we are against and how we organise the fight-back. Secondly, we need to explain our alternative to austerity, what we are for, and how we use that in our fight-back. What we are against and what we are for need to be two sides of the same coin – the coin that defeats the government.

This short contribution will focus on the second of these two prongs – "what we are for" – but, before that, a few words of a general nature and a few words on the first prong are appropriate.

On the general front we know that the Coalition is weak and is riven with divisions. At the same time, whilst it is probable that the mood within the working class against austerity has hardened in the past year, only a fool would argue that we are today where we hoped we might be.

The CC in this year's Industrial Perspectives document in IB No. 2 quote Mark Serwotka approvingly as saying, "the working class was in a worse position 18 months on from the demonstration of 26th March 2011."

On the first prong of my argument from last year, the question of consistent opposition, the "what we are against and how we organise to win" then, five years into the economic crisis that is the

central fact of political life, that opposition is still very much a work in progress. The SWP can be proud of the role it has played on both local and national levels in campaigns and in the trade unions but we all know that we are too small to make a decisive impact by ourselves. Reasons for the continuing ability of the Con-Dems to implement their savage attacks have been cited at various times as including the role of the trade union bureaucracy in marching their members to the top of the hill in the pensions campaign and then marching them down again, the lack of strong rank and file organisation in our unions, the craven attitude of the Labour Party and their own commitment to the cuts agenda and the lack of a "left of Labour" political force of sufficient size to influence events. All these are absolutely correct and are indeed major issues that all need addressing.

I believe, however, that there is one more reason why we are not where we need to be. That is the second prong of my argument from last year namely, as well as explaining what we are against we also need to explain what we are for. We need to give confidence to workers that there is something positive worth fighting for and that is what I want to turn to now.

One response relating to my contribution last year was the "Action Plan for our Future" produced by Unite the Resistance (UtR). This was a set of demands outlining our alternatives to unemployment, austerity, privatisation and cuts. In the CC's supplementary Pre-Conference document "Where Next After N30?", produced last year after Pre-Conference Bulletin No. 3, the CC stated, "one of the surprise successes of the Unite the Resistance convention was the Action Plan UtR produced.

We completely sold out of the 4,000 we printed and have subsequently received orders for 1,000 each from the Bakers Union and two Unite branches and 500 from an USDAW region. It is clear activists are looking for a simple alternative to the crisis. We will be producing a further 15,000 and we will try and promote it as widely as possible."

Personally, I was not surprised that something powerful that provided a positive and radical set of demands in opposition to austerity and capitalist crisis could strike a chord with those looking for answers. Unfortunately, I am surprised that in the ensuing twelve months we have not seemingly put much effort into this prong of the fight-back. Taking the arguments for a socialist solution to the crisis head-on with a set of concrete demands is an intensely political course. It is doubly political in that not only does it confront the Con-Dems head-on but it also confronts the Labour Party leadership head-on. It is also a way to seek to drive a wedge between some left-leaning trade union bureaucrats and the Labour

Party.

A new Unite the Resistance pamphlet called, "Trade Unions and the Fight Against Austerity" was launched at the UtR conference on 17th November.

The pamphlet is important because it does actually seek to combine the twin strategies we need to win – those two sides of the same coin. As John McDonnell MP says in his foreword to the pamphlet, "...first that means mobilising to defy the Coalition's imposition of austerity measures and to protect people from this Government's attacks.

But secondly it also means convincing people and giving them confidence that there is an alternative within their grasp." Owen Jones, the author of "Chavs – The Demonisation of the Working Class", writing about the pamphlet says, "as a movement, we desperately need to start fleshing out a coherent alternative to austerity, and building a strategy to mobilise around it. This pamphlet is a crucial contribution to doing just that and will help spur us on not only to debate – but also on to action."

I will criticise the way that the pamphlet "bolts-on" the demands of the Action Plan in little more than a list-like manner. The demands need to be coherently argued for, nonetheless, I applaud the fact that we see their importance.

The pamphlet calls upon trade unions, community organisations, service users and anti-cuts groups to take up the demands in the UtR Action Plan – this seems to me to be a political priority for the SWP. We need to be in the forefront of building the biggest and widest campaign that both fights against the government (and by implication the Labour Party agenda) and for a genuine alternative.

I will leave the last word to the authors of the pamphlet where they are writing about the mass strikes and demonstrations of 2011, "strikers were joined on their picket lines by pensioners, students and community activists. The strike gave a glimpse of what a mass movement against the government's austerity programme could look like – millions of people from every walk of life with trade union power at its heart. If trade unions are to be successful then they will have to build on this model. They must become the guardians of everything that is decent and relevant to working people. And as well as saying what they are against, they must also say what they are for."

John (East Devon, Somerset & Dorset)

THE CASE FOR A FINANCIAL CRISIS UNITED FRONT

In the 1980s, 'objective circumstances' were correctly seen as the primary limit on Party growth. But, as the downturn dragged on, realism segued into pessimism at all levels in the Party. We have emerged from this period amazingly well but not without scars. Recent mistakes (and subsequent departure) by several leading comrades are further symptoms of the downturn inside the Party but are not the cause of our lingering problems.

Compared with the Party's early years, levels of confidence, free-ranging political debate and initiative are relatively low among ordinary members. But neither tinkering with the Party rule-book nor looking to the leadership for all answers will cure this. (See several submissions to Bulletins 1 and 2) If the Party is lacking vitality, we need to recognise this and try to move forward together.

Missing an opportunity?

Anger over banking is massive in the UK and even bigger in USA and the Continent. Banking scandals don't, of course, connect in most people's minds with trade union struggles – and the workplace is rightly central to our overall strategy.

But, the raft of campaigns that has sprung up around financial issues (eg Occupy, UK Uncut, Jubilee Debt Campaign, Positive Money, New Economics Foundation) is a direct challenge to neoliberal economic hegemony, 'We are the 99%', is a class-political slogan. The financial crisis presents us with great opportunities for recruitment and political influence.

The politics of the new breed of financial activists are diverse, to put it politely. This is true of every area of united front work. A degree of political coherence and direction is always necessary to achieve anything at all. The SWP is best placed to provide this.

The Seattle watershed failed to lead to a traditional upturn for us to relate to. Of course, we are not to blame for this. The World Social Forum's almost paranoid ban on hard politics allowed weak reformism and NGOs to dominate. Nevertheless, low-profile involvement by individual members might have allowed us some influence inside the social movements movement (sic). A united front doesn't always mean leading comrades getting elected to top positions.

We can learn a similar lesson from our ignominious eviction from RESPECT. There was no major flaw in the way the Party applied the theory of the united front to RESPECT. One individual made

a mistake (based on good intentions) and Galloway seized the opportunity to ditch us – employing bad behaviour that far exceeded that of any of our comrades.

The only mistake made by the Party, as a party, was ineffective Central Committee involvement in what leading comrades got up to in united fronts – and refusal by several of these to accept the fundamental role of the CC.

Community-based campaigns can feed into workplace politics

The Party is right to view every political issue through workplace-tinted spectacles. But, when this doesn't bear fruit we should remember that all trade union members also live in communities.

Two examples: At the start of the Great Miners' Strike and also the Anti-Poll Tax campaign, we made serious attempts to get trade union solidarity action. When this didn't happen, we switched to working in the Miner's Support Groups and promoting Can't Pay, Won't Pay – earning a lot of respect in both cases.

An adjustment is needed now. We should take the financial crisis more seriously. There is an organic link between debt, economic crisis and austerity. As the cuts bites deeper, community and Internet-based campaigns will naturally find resonance in workplaces.

Oh no, not another united front!

Does the depth of the financial crisis justify the time and effort? Yes! The overwhelming weight of evidence points to a continuance of massive, unpayable, sovereign and bank debt and inflationary bubbles. Total outstanding OTC hedge fund contracts run to many hundreds of trillions of dollars – an indication of the uncertainty and interconnectedness across all tradable assets.

Accompanying the likelihood of low growth in the real economy for the foreseeable future will be the perpetual threat of an ice-age in lending. Average non-financial rates of profit in the system will continue bumping along at historically low levels. Impending rafts of new banking regulation will either have minimal effect, or will precipitate the very lending freeze they are designed to prevent.

A big proportion of the population is filled with silent rage. And/or, filled with disbelief, 'This can't be happening. There must be some explanation I haven't spotted yet.'

Repeated economic, political and military crises will precipitate new class struggles.

This time it really is different. This is not merely a capitalist crisis, nor even just a banking crisis, it is a money crisis.

It is unprecedented and world-wide. Add climate change, resource depletion, environmental degradation, poverty, inequality and burgeoning urban problems to the mix, and the ruling class faces a perfect storm of unknown duration.

Present Party position

Was it finance that caused the crisis? (SW 2 June) is an excellent summary of the 'long-term and complex' causes of the current crisis of capitalism and is representative of Party coverage. But in addition, it seems that the debt problem has acquired a degree of autonomy within the superstructure and that, furthermore, this will continue to fuel the crisis in the real economy for the foreseeable future.

Alex C. and Joseph C. have both made a point of saying, 'This crisis will end at some point.' On the other hand, Istvan Meszaros believes that, 'This is the worst crisis in human history.' Preferable to such stick-bending is, 'This may yet turn out to be the worst crisis in human history.'

We rightly reject the financialisation fallacy. Totally false is the notion that 'financialisation' represents a new, fully autonomous feature of capitalism and that we can somehow return to the 'good old days' of responsible manufacturing capitalism.

Four modest proposals:

1. Set up a group to put together a Party pamphlet on The Economic Aspects of the Capitalist Crisis. This should have the harder political edge of Martin Empson's Marxism and Ecology rather than CaCC's A Million Climate Jobs NOW!
2. Encourage non-working or non-student members to participate in the activities of financial campaigns.
3. Add a section of links to these campaigns on SWP Online
4. The coverage of financial affairs could be upped a bit in our publications.

Conclusion

Grappling with the financial situation is a daunting task that most of the population, including some SWP members, haven't got the time or patience for. There are no experts, certainly not the media hacks. But those within the party who are prepared to take it on should do so in a more integrated way.

We could more openly support the Occupy movement. We could support the demands to abolish fractional reserve banking or end debt slavery, without forgetting the real economy and the real fight-back on the streets and picket lines.

Dermot (Chesterfield)

BRING DOWN THE TORY COALITION GOVERNMENT

There is a spectre haunting Europe again. General strikes, demonstrations, and struggles are intensifying in many countries across Europe. The sharp edge of the assaults by the ruling classes are now first in those nations in the European Union. But the attacks will not end there. More cuts and deeper austerity will come to Britain after the Tory Autumn Budget statement. Anger is rising and the struggle will inevitably increase here in Britain.

Social democracy which has dominated the working class has no real independent strategy in the crisis. They are virtually indistinguishable from the most conservative parties in Europe and in the UK. They are united in demanding that the working class must pay for this crisis.

There is a crisis of leadership. The trade union leaders are dominated by social democratic ideology but are facing relentless pressure everywhere from below. The situation demands from us a greater clarity and sharpness in our politics and political slogans.

Our central slogan and demand should be: 'Bring Down This Tory Coalition Government.' This government has no validity, or any kind on popular mandate. And yet it is launching a devastating attack on our welfare state, and the health service, while pursuing arm sales and military interventions.

In our agitation, intervention, and in our leadership in campaigns, and in the workplace and in the unions, we say we can stop individual cuts, we can have an impact.

However we can not halt the Coalition cuts program without bringing this government down.

We must develop a movement that recognises this basic fact. One that can become strong enough to help bring this about. Our call for strike action, our call for a general strike, must be located in this context. We want a general strike as one tactic, that is part of the overall strategy to bring this Tory Coalition down!

Ron and Mark (Manchester)

ARGUING FOR A GENERAL STRIKE

In March 2011 my UNISON AGM voted unanimously for a general strike against the cuts. Inspired by the student revolt over

fees at home and the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, there was a general mood amongst a significant number of union members that we could take on our own government and win.

The 2011 TUC march, strikes in June, the impressive votes for action in the Autumn, and then the well supported strikes on 30 November saw that hopeful determined mood grow. However, the failure by some union leaders to build on this mood and secure a victory has been a serious setback to the sense of confidence amongst union members, with activists also losing confidence in their leaderships (noting some honourable exceptions to my general point).

This is why there were fewer union members from my workplace on the 20 October TUC demo, and fewer overall.

However, at 200,000 strong the demo did show that there is a sizeable number that want to take on and fight the Government. It would be wrong to draw the conclusion that our side is beaten. It is not.

But given this context we need to be more sophisticated on how we argue for a general strike because the mere call for it in the absence, or imminent future of, large scale industrial action can appear to be too abstract and improbable.

The pensions dispute had a clear focus for the 'trade' dispute that happened on 30 November 2011. The fact that the Government attacked the whole public sector simultaneously made the argument for fighting back together very easy. In fact unity across the unions was often demanded by union members and helped breed confidence in the votes for action.

Today in my workplace there is still a mood against the government, and specifically an anti-Tory mood, but the desire to fight – at the moment – is limited. That could all change if directly attacked again *and* if they could see that their union has a strategy to win.

Given the scale of the crisis and the Tory desire to make us pay means further attacks are inevitable in the future. Who knows if the Tories will take on the whole trade union movement at once again, or if the next industrial battle will involve a number of unions? We could see a number of confrontations over different issues.

Regardless of the form of future battles, the desire by ordinary union members to want to fight together is likely to remain, because instinctively there is an understanding that by striking in our millions our side has a better chance for victory.

In the context of the current level of industrial action we need to try and overcome the loss of confidence and rebuild the level of action that was taking place 2011, before we can make the prospect of a general strike a reality.

Part of overcoming the loss in confidence is show union members that our union leaders have a strategy to win and defeat the government.

That means firstly winning trade union leaders to the idea of developing a strategy of action that will excite union members and breed confidence in a possible victory. Such a strategy could include:

- The commitment to co-ordinate ballots and strike action (regardless of the specific battles)
- The commitment to name a plan of action over time for members to see that it won't be a repeat of the pensions sell out.
- For the commitment to include a whole week of industrial action sector by sector to maximise pressure on the Government for the loss of one day's pay.
- A commitment to call on the TUC to act upon the recent Congress decision for a general strike.

The sharing of such a plan with ordinary union members is vital if we are to generate the confidence and enthusiasm to win the votes for the kind of action that can defeat the misery of austerity, the cuts and the government.

Tony (Black Country)

ON SOCIALIST WORKER

I would like to propose a motion in relation to the party publications -

1. When I first read SW in 1970 every sizable article would draw out the revolutionary implications of the subject matter.

Too many today treat a news item in much the same way that the liberal press might. I think this is limiting.

If anybody new reads the publication they are unlikely to read it cover to cover but just look at selected pieces. We need to show our distinctive revolutionary analysis on every major article written.

2. The level of spelling and punctuation mistakes make for shoddy presentation. Again, going back decades, great effort was made to have a professional finish. I think we need to return to best presentation possible ethos.

3. Letters should either be printed in their entirety or not at all. To have your name clipped to a bastardised version is unfair, confusing and demoralising to the writer.

SW should become increasingly a debating forum within the organisation to trigger reports, good ideas and make increasing numbers of members realise that they can argue in print as well as by mouth. Today's letters section needs tidying to lean in this direction.

Colin (Brighton)

SPORT AND SOCIALIST WORKER

I would like to suggest that Socialist Worker has a regular feature covering sport. I am not suggesting we have tips on which horse is going to win the 2:30 at Ascot or a post mortem of the the latest footie results.

We have a Reviews and Culture page where there is a very good socialist discussion every week of intellectual pursuits: books, theatre, film, museums, TV programs, comedy, art, music, documentaries, photograph gallery's, opera, exhibitions and poetry. Sometimes there is a report on a sporting issue such as Michael Lavallette's on how Rangers Football Club went into administration (June 2012) and there have been articles around the Olympics in 2008 and 2012, but unless there is a strike against JJB sports or a closure of a leisure centre, socialist debate in terms of sport is not that widely covered.

At Marxism this year and last there was one meeting relating to the Olympics otherwise nothing relating to sport.

Yet sport in society is discussed in workplaces up and down the country on a daily basis. It takes up a huge proportion of media time. In many newspapers sport takes up as many as 15 pages of coverage.

On the left generally, what writing there is on sport seems to concentrate on the overtly political in a mechanical way or is almost impenetrably academic. It is though sport is seen as a distraction from the class struggle, a safety valve to relieve the tensions of everyday life - if only people were not spending their time on the terraces they might be seizing state power.

Sport as it exists under capitalism contributes to the way people see the world. Capitalism moulds sport to reflect its values. The Olympics sometimes resembled a gigantic time and motion study. Infinite measurements and stopwatches calculate who could get from here to there in the shortest amount of time and who can lift the most weight. And yet many of the events were thrilling such as the Somali born British athlete, Mo (Mohamed) Farah's winning of the 5,000 and 10,000 metres. There are of course contradictions, whilst being excited by the way he ran I was also minded of the fact that he was an 'ambassador' for BUPA.

Sport under capitalism has become an integral part of the system, economically, with its advertising and sponsorship, sports clothing giants, betting industry and corporate hospitality. Millionaires, banks and economic trusts have taken over the financial side of sporting activity.

Along with this comes the ideological element of sport that helps to bolster

the system. The idea that if you work and train hard enough and compete to your utmost by keeping up your work rate - you can make it. Many of the cyclists in the Olympics described how they trained in a warehouse for years going through the same routines day after day. Other athletes like javelin throwers describe repeating the same motion over and over just like a machine operator. In fact their bodies resemble more and more a machine.

Under capitalism athletes are alienated through this systematic training and competition. Many live compartmentalised existences.

For Marx the way he described recreation was that after a week of drudgery at work doing meaningless boring repetitive work where you were just a hand, leisure time was used to recreate ourselves into whole human beings again - it was literally re-creation.

Many people watch, participate and enjoy sport all over the country. Fun runs are very popular, 8.5% of the population cycles, 22% go walking - the most popular physical activity. (I am thinking of setting up a local walking group: Socialist Walker of course.)

Without appearing to be killjoys or spoilsports, socialist discussion of sport should try to explain the complex and contradictory nature of the politics of sport. There are many issues in sport: sexism, racism, homophobia, disability, drugs, nationalism, pre capitalist sport, alienation, gambling, the leisure industry, match fixing, rip off expensive sweatshop sports clothing, sports architecture, the selling off of playing fields, the closure of swimming pools, competition in sport, the whole issue of boxing and the development of sporting elites rather than sport for all.

Without expecting to achieve the heights of the German Workers Sports Movement which published 60 newspapers in 1928, read by 800,000 readers maybe if we dedicate one column in the reviews and culture section of the paper to sporting issues we could add a socialist perspective on sport to the paper and an antidote to the common view that sport and politics should not mix. Sport and politics are closely linked, so close that maybe we should give it more attention. We need to develop the socialist way of looking at the world in all areas of life.

Bill Shankly manager of Liverpool through the 60's and 70's was remarkable in that he insisted on talking politics in a simple way, even while talking about football: "The socialism I believe in is everyone working for each other, everyone having a share of the rewards. It's the way I see football, the way I see life".

Mark (Liverpool)

SELLING THE PAPER

"Recruitment - a job for all!" means "Selling the paper must become a job for all"

Bulletin number two's article on "Building the Party" by the central committee identified the problem that only a small minority of the party are actively striving to recruit new members to the SWP.

This article will argue that the key link in the chain to change this situation is for every member to be won to selling the paper to one or more non-members on a regular weekly basis, and that the leadership of the party at every level needs to make winning this the priority till it is won. This is *not* an argument that every comrade must be won to doing a public sale (though imagine the weekly impact we would have if 7500 people sold Socialist Worker every week publically in Britain!!). It is an argument that every comrade can and must sell the paper to someone, somewhere - wherever in fact it is easiest for them to do so.

This does not contradict the use of the internet and the web pages. To use the language of business - these are *additional channels* of communication not *alternative channels* to the paper.

If Coventry SWP is typical, we can assume that the majority of party members do *not* sell the paper on a regular basis to one or more non-members. If we have 7,500 members, then if each member bought their own copy of Socialist Worker and then sold two papers regularly, even without the addition of workplace, public and one-off demonstration sales the paper would have a weekly circulation of over 21,000. I'd like to see the circulation figures, but I imagine they are nowhere near that number.

Perhaps we should test this out. Let's ask at every CC meeting, every NC meeting, and at every aggregate "How many comrades sell Socialist Worker every week (or most weeks) to non-members?" I will be very pleasantly surprised if the answer contradicts my previous assumption.

Yet selling the paper is crucial on the following counts:-

1) It is crucial to the development of each comrade. Every time a comrade sells the paper he or she is publicly relating to the class *as a member of the SWP*. It means that comrades have to read the paper in case the non-member wants to engage in discussion about the paper.

It creates the opportunity for the party member to have a political discussion on our terrain, about our politics as they are expressed in Socialist Worker. Comrades can be active in a variety of united fronts, the trade union, anti-cuts campaigns, UTR, UAF, LMHR, and STW without necessarily selling the paper in this united front work.

They can be applying the principles, strategy and tactics of the SWP to this

work. But if they are not selling the paper to anyone whilst doing this work, *then to the outside world their membership of the SWP is incidental to their work in the united front rather than being crucial.*

2) Comrades who regularly sell the paper have the practical weekly experience of non-members being interested in our politics. Comrades who do not do this, do not have this experience. Social being determines consciousness. This is crucial to our understanding of the world (e.g. our analysis of the trade union bureaucracy). *But it applies to us too.* If a comrade goes for months or years without every experiencing selling a Socialist Worker to a non-member i.e. personally experiencing a non-member being interested in our politics, then this will make them less confident in every aspect of our politics but in particular about approaching people to join the party.

3) It gives the member more ownership of the paper, because to the non-member who buys it the member selling it is responsible for its contents. So comrades develop an incentive to input into the paper. This will make our paper even better.

4) It creates the scaffolding around which the party will be built. Cliff's Lenin is quite clear – the Bolsheviks grew in direct correlation to the growth of their paper sales. In other words, today's buyer is tomorrow's member. The fewer buyers we have today the smaller tomorrow's party will be.

5) Expanding the readership of the paper is a worthwhile task in itself. Comrades underestimate the impact of the paper. Not only does it present a Marxist analysis of facts available in the bourgeois media elsewhere, but it also presents *a different set of facts.*

For example if opportunities are lost to take example of rank and file militancy in a dispute, it is only in our paper that non-members will read this. But these facts can be crucial to understanding whether victory was possible or not. And this understanding can and will affect the morale and subsequent activities of the reader of the paper.

Cliff argued that every member could sell to someone. To his own rhetorical question of "I don't know anyone to sell to?", he would answer "What? You have no friends, no family, no neighbours, no fellow hobby enthusiasts, and no work-mates?"

To which I would add, Do we have no contacts that need visiting who want the paper, can we not organise a sale down a comrade's street to obtain some paper sales close to their house, is there no workplace you can sell at?

In other words, there must be somewhere where everyone can feel more confident at selling the paper. The leadership's task is to support comrades in becoming confident in selling the paper and help each individual member work out where best they can sell to gain that confidence. (And selling the paper to a contact is selling the paper!)

In praise of public sales

The previous text is stressing that we need to get every comrade selling the paper wherever it is easiest for them to do this. But I want to add a point in praise of public sales.

I joined the party in 1974. My mates and I grabbed leaflets from IS members leafleting Elland Road (Leeds, Leeds, Leeds) and attended the advertised public meeting in the Peel Hotel in Leeds. The following week we attended Dewsbury IS' branch meeting. The following Saturday we were on our first public sale. Not several weeks later, the following Saturday!! I sold the paper with two excellent comrades from the factory branch at Woodheads – Peter and Gordon. In fact the heart and soul of the Dewsbury geographical IS branch was three comrades from the Woodheads factory branch – Peter, Gordon and Colin. These three comrades had all unionised the factory and built a revolutionary socialist presence in the plant, but all three took building the geographical branch seriously. Not a hint of "We're trade union specialists no public sales for us". All comrades sold the paper. We need to win this attitude back into the party.

In addition:-

- The public sale is great! What can be better than having a conversation with an until then perfect stranger about our politics? Miles better than the "they've screwed up my overtime" type of conversations at work that I get as a union rep.
- The public sale is probably one of the few activities you do with comrades. At work I'm on my own as a party member. On the sale, I'm with my comrades.
- And after the public sale, we go for a coffee and we have an informal almost branch meeting where we chat over politics and whatever issue we feel like. This in itself almost makes the sale worthwhile.

How to win it

I was one of two delegates from Coventry SWP when Cliff argued the downturn. We went to the conference in opposition to that analysis. Cliff's speech was brilliant. We were persuaded. Cliff then argued the following "First he had to win the CC, then the national committee, then the conference delegates—now the task was to win all the members of the party to the perspective."

To win the members to the downturn analysis meant going round and individually listening and debating with every member of the branch. This is what the leadership must do now with this issue. The CC must pick this up and place it to the centrality of their perspective.

And each branch leadership must with emotional intelligence find a way to help each unconfident member become confident at selling the paper.

Richard (Coventry)

A CLARIFICATION ON RIGHT TO WORK AND UNITE THE RESISTANCE

There appears to have been some confusion in the party as to the changing position of the Right to Work campaign within the party's overall strategy.

This IB contribution is an attempt to clarify the role of Right to Work in relation to the Unite the Resistance initiative.

Since it's resurrection several years ago Right to Work has been through a number of different phases of activity. The roots of the current confusion lie in a significant shift from Right to Work being a more general anti-cuts organisation to a more focused campaign around the issue of unemployment and attacks on benefit claimants.

During it's life as an anti-cuts organisation several areas were able to set up local Right to Work anti-cuts groups which involved links with local trade unionists and others.

While this fitted during a period dominated by anti-cuts activity the locus of resistance has shifted firmly to the workplace following the strike of 2.5million on November 30 2011.

After the union bureaucrats closed down the struggle over pensions the party is now trying to establish networks of trade-unionists that can push forward the fight for a serious industrial response to austerity through Unite the Resistance. It is no longer the role of Right to Work to be the link between party branches and a wider layer of workers.

This does not mean that Right to Work no longer has a useful purpose. In the past year demonstrations over rising youth-unemployment and particularly against the government's workfare schemes have seen Right to Work and the SWP gain extensive media exposure and a platform from which to challenge the Tories' ideology of 'the undeserving poor', welfare cuts and their failed austerity agenda.

When George Osborne spoke about the 'unfairness of the shift-worker looking up at the closed curtains of the benefit claimant' at the Tory party conference it was a conscious attempt to scapegoat unemployed workers for the crisis.

It is important that we do not allow this argument—which is poison to the working class movement—to go unchallenged. We need to remind people in our workplaces that when workers go on strike we see unemployed people on the picket lines while the Tories vilify the strikers in the national press.

This can be achieved by inviting a Right to Work speaker to address your trade

union branch, selling copies of the new Right to Work pamphlet, raising a motion over workfare schemes to create a discussion or simply by talking about it with colleagues on a tea break.

In addition to this ideological role Right to Work—as it now operates—provides those comrades who are themselves trapped in unemployment the means to organise other claimants at their jobcentres or at Work Programme offices. While organising the unemployed should not be a primary aim of party branches—which urgently need to focus their energies on deepening our roots in key workplaces—it is possible for this work to be part of the routine of those who are forced to attend benefits offices.

Where comrades have organised around unemployment in the past year we have been able to draw a periphery of unemployed people who are questioning the priorities of a system which subjects them to the humiliation of proving they are looking for jobs when there is not enough work available in order to justify meagre benefits.

By encouraging attendance at our branch meetings and selling and discussing Socialist Worker with them we have been able to recruit to the party.

Finally unemployed comrades have been able to intervene in Unite's community membership initiative. While this is somewhat of a work in progress we have already seen some small demonstrations called under the Unite community banner and been able to widen our contacts both with other community members and with working Unite members through attendance at Area Activist Committees.

Mark (South East London)

BRANCH MEETINGS: 'ORGANISING CENTRES FOR THE FIGHTBACK'?

The CC's contribution to IB 2 under the heading 'Building the Party' makes good points about recruitment, retention and branch meetings. The latter's role in the other two needs to be emphasised. While it's true that good people join on demonstrations, and individual comrades can, and do, recruit, good branch meetings are essential to the party's credibility as an organised force on the ground.

(Bearing in mind the discussions about party democracy that have appeared in the IBs, it's also worth noting that lively, well-attended branch meetings are also vital to

the effective functioning of democratic centralism.)

In Brighton we have strived to bring together ideas and action in our weekly meetings and believe, for the most part, we get it right. There's another important factor, though – attendance of comrades. Over the last few years we've made great progress, going from a handful of people to 15 or 20 on a regular basis. We used to worry that we weren't getting women at the meetings at all. A few weeks ago women outnumbered men by more than two-to-one.

But although we're far from reaching a crisis point, consistency of attendance has noticeably fallen off over the last six months. We still get the odd well-attended meeting, especially when we get the title right (the talk on 50 Shades of Grey was the prime example). But for the first time in a couple of years we've dropped as low as six people in branch meetings, and at our last public meeting only five comrades attended, just about outnumbering non-members (counting someone who rejoined on the night).

Most comrades who are active in their union and/or campaigns will get to a branch meeting at some point, but there is a feeling that the SWP branch has slipped down the list of priorities for a lot of people. Meetings are certainly not seen by many as "organising centres for the fightback", the place where you come to discuss how best to orchestrate the fightback or relate to other organisations, individuals and campaigns.

This makes it hard to organise activity. There are seldom enough of the right people in the room. But it also damages our ability to recruit and retain.

If a non-member turns up at a poorly attended branch (or public) meeting it's not going to help persuade them that we are the organisation to join, even if they agree with us. And if that person who joins on the demo comes along, they're going to wonder whether they've made the right decision. More insidious is the feeling among members (and this we have experienced in the past) that perhaps they shouldn't invite a contact along for fear of embarrassment.

We're not at that low point yet. But somehow we have to encourage more comrades to feel that branch meetings are the places where they can debate the big ideas, discuss what's happening in their workplace and in their community and most of all organise action. If they have a busy political agenda, it's the branch meeting that should be among their priorities, as the place that can bring it all together and give them focus.

This will help recruit people and integrate new members – and get them into the habit of thinking of themselves as part of an organisation.

There is, perhaps, a practical measure that can reinforce this. We used to issue membership cards. They weren't only a subs collection card. In them they said that "Members of the SWP are expected to sell Socialist Worker". The idea was not simply to sell more papers, but by selling the paper

a member was implicitly agreeing with the ideas in the paper and explicitly acting as a member of the party.

Members were also explicitly expected to be an active member of their trade union, where appropriate.

Although we don't want to get into making a long list of demands, and we should certainly be sympathetic to comrades' actual circumstances and their ability to meet these expectations, by making their obligations a little clearer we might get a little nearer to building a party that's better organised, better rooted in localities and better able to lead an effective fightback.

Phil & Steve (Brighton)

SOME POINTS ON THEORY AND OUR PARTY

The depth and breadth of ideological radicalisation that a number of comrades have written about poses a number of challenges that we ought to address. This radicalisation is evident in the size of SWSS meetings around the country, the popularity of events such as our own Marxism in Scotland and the annual Historical Materialism (HM) conference, which had over 100 bookings more than last year and was notably younger, and more receptive to the participation of organised socialists.

It is our responsibility to both respond and relate to this ideological radicalisation and also to attempt to find ways to translate it into greater political mobilisation and activism. We need to be capable of taking on ideological debates within the party and outside of it. We need to demonstrate our ability to engage seriously with the ideas thrown up by this radicalisation, and make clear the distinct contribution that our tradition can make to them. The following is an incomplete list of things we might do to help this:

1. We should continue the good work which has been done on developing new writers for our publications. We are still reliant on a relatively small number individuals, mostly focused on academia, who write regularly on these sort of questions. After a great deal of discussion over the past couple of years some important steps forward have been taken to remedy this. Noticeably, the most recent issue of International Socialism contains contributions from a number of new writers, a number of women comrades, and some non-members, as well as a breadth of articles across different areas of interest. We should strive to ensure this is the rule rather than the exception.

2. The nature of the current period means we have a relatively large number of post-graduate students active in the party (this is reflected in the debates about organising PhD students highlighted by Dominic and Amy in IB1).

The level of youth unemployment means that attempting to stay in education looks like an increasingly viable option for people, and our own members are no exception to this. These comrades are often engaging in quite high level theory, alongside, in most cases, political activity within the student and wider austerity movements. Largely, however, they discuss and develop this theory in isolation from debates within the organisation. This is a problem, since it risks developing a kind of intellectual division of labour. There is a responsibility on comrades to write for our publications and bring these debates into the party.

If, for example, you think that Poulantzas or Althusser, or Adorno or whoever, is vital to understanding the crisis or to developing our strategy, write something, explain why!

3. However, the onus cannot just be on these comrades. Rather, this also requires something of a shift in the culture of the party. Many comrades report a fear of writing about areas of theory for fear of inadvertently arguing something against our 'line' or 'tradition'.

For what it's worth, I think that this is a problem which exists largely in the minds of individuals rather than in reality. My own experiences of writing for the journal do not match this. However, the fact that this perception exists means it is something which must be addressed. There is a risk of this leading to a self-perpetuating cynicism in which the party's own publications are seen as boring and pedestrian compared to the exciting debates elsewhere, which in turn leads comrades not to contribute to them.

4. This is not to say that the party's publications should become more academic. The publications should remain ones that are accessible to all of our members, and to those close to the party. We should reject the idea that to write about thinkers whose own arguments are rarefied and inaccessible involves doing so yourself.

We have had and continue to have many people in the party who stand as living proof that this is false. You only need to compare recent books by Alex Callinicos or Paul Blackledge to equivalent books by academic publishers to see that.

5. Finally, it is not adequate, in the face of new debates, to say 'we dealt with that in the 80s'. Of course arguments recur, reach similar conclusions and come in and out of fashion. We have a rich tradition to draw on, and to which we can and should return again and again to offer us guidance in understanding the world we face.

Yet we must also not allow ourselves the arrogance of believing that we resolved

every question some time in the past. Whilst we stand on the shoulders of giants, it remains the case that tradition *can* weigh like a nightmare on the minds of the living. Indeed, when reflecting on our tradition (just within the SWP, let alone the entire history of organised Marxism), it is worth remembering how some of our most significant ideas were heterodox positions, clarified through debate and disagreement, often against an orthodoxy.

These points amount to a call to up our game in theoretical work. To expand the pool of people actively taking on theoretical debates, and therefore to expand the pool of people able to take on such debate. This requires hard work, but is essential if we are to adequately relate to the radicalising world around us.

Dan (Norwich & East Anglia and National Committee)

ON STUDENT CADRE

Some problems that occur in student groups

The economic crisis and the widespread attacks on education that this produced led to a huge and sudden upturn in student struggle, starting with the siege of Millbank in November 2010. This led to the radicalisation of a whole new layer of students and a reinvigoration of the student movement in general and SWSS in particular. As a result, new SWSS groups started up, and existing ones saw the influx of large numbers of new members.

At the party conference two months later, comrades emphasised the importance of building the party out of this and the need to ensure that new members were retained and developed in the organisation. I want to talk about two specific problems that have arisen in how we relate to student members, and suggest some possible solutions to those problems. I want to relate these problems to my experience at UEL, but my understanding is that similar problems have occurred elsewhere.

Relationship between new and existing SWSS members

At UEL, building a serious SWSS group has meant needing to quickly catch up to the level of political pressure on campus in a context of a lack of a political culture and no built up tradition of organised student resistance in the past years. UEL is going through an unprecedented level of attacks upon the university, with 300 staff made redundant,

services being privatised, module closures and attacks on students.

We had to quickly establish a core for the SWSS group to expand on, and from there we had to build a periphery, recruit & cadre those recruits.

Some level of what may be described as substitutionism was necessary. To not force through a strategy may have meant that our political responses to management and the engagement with union activity on campus may have ended up in an un-ideal situation – with local unions going into strike action without a student mobilisation organised by SWSS/EAN. But it should have been the case that the substitutionism was identified as a method to comrades in the group and that at some point the problems associated with substitutionism would hold the group back.

The core of a SWSS group needs to avoid substitutionism at the point where recruitment from the periphery increases to an extent where it no longer becomes necessary. It is during these intense periods that developing new members becomes possible, and we should therefore be encouraging them to take on new roles and responsibilities. This was not the case at UEL, with the core continuing to take on all of the activity in the group, rather than attempting to draw in and develop new members.

Implications of this are a generalised stagnation in comrades' political development, combined with either poor or non-existent attempts to tie them into the national structure of the organisation. As a result, the new members drop out of activity.

It is a trap to fall into a case where leading comrades isolate themselves and galvanise away from new members who are overlooked when it comes to organisational detail, strategy, tactics and decisions. A group may have grown dramatically or slowly, but it is important to remain progressively critical of the way the core of the SWSS group operates and how it engages with the wider layers of comrades.

The comrades in leading roles need to expand the level and channels of communicating. Organising meetings and committees, as well as general political conversations need to include wider layers of members.

Leading comrades should also be thinking about the way they intervene in meetings. Discussion and critical thought should be a priority and more experienced comrades should avoid overzealous contributions and aggressive interventions that can intimidate new and less confident members.

The dogmatic approach to mobilise comrades to carry out activity, based on rhetoric and dogmas on the line of revolution being 'around the corner', has detrimental effects on the perspectives. The rhetoric used replaces concrete political and ideological development and discussion. It aims to compel others into activity based on dogmas which wear off overtime, rather than

on a sound understanding of revolutionary politics.

Comrades should be asking new members to introduce caucuses or meetings, those who would not normally speak by choice, but also helping them if needed.

This should be extended to open discussions about SW, SR and ISJ Articles. It not only fulfils the mechanic demand on comrades to read our publications, but allows a follow-up with direct discussion, greatly improving development of all comrades.

At UEL, without breaking out of the insular, cliquish nature of the SWSS group that had developed. The SWSS group would not have grown.

Relationship between the apparatus and SWSS members

There are two issues that I want to raise with the way in which the apparatus of the party relates to SWSS members. The first concerns the relationship between the student office and SWSS groups, and the other relates to the role of organisers.

Regarding the student office, there can be a tendency to keep in contact with only one or two people within any SWSS branch. At UEL for example, two people in particular appear to be seen as 'points of contact' by the student office, while others have had no interaction with the student office at all. This has created difficulties for those comrades and for other comrades in the group, and has put strain on the relationships between them.

The 'contact' is put in a precarious position with regard to democracy within the SWSS group. They are not elected to a position in the branch, but find themselves in one. They can effectively become an organiser within the branch and end up carrying the responsibility of a full time party worker.

They are expected to relay the centre's position and execute a to-do list, as opposed to working out with the group how the centre's position can be applied to the situation on the ground. They also end up becoming overburdened with work.

The situation also impacts on other comrades in various ways. In some cases, comrades have little or no relationship with the national organisation. Because of the nature of student politics there are always new people stepping into leadership roles in campaigns and struggles, but the student office fails to effectively relate and respond to new recruits.

Most importantly the SWSS group tends to end up having an agenda dictated from the centre. Of course, the national perspective is important, but comrades also need to be allowed to develop this perspective based on the situation on the ground as democratic centralism would require.

The role of the organiser

The role of a full-time organiser is an ideological one, and involves winning people to the party's national strategy and ensuring that it is carried out at a local level.

But it is also important that this is a two-way street, and that the organiser listens to the perspectives of comrades on how the strategy can have the best impact. Attempting to impose the strategy before it has been discussed is problematic, in that comrades may not understand the importance of the strategy or be won to it, and key aspects of the local situation may be overlooked.

At UEL, for example, a restrictive attendance policy has been introduced which has rightly angered a large number of students. I understood the level of anger that this had created, and argued for a campaign around it, and this had some support among other comrades. Admittedly, this was raised outside of a caucus, but the inflexibility of the organiser around the national perspective, and the lack of dynamism around adapting to the changing situation, meant that the issue was not taken seriously. As a result, our political competitors were able to capitalise on the anger on campus, leaving us on the side-lines.

This is just one example, but could have been easily avoided. Agendas for meetings and caucuses need to include the national perspective, but student members must be allowed and encouraged to add items. Leading comrades and organisers should not rule over these channels of developing a political understanding of the current situation.

Moving forward

These shortcomings in student organising could be addressed by learning from town branches, which tend to be a more democratic environment. There are some important ways in which the town/district organisation is run differently to SWSS:

- 1) At a town or district level, where there is an organiser, they are clearly visible and defined as such.
- 2) The organiser and CC members need to relate to town branches / districts on a collective basis as opposed to individually as appears to be the case in student work.
- 3) Consequently, the centre position is clearly identified as such. The collective debate creates space for constructive feedback, suggestions and criticism if necessary.
- 4) More responsibilities are delegated and space is given for comrades to develop collectively.

The recent rise in student struggle and the growth of the audience for revolutionary politics is incredibly exciting, and shows the potential for our party. The problems I have described above are good problems to have, in that they would not exist in small SWSS groups, or if the level of class struggle was not as high as in the

current period.

Despite this, we should take these problems seriously, if we are to ensure that the new members we are recruiting in this period are to become leaders in class struggle.

Arnie (UEL SWSS & West London), Jonas (UEL SWSS & East London), Dexter (Longley Park Sixth Form & Sheffield) and Matthew (UWE SWSS & Bristol)

THE CREDIT CRUNCH GENERATION

Paul: There was a time when there was a layer of working class people who had escaped higher education, but who learned their politics through struggle. In the past such people populated the Labour party branches, the Communist Party and the trade unions, and some of them found their way into the SWP; but today, they are a much rarer breed.

Hornsey and Wood Green Branch has been transformed since March 2012 by a group of new members who have taken over the local leadership, and whose activities have brought in other active people around them.

We have not seen new members at this level before. The three members who initiated this process are working class and self-educated; and artists: two musicians and a film maker. Kyri left school at 13, but it doesn't seem to have done him much harm. The new members are inspiring to work with. Being self-educated has brought them great confidence, and tremendous learning skills.

Phil: I joined the SWP after making an extensive study of Marxist thought. I had not been in a trade union, or engaged in political life, and was politically passive. But I was not apathetic.

We are the credit crunch generation. We started out with the "freeman" movement, finding out how to deal with credit card and parking tickets, by using our civil rights under the Common Law. We are self-taught as musicians, so we read the legislation. I never had a book on my bookshelves two years ago, but we bought Black's Law Dictionary in December 2010 for £70. We learned the meaning of legal words, and learned about the law of contract.

I did my reading in Cyprus. I asked my grandmother to bring me books from England: Maxim Gorky, and John Berger's 'Ways of Seeing'. Those writers had a different philosophy, but what was it exactly? I was reading Gorky one day, and suddenly

realised, ‘this is propaganda!’

Cyprus never had a bourgeois revolution, and right-wing Greek Cypriot nationalism was rampant. Simon read Gorky’s ‘My Apprenticeships’, and he said, ‘your relationship with your grandmother is in this book’.

I said to Kyri and Simon, you have always been disobedient, but why? Just as the Bishop said to the young Maxim Gorky, “It is not because you find learning dull that you are naughty. You have another reason for being naughty”.

We are self-educated in philosophy and economics. Not so much in politics, but we are learning that now. I read Michael Barrett Brown, Ernest Mandel, Lenin, Kautsky, R.D. Laing, and Marx and Engels, using the www.marxists website which chronologically explains the Marxist tradition (including disagreements and dead ends), with a timeline. I read articles, and then followed up references to the other Marxist writers on the site.

In Cyprus, we decided that we would start a class when we came back to England, in October 2011. That didn’t work out, because it was going to be with our friends, who were all lumpen. But we wanted to organise, and we were serious. It was a revelation to discover that Socialist Worker published a weekly newspaper. That was in November 2011.

It took me a while to contribute in SWP branch discussions, the reason being that I had to learn the basics of arguing. It all seemed like too many ‘points’ were being made. I seriously didn’t get it.

Simon: The longest job I had was as a cinema usher, with constant verbal abuse from customers about the price of tickets and the popcorn, whilst surrounded by posters of millionaires. This became my daily experience of my beloved cinema – my passion. I’ve been fighting being a number my whole life. It’s what led me to the left – to art – to the need for creating to confirm my existence. It took us a good few years of looking to the left before we ever saw the Socialist Worker Party.

Kyri: After living in London my whole life, it was fantastic to find a branch that met every week. There was an apprenticeship system: anytime I needed to sharpen my politics, comrades were there. But there were no Kurdish, Turkish, Greek or Caribbean members, and everyone was highly educated. Most of the focus was on national events, and the party didn’t seem to have any roots in the area.

Paul: The new members read, talk and argue a lot: basic, obvious stuff that works, but things that the SWP doesn’t do enough, anymore. They have taken a strategic and leadership role almost from day one. The classic in the early days was when the full time organiser and myself took the table, papers and bookstall down

the High Road on Saturday morning, and found the new members already waiting, with their own table set up, decorated with SWP posters obtained from some demo.

Phil and Kyri leafleted a small bus garage for weeks. When the bus workers went on strike, Phil was on the picket line for four hours, and he came back with a detailed report of what each individual had said, and what they wanted for themselves, in their own lives.

To work politically around the council, Phil and Kyri met the left-wing of the Unison stewards, and then talked with my very best contact for three hours, taking a new approach to people I have worked with politically for years, but have failed to convince fully; and this dialogue has been ongoing.

The new members have used the same method within the party itself, sometimes disagreeing with the way the established members were doing interventions. They have spent hours talking to other branch members, to make them more integrated, and more outward-looking.

As local people born in the area, and with Phil and Kyri being Greek Cypriot, the new people are very focused on this specific locality. They are quite sceptical about the party’s national events and initiatives.

As soon as the new members came along, I concentrated on them 100%, because they are the future. We have had the 1968 generation of members, the post-miners’ strike generation, and the stop the war generation. Now meet the credit crunch generation.

Since Phil took over from me as paper organiser, the figures have stepped up and up. Industrial sales are done properly and consistently now. But the focus is on using the paper to build politically around our networks.

Maybe some members reading this will think we are just lucky that such people came along and joined our branch. We are very lucky, but I think it’s more than that.

This article is really about the kind of people around us, who already have a basic awareness of the SWP and what we stand for, and who we must win to our politics.

They are around us at work, on paper-sales, and in the community. We must cut right back on any stale or box-ticking approach to our activity, and start to focus properly on such people, taking them as seriously as they take the rotten state of the world we live in.

Paul and Phil (North London)

MAINTAINING THE FUTURE NETWORK

It’s not easy being a socialist – especially when strikes and the general class struggle are at a low level, as they have been in Britain for twenty years or more. It’s even harder being an active socialist, when, in the absence of militant trade unionism, this can cost you your job.

We always hope that the current strike or demonstration will be the start of a significant fight back by our class – but many of us have been disappointed too many times to have the energy to make ‘one more vital push’.

Of course as a revolutionary socialist organisation the SWP will only grow by pushing out, but we also really have to look after our members and maintain the maximum level of contact with the party. We have to ensure that we encourage our members to be as active as possible, but also recognise that for periods they may not be active socialists.

We have to recognise reality, the majority of our members are not active, they do not all get Socialist Worker each week (circulation figures are now less than the membership figures) and the majority do not pay subs.

If we really mean that all members are important and that SW is central to our political engagement then the very least we can do is arrange to ensure that all members get a couple of papers (at least) every week.

All members on subscription should be sent two papers to encourage them to sell the extra copy to work mates etc.

All branches should ensure that members who are not getting the paper have a couple of papers dropped off each week and we have a friendly chat with them to find out what is happening in their union and workplace – and if possible to collect subs, if they are not on standing order. All active members of the SWP should visit one or two less active members each week so that they have an active dialogue with the party.

If we do this we should be able to significantly increase the circulation of SW and the party’s income, but more importantly we will widen the network of socialists we are talking to on a regular basis.

This will make it much easier for the party to grow fast when the level of strikes increases as it may have *begun* to do in the last year or so (along with the two large public sector one day strike last year, the number of private sector strike days also doubled – from a very low base).

We also have to try other ways to bring our members together – if they will not come to the branch meetings we need to

find other initiatives that they will come to - new members schools, educational, book clubs, film evenings, socials etc.

It is only by physically meeting with our members that we will really maintain contact with them.

Texts and emails are great to inform each other about what is going on, but there is not alternative to actually meeting and discussing with comrades. We can only give comrades SW if we actually meet with them – and we can then give them leaflets etc for their union meetings or workmates.

The working class struggle in Britain has suffered a significant set back over the last year with the defeat of the public sector pension struggle – this was demonstrated by the much lower turn-out on the October TUC demonstration then the one in March last year.

Some comrades who have been waiting for the up-turn for decades will be bitterly disappointed. Now more than ever visiting comrades (and other contacts) will be vital for maintaining a socialist network and for enabling rapid growth when the level of struggle in Britain really begins to match that seen across the rest of Europe and other parts of the world.

Andy (Leicester)

THE INTERNET AND I.T. – NOT JUST FOR REVOLUTION?

At Marxism 2012 one of the highlights was hearing from our Egyptian comrades about their heroic struggle, how it captured the imagination of the world and how they made sure their message of hope was circulated.

Videos, photos and blogs were there when at times the mainstream media decided not to be. Before you read any further I want to say the internet is not the panacea no one could argue that, it is only a tool and it has been largely neglected by the movement until a time of revolution.

Lessons to be learnt

What lessons can we learn and was this the start of a new communication era for the Revolutionary Socialist movement? There are definitely lessons to be learnt and as technology develops this will always be the case, but the answer to the second question is no it's not a new idea and it was pioneered here in the UK but in the preceding ten years the movement has failed to embrace and exploit the idea of digital media, although it's certainly not alone in

that arena. So if the Egyptian revolution wasn't the start of the revolutionary socialist use of the internet when was it?

30k fire pay

The first major industrial struggle that used the internet to any degree was the firefighters national pay dispute in 2002/04. Started by a single revolutionary socialist firefighter in Manchester the 30k website grew at an unprecedented rate becoming a focus for the public, media, politicians and most importantly rank and file activists.

The site initially performed as a publishing platform to dispel the ruling class agenda correcting many half and mistruths circulated by the mainstream media who were doing the bidding of the politicians and ruling classes.

The arguments were clear, simple and concise and published in those terms effectively. In the build up to the ballot and first wave of strikes the site was fully supported by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) bureaucracy, it spread the argument and built confidence at little or no cost (the union made one financial contribution during the early period of the dispute but never funded the site as was claimed in some publications).

Rank & File

Problems for the site arose during the dispute when it became an organising tool for the rank and file within the FBU. The fairly early addition of a forum to the site gave anyone the opportunity to pass comment on the dispute, you just had to register.

Activists were very quick to make use of this powerful communication tool. It gave them an easy way to communicate and get up to date information from around the UK mainly from activists they had met or knew of, this gave the updates weight.

Any rumours could be dispelled or authenticated quickly and there was the ability to upload photos which again helped build confidence (there was even a best dressed drill tower competition). The parting of the ways between the site and the bureaucracy occurred when strikes began to be cancelled in return for talks.

The feeling among the rank and file was that this was a huge mistake (and this has been vindicated by history). This could now be easily and quickly checked around the country by the rank and file network and was voiced very vocally by the 30k'ers much to the displeasure of the bureaucracy.

The website never replaced traditional media and meetings, it just assisted as an organising tool. Meetings continued and could continue later via the forum, newsletters and briefing notes were still published but for the first time everything was reproduced and distributed digitally

at virtually no cost as well.

During the dispute the site was often quoted in the house of commons and the traditional media and at the peak had millions of hits and the users created tens of thousands of pages themselves, Facebook was barely an idea at this time. The rank and file were given a new tool and they used it. New leaders emerged through the network in a broad left style, literally, just take a look at the FBU leadership today (gen sec, asst gen sec plus a number of the national officers and EC members were all 30k contributors).

With the appalling sell out that ended the dispute there has to be two questions, was there mistakes made in using the internet? And what can we learn from the dispute and the way the internet was used at the time?

In hindsight we generally made a very good job of it, the biggest mistake was underestimating the success it would become. The site had to be moved several times due to the amount of traffic and content produced.

Planning was a weakness due to this being the first time the internet was used in this way and one there would be no excuse for today, the digital age was in it's infancy at the time, we were doing things that hadn't been done before but lessons were learned very quickly.

Today with the explosion of internet usage and services available this would be inexcusable, but at the time I feel we made the very best use of what was available.

Looking forward what should we be doing?

Looking to our comrades in Egypt they have the advantage of huge technological advances that weren't available to the firefighters of '02, mobile internet, streaming video, mobile video uploads, Twitter, YouTube and blogging to name but a few services that should help our causes.

Structure all or most of these into a web publishing platform and we are presented with a very powerful tool we haven't as a movement started to capture.

Our websites should be viewed as a resource centre to publish our theories, expose our struggles and promote our causes.

Every demo, picket line and mass meeting should be reported across multiple platforms meaning video, pictorial and written reports should be made available at every opportunity and disseminated by email, social media, website and shared by our members, add this to our traditional printed media and we are well on our way to making the most of the communication platforms available to us.

Link the struggles

We need to link up our struggles digitally as well as traditionally, a digital map and listings of where demo's/disputes/strikes are taking place would make it easier to arrange solidarity and would help hugely in building confidence among comrades and trade unionists, the ruling class make many gains by stifling reports and information about local struggles, we can circumvent their traditional channels to build, using fast, effective and cheap publishing platforms.

Definitely not either or

This is not an either or question I have to reiterate digital publishing in no way lessens the need for meetings and most importantly our revolutionary paper, there is and never will be a substitute for face to face interaction but in a digital age we now have new tools with little or no cost implication to assist our causes and we must use them! Our challenge is to embrace them?

Simon (Manchester district SWP, Greater Manchester FBU brigade committee, '30k Fire Pay' website founder)

MOTIONS FROM BURY & PRESTWICH BRANCH

1) Election of the Central Committee at January 2013 conference

There are many methods for electing a Central Committee, including the one we have used for many years, which are democratic, consistent with democratic centralism, which have been used by organisations in our political tradition, and which have their pros and cons.

For the January 2013 conference, slates or individuals may be nominated, after which the election will take place on the basis of votes for individual candidates rather than slates, which means that conference must decide the number of people it wishes to elect to the CC before electing them.

The CC, or any group of at least five delegates, may nominate individuals or slates, and may propose the size of the CC.

Conference should vote on the size of the CC, after which conference should vote for individual candidates. The individuals with the highest votes will be elected.

Section 5 of the party constitution should be updated to reflect this amended method of election.

2) Central Committee and party employees

Central Committee members and other full-timers have a particular responsibility to win the party as a whole to carrying through decisions effectively. If some argue against decisions that have been reached, or obstruct their implementation, this undermines our democracy, our unity in action and the effectiveness of the party.

However, our CC members and full-timers are an important layer of our cadre and we need them to feed their experiences and views into the party's democracy. Requiring them to intervene in the party's democracy on behalf of the CC irrespective of their own views stifles genuine debate and learning.

Individual CC members and full-timers can participate freely in the key areas of the party's democracy - NC meetings, internal bulletins, and speaking at party conference, without being bound by the CC "line".

Discipline is for unity in action in the carrying out of decisions, not to stifle debate. It is better that the strongest possible speakers from each point of view are heard to ensure maximum clarity. Discipline is necessary in a revolutionary party to ensure united action against the enemies of the working class, not against our own members.

3) Internal Bulletins before each Party Council

We will have at least one Party Internal Bulletin prior to each Party Council. Internal Bulletins are 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.

Bury & Prestwich branch

MOTION ON DISTRICTS IN THE SOUTH WEST

This District Aggregate notes that SWP has effectively accepted that Devon & Cornwall District (which includes Somerset and Dorset) should be divided by allowing a Plymouth & Cornwall and a East Devon, Somerset & Dorset Aggregate.

This is partly a matter of geography, as 200 miles separates Bournemouth from Lands End, but mostly a matter of politics. We have a very active series of networks linking comrades in Exeter, Taunton and Dorset. We exchange speakers, some Devon comrades are Dorset Socialists members and some Devon and Dorset comrades have been instrumental in setting up the new Taunton and West Somerset Branch. Because of the inhospitable social climate and similar regional class profiles, we work a great deal together so it makes sense to operate as a discrete Party organisation.

Therefore East Devon, Somerset & Dorset Aggregate urges Party Conference to formally recognise it as a separate Party District.

East Devon, Somerset and Dorset aggregate

MOTION ON THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE

This branch notes that for the past year there has been no delegate to the National Committee from the East Midlands and no full-timer operating in the East Midlands either.

This means that there is a disconnection between this important part of the party's decision making process and this region of the country - and we understand that the East Midlands are not unique in that respect.

We instruct Conference to elect a Commission to oversee a change in the composition of National Committee, with the aim being to ensure greater regional and fraction involvement.

Leicester branch

MOTION FROM CANTERBURY BRANCH

In IB2 Ruth contributed an excellent discussion on addressing party democracy. This submission finished with a number of motions, and a request for other branches, if in support to submit these motions for IB3.

We in Canterbury branch of Kent have discussed these motions and have taken the view that the issues Ruth raises are real, and that the steps proposed should be considered by the whole party. We therefore submit that the following motions be heard at this year's conference.

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 rearranged 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.

**Arthur, Bunny, Geoff, Keith, Jon and Will
(Canterbury)**

